

Old Ties and New Binds: LGBT Rights, Homonationalisms, Europeanization and Post-
War Legacies in Serbia

Dissertation

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Abstract

My dissertation examines the historic links between the anti-war activists in Serbia with the current efforts and work for LGBT justice and rights. As an interdisciplinary scholar, my work integrates a variety of epistemologies across disciplines by putting anti-war and LGBT activists experience in Serbia into conversation with one another to address unique vulnerabilities. Drawing from transnational feminist and queer critiques of governance, (homo)nationalism, and transnational sexuality studies, I consider how new non-heterosexual identity politics—with roots in anti-war activism—have surfaced in Serbia since the Kosovo War. I argue that it is at the intersection of anti-war and LGBT organizing that new and conflicting identity politics have emerged, in part as a reaction to a pro-war hyper-nationalism and neoliberal globalization.

Dedication

I write this in memory of Jill Benderly, who taught me to be unapologetically me and to fight until my last breath for justice and peace. I love you. I miss you.

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When I think about the scores of people, creatures, and plant life that have helped me arrive at this journey I am overwhelmed with emotion and humility. I will do my best to acknowledge everyone, but given the amount of love and support I have received during my seven years as graduate student this surely won't do y'all justice.

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Gabbard, Sonnet and Jill Bystydzienski. Role of women's/feminist organizations, Eastern and Central Europe," *Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. 2016.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Bombs, burning buildings, riots, and violent outbursts—all of these images at one point or another have been used to describe the former Yugoslav-state, Serbia. Over the past two decades the region has engaged in a number of wars and armed conflicts in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. Serbia also endured US-led NATO bombings in the capital Belgrade from March 24, 1999, to June 10, 1999, putting an end to the Serbian war with Kosovo. Amidst these conflicts the Serbian government transformed from being led by the totalitarian Slobodan Milošević, to a democratically elected parliament. Now, as Serbia is about to join the European Union, a country and people once associated with bombs, barbarism, and brutality are embarking on a transformative journey. The journey to join “Europe” includes state recognition and protection of marginalized groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. But this move towards greater rights for LGBT citizens in Serbia has been fraught.

In 2010, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists and allies gathered in a sequestered lot on the outskirts of Novi Belgrade (new Belgrade) to participate in the first

gay pride parade in nearly a decade¹. Pressured by European Union delegates, Serbian elected officials sanctioned the parade, and assured police protections for the parade goers. Police forces run by Milošević's former party surrounded the perimeter of the parade for protection. Just a few miles away anti-gay demonstrators and football hooligans flocked to downtown Belgrade, causing millions of dollars in property damage, resulting in 100 arrests, and vandalizing various buildings associated with Western industries and nation-states. The images from the 2010 parade evoke memories from the previous two decades of anti-war protests and nationalist counter-protests during the Yugoslav Wars (Blagojević 2010).

¹ The 2001 Belgrade Pride Parade was met with violent attacks from anti-gay protestors, resulting in an unofficial embargo of gay pride parades in Serbia on behalf of the activists and government officials until 2009, when activists supported by Amnesty International attempted to host another parade, to no avail. I focus on the 2010 Pride Parade because it was the first parade to occur with full support from the European Union, NGOs, and Serbian politicians (Blagojević 2010). The European Union was a driving force behind the 2010 parade by publicly supporting the event and encouraging Serbian officials to publicly show their support (Blagojević 2010).



Figure 1. Antigay Rioters Clash with Police in 2010, photo from Associated Press

2010

The parallel imagery of the anti-gay nationalists facing down the LGBT marchers, considered alongside the pro-war nationalists and the anti-war movement, warrants further interrogation. Many of the stalwarts of Serbia's LGBT movement began their work as activists and movement builders during the Yugoslav Wars as anti-war activists. In order to understand current grassroots efforts to advance Serbian LGBT rights as well as resistance to them, I trace the links between the anti-war protests and LGBT activism.

From the passage of same-sex partner recognition policies in both the global North and South (e.g., Netherlands, Canada, Portugal, South Africa, Argentina), to homophobic state responses including the near passage of the death penalty for individuals considered “homosexual” in Uganda, homosexuality itself has become a terrain of dispute in broader struggles concerning national sovereignty, democratization, and transitional justice (Weiss and Bosia 2013). This is also the case in Serbia, a country undergoing dramatic political and economic change following an intense period of conflict. The Serbian state is simultaneously contending with nationalism (which tends to be protectionist and inward-looking) on the one hand, and economic/political integration into the EU (which tends to orient the state and nation outwards, to the regional/global market and global political community) on the other.

However, I cannot talk about Serbia’s contemporary LGBT and feminist politics without discussing post-socialism and the history of Titoism in Yugoslavia. Class tensions, state socialism and state control, nationalism/isolationism, nepotism and cronyism, and the shift towards neoliberal privatization have created unique tensions and problems for Serbian LGBT and feminist politics.

Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1992, Jovic (2001) describes the former Yugoslav economy as being an alternative to Soviet Communism and capitalism. This third way, or self-management model, has also been called Yugoslav socialism. Under this model, the Yugoslavian government of Tito (1945-1980) redistributed

housing, had free health care for all, promoted trade unions, and produced the majority of goods within the nation. Despite considerable privatization efforts, Serbia has a weak currency and faces looming inflation mostly due to the fact that since 2000, the monetary value of Serbia's exports has only equaled half of the monetary value of their imports, leading to a precarious debt balancing act (ibid). The Serbian government's solution to stabilize the economy has been to further sell off state enterprises to private buyers. Privatizations of Serbian industry along with the market expansion that EU integration promises are further examples of Serbia's shift towards neoliberal capitalism.

Another major shift in the Serbian economy has been directly connected with the labor market. Director of the Center for the Economic Research in Belgrade and Serbian economist, Danilo Šuković, asserts that the Serbian labor market has experienced drastic changes over the past two decades (1990-2009), which has led to an increase in poverty (Šuković 2009)². According to Šuković, lasting effects of the wars—including an influx in refugees and internally displaced people, along with the emigration of Serbian youth—have contributed to a flood of potential workers in the job market, making employment opportunities scarce, and further leading to Serbia's economic downturn (Šuković 2009: 99).

² In 2010, Danilo Šuković also served on the Serbian Anti-corruption Council. This group publishes annual studies on corruption in Serbian government and acts as a watchdog for government activity.

Šuković points to the global recession of the mid-2000s as another contributing factor to the decline of the Serbian economy as well as a decrease in employment opportunities. When considering Šuković's assertions, one can further see the paradox and tensions Serbian workers are confronted with in terms of joining the European Union, particularly when considering that economic aid has been designed precisely to transition Serbia's economy into the global market³.

During the war period, Serbia experienced drastic economic sanctions from the international community from 1992-2001. This, coupled with the costs of the wars and the disintegration of the Yugoslav economy, left the Serbian economy crippled and the Gross Material Product (GMP) dropped from \$24.6 billion in 1989 to \$9.5 billion in 1993 (Judah 2000: 263-272)⁴. It was during this time that the Serbian banks collapsed and inflation skyrocketed, leading to hyperinflation and rendering pensions and wages for the everyday Serbian worthless (ibid). This resulted in food scarcities and starvation (primarily of pensioners) (ibid). The middle and professional classes were hit the hardest

³ Figures according to the IMF, "World Economic Outlook Database April 2010." *IMF.org*. Accessed June 1, 2017.
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2008&ey=2015&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=49&pr1.y=10&c=942&s=NGDPD%2CNGDPDPC%2CPPPGDP%2CPPPPC&grp=0&a=>

⁴ According to Tim Judah, Yugoslavia, and later Serbia measured the economy based on the Gross Material Product (GMP) (2009: 267). The GDP is estimated at about 15-20 percent greater than GMP (ibid).

by the war and the economic collapse, and a massive emigration of young educated professionals to Canada occurred (Judah 2000: 277).

In April 2008, Serbia and the European Commission signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), beginning the process of Serbian integration into the European Union. The treaty assures Serbian integration as long as key benchmarks are achieved in the areas of economic and political liberalization, the development and implementation of human rights laws, and the representation and equal rights of minority populations⁵. In addition to emphasizing political and social recognition of human rights, the treaty explicitly calls for Serbia to adopt “the principles of free market economy and sustainable development as well as the readiness of the Community to contribute to the economic reforms in Serbia” (SAA 6)⁶. According to the treaty, these reforms are designed to create a new political economic climate to rapidly modernize Serbia and insert the nation into the European and broader global economy (SAA 6-8). While the treaty’s focus on shifting Serbia’s economy from a socialist model to a capitalist model is not surprising, it is particularly interesting to focus on when considering the ways this

⁵ “European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations,” *EC.europa.eu*. Last modified June 12, 2016. Accessed August 3, 2017.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidates/serbia/relation/index_en.htm

⁶ “Stabilisation and Association Agreement Between the European Communities and their Member States of the One Part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other Part,” *EC.Europa.eu*, Last modified January 1, 2008. Accessed October 14, 2014. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/serbia/key_document/saa_en.pdf.

impacts not only Serbia's unique post-conflict transitional government, but also policy design and implementation on the civic level.

More specifically for Serbia, EU integration means a transition from a socialist post-conflict economy to a liberalized capitalist economy. This economic transition is underwritten by neoliberal values and strategies, such as privatization, consumerism, individualism, democratic interventionism, and the ending of government welfare (Schild 2000). In the case of Serbia, the adoption of neoliberal values support the institutional restructuring of the socialist government and economy and has redirected resources away from the welfare state to civil society which is now positioned as harbingers of "welfare" services. In Chapter Five, I explore how neoliberal privatization has created new alliances between LGBT, feminist, leftist, and economic nationalists in Belgrade.

The privatization of state-owned industries, major austerity measures are currently being implemented in Serbia. The privatization of social welfare programs creates a need for forms of aid and support through international and supranational foundations, such as the USAID, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the EU, UN Global Fund for Women, numerous nation-state funders such as Sweden and the United States, Mama Cash (The Netherlands), Mott Foundation (UK), and the European Commission Fund for Women. International funders are not only charged with promoting and sustaining Serbian civil society projects, but also with helping to craft a new Serbian democracy and economy—one that promotes neoliberal capitalist values that fit with the European

Union. The implementation of neoliberal capitalist projects include the design and implementation of gender mainstreaming projects and programs. Schild's interrogations of neoliberal projects aimed at promoting gender equality have transformed gender politics in a negative way by focusing on individualism, personal responsibility, and a sort of boots straps mentality that places the onus on individuals to overcome poverty by having access to the market economy. The focus on the individual fails to address structural and institutional barriers and discrimination (2000). In Chapters Three and Four I examine how LGBT and feminist activists in Serbia negotiate the dynamics of economic transition and the agendas of international while maintaining their local autonomy. It is in these chapters that I explore the current tensions between global and local initiatives in transitional Serbia.

In addition to economic shifts, Serbia's transition has created new forms of xenophobia and homophobia. Many nationalists and isolationists associate the LGBT community with outside interventions, primarily from the EU. For example, as a part of the accession process the EU requires that Serbia pass laws that grant protections and rights to LGBT individuals. These protections include anti-discrimination laws protecting lesbian, gay, and bisexual people from experiencing employment discrimination, access to adoption for LGBT couples, and police protection of LGBT people (Blagojević 2010 and Kahlina 2013). Nationalists and isolationists view the new laws (including anti-discrimination protections and access to adoption) as foreign and

European. Many nationalists, such as the group called 1382, view EU accession as leading to a potential loss of national identity and sovereignty. These fears triggered a resurgence in a hetero-centric, pro-family agenda that seeks to affirm traditional gender roles and a heterosexual nuclear family structure. This agenda, along with the multiple transitions to the Serbian economy, politics, and society associated with European integration, is creating a volatile backlash from the religious and nationalist right wing against the LGBT community (Gabbard 2013).

Not only are those who identify as LGBT under regular attack by nationalist and right wing leaders, they are constantly negotiating a somewhat precarious relationship with the Serbian government. In an attempt to comply with EU mandates, the Serbian government continues to pass laws and policies in order to appease neoliberal-inspired policy recommendations. The same politicians allegedly supporting the Serbian EU accession agreement (SAA) and anti-discrimination laws are also engaging in public homophobic rhetoric in the media, refusing to meet with LGBT organizations, firing government staffers, and/or refusing to implement the laws. The only time state officials are seemingly in support of LGBT rights is when the EU delegation pressures the government (Blagojević 2010). Additionally, the EU's approach to pressuring the Serbian government to support gay rights leaves out a critical voice in the fight for LGBT rights in Serbia—namely, the local activists. The EU's work with the government fails to engage with LGBT grassroots efforts and initiatives that activists have been working on

for decades. I analyze the divisions between local LGBT activism and organizing and the international community in Chapters Three and Four.

My project investigates the legacy and contemporary relevance of anti-war and pro-war activism as it relates to both contemporary LGBT organizing and rights in Serbia as well as political homophobia. I inquire into the legacy of Serbia's conflict on contemporary LGBT organizing. In particular, I analyze the challenges and opportunities accession has brought to LGBT individuals and activists. My project expands the analysis of LGBT activism in Serbia beyond Europeanization of LGBTQ politics by foregrounding Serbia's history of conflict and imperialism. In addition to exploring questions of Europeanization, my research problematizes the dichotomy between pro-EU/LGBT rights and anti-EU/anti-LGBT rights. This dichotomy emerges in a particular timeframe and trajectory that starts with EU accession, and fails to recognize the implications of Serbia's post-war legacy. I am pushing us back in time to see the origins of nationalism and political homophobia. Europeanization of LGBT issues is complicated and nuanced by Serbia's particular history.

In the dissertation, I chart the specific links between historic pro-war nationalisms that emerged in the 1990s and contemporary nationalism and homophobia in Serbia. Furthermore, the post-war legacy and armed conflicts with NATO and EU member states continue to perpetuate an "othering" of Serbia that ironically fuels political homophobia by right wing nationalists. Additionally, the same individuals who engaged in anti-

nationalism and anti-war activism are major actors in Serbia's contemporary LGBT and feminist movements. LGBT activists are motivated in part to combat a similar form of nationalism and violence that they experienced during the 1990s wars. Additionally, the historic alienation of Serbia and its reputation of barbarism create further tensions towards LGBTQ communities who, since the process of EU accession commenced, are now generally associated with "Europe." Chapters Three, Four, and Five provide case study examples of LGBT and feminist activists in Serbia and their connections to anti-war work in the 1990s.

In the research I show how homonationalism can create normative queer identities as well as how queer and LGBT social movements interact with and are impacted by global initiatives such as European integration and neoliberal capitalism. My research contributes to scholarship on homonationalism and Europeanization. In the Serbian context, Europeanization is fraught and complicated due to its legacy of conflict with the West. The same Western entities that bombed Serbia, killing innocent civilians, are now calling for implementation of LGBT protections. LGBT activists in Serbia must negotiate their role as a human rights litmus test, all the while being associated with outsiders who were once at war with Serbia. Homonationalism, in the Serb context, works in tandem with Europeanization. Serbia's post-conflict legacy, its global reputation for being the aggressor during the Yugoslav Wars, and its connections to Eastern Orthodoxy and Russia further complicate LGBT and feminist activism and organizing in Serbia. My

project provides a dynamic assessment of Serb history as being a critical component to understanding Europeanization and homonationalism.

Why Serbia?

In the Fall of 2010, I sat in Cincinnati, Ohio, in my advisor's office talking about what I wanted to do for my MA thesis. I was relatively new to academia—only a semester into feminist and queer theory. I came to graduate school seeking to merge my work as an activist with my insatiable curiosity about social constructions of power and oppression. I knew I wanted to incorporate my decade's worth of local and international anti-war, queer, and feminist activism, but I was still teasing out how to make it all fit. As I settled into graduate work, I received alarming news via social media from several of my feminist and queer activist colleagues in the Balkans. Violence had erupted as right-wing nationalists took to the streets in counter-protest of gay rights. The violent backlash was shocking for queer and feminist activists on the ground and abroad.

Years before, as an undergraduate, I had spent half a year as a student in the region studying the Former-Yugoslav states' peace transitions and transformation following the wars⁷. During that time, I learned about gender issues, traveling throughout

⁷ The Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia existed following World War II (1945) until the Yugoslav Wars in 1992. During this time, Yugoslavia was a socialist country and part of the non-alignment movement, meaning they (along with India and Egypt) did not take sides during the Cold War. (To break it down in a very basic way: the global division of political economic ideology of capitalism, which was generally associated with U.S. and Western European nations; versus communism, which was associated with the U.S.S.R.

the region meeting, and interviewing women's rights NGO workers and activists about their peace and reentry efforts for displaced women and survivors of sexual violence during the war. It was during this time and in my numerous trips back to the region that I developed strong relationships with activists and NGO workers who focused on women's and LGBT rights. The 2010 anti-gay backlash was a pivotal moment in the LGBT and feminist community in Serbia, as well as one in my life as a feminist and queer scholar.

During the 2010 Pride Parade, violence erupted when right wing, anti-gay rioters attacked parade participants from the Serb LGBT community and police who were assigned to protect them. The Serbian news channel, B92, reported that 140 people were

and China, and other Eastern European or "bloc" countries). Yugoslavia was led under the authoritarian leader Josip Broz Tito ("Tito") beginning in 1945 until his death in 1980. Under his leadership, the nation, comprised of six republics divided loosely along ethnicities, maintained non-alignment status and developed a socialist economy. Following Tito's death, the six republics that comprised Yugoslavia slowly broke up mainly along ethnic lines, beginning with the peaceful secession of what is now called Slovenia in 1991, followed by Croatia (following a yearlong war) in 1991, and then another bloody war (1992-1993), which led to the secession of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) following international intervention by NATO. There have been a number of other transformations in the former-Yugoslav states, including the breaking away of Macedonia (1991), the changing of the name of Yugoslavia to "Serbia and Montenegro" (1992-2006), and later the break of Montenegro from Serbia (2006), as well as the attempted and eventual breaking away of Kosovo from Serbia and Montenegro following another international intervention in 2001. As of May 2012, the Republic of Serbia has still not recognized Kosovo as an independent entity and claims that it is still part of Serbia. For more information on Yugoslavia and its collapse see Dejan Jović (2001), Tim Judah (2009), and Laura Silber and Allan Little (1996).

injured in the attacks, and 249 people were arrested⁸. Protestors attacked the pro-Western Democratic party headquarters, setting the building's garage on fire⁹. The attacks came on the heels of the Serbian Orthodox church statement condemning the parade. Right-wing Serbian groups echoed the condemnation of the parade, saying, "homosexuality is contrary to Serbian religious and family values."¹⁰

Hearing of the violent outbursts and homophobic rhetoric left me in a panic, worried that my colleagues and loved ones were unsafe, and hoping that this backlash would not prevent LGBT rights from moving forward in Serbia. Additionally, as a young observer, I could not help but notice the nationalist hand symbols and hear the nationalist chants on the news coverage, which seemed to be flashbacks from Serbia's days of war with Bosnia and most recently Kosovo¹¹.

⁸ "158 injured, 249 arrested in Belgrade riots." *B92*. Modified Oct 11, 2010. Accessed June 1, 2017.

http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2010&mm=10&dd=11&nav_id=70208

⁹ "Serbia Police Clash with Far-right Rioters at Gay Pride March." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, last modified October 10, 2010, Accessed July 2, 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/10/serbia-police-rioters-gay-pride>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Tim Judah argues that the Kosovo War was rooted in ethnic hatred dating back to the 1300s and the Battle for Kosovo, where Serbs fell to the Ottomans in 1389 (Judah 2009). Present-day Kosovo is comprised of Muslim ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Serbia was in an ethnically-charged war with Kosovo in an attempt to maintain a Serb presence in Kosovo, and to keep it as part of Serbia (ibid). The result was the displacement of ethnic Serbs and Albanians, ethnic cleansing, and the destruction of villages and towns. The conflict came to an end following an international intervention resulting in a seventy-eight day NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in the capital, Belgrade in 1999 (ibid). Following the airstrike campaign Serbia withdrew

Both the Bosnia and Kosovo wars were rooted in deep-seeded ethnic conflicts dating back centuries. As with many parts of the Balkans, the areas that would later become Bosnia and Kosovo were conquered by the Ottomans (1463), which led to divisions between ethnic Serbs and those who either voluntarily or involuntarily converted to Islam (Malcolm 1996). In the case of Bosnia, prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, the republic was comprised primarily of ethnic Serbs, Croats, and Bošniaks (Muslim Bosnians), and was considered the epitome of inter-ethnic cooperation and community in Yugoslavia (Malcolm 1996). However, following the Croatian War, in 1992, Bosnia exploded into a bloody conflict pitting Serbs, Croats, and Bošniaks against one another. The results included the internal displacement and exile of thousands of ethnic Serbs, Croats, and Bošniaks, the raising of towns such as Srebrenica, the devastating siege of Sarajevo, ethnic cleansing throughout the region, and the systematic sexual torture, rape, and violence against women based on their ethnicity (Hall 1994; Malcolm 1996; Sibling and Little 1996). It was during this time (1992-1995) that the international community intervened, issuing economic sanctions against Yugoslavia (what would later become Serbia), the deployment of NATO peacekeepers (Silber and

armed forces (1999), but the country will not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. Kosovo is significant to Serbs, because it is considered holy land for the Serb Orthodox church (ibid). One requirement of Serbian EU integration is that Serbia recognize Kosovo as an independent state. However, the Serbian government still refuses to do so. This is yet another example of clashes between Serbian nationalists and the EU or the nationalist vs. internationalist dichotomy.

Little 1996), and later brokering of peace negotiations (ibid). Additionally, the international community still maintains a strong presence in Bosnia through international development agencies such as USAID, the European Commission, the IMF, and other programs focused on keeping the region from erupting into further conflicts.

Due to my personal experience studying the Balkan wars and my investment in the safety and well-being of many of the Parade participants, I could not help but ask questions about the paradox of emergent LGBT visibility and forms of homophobic violence in post-conflict Serbia. These questions emerged, too, because of my studies in feminist and queer transnational research. As someone who regularly followed the former-Yugoslav states' EU integration, I wondered what sort of political, economic, and social pressures were being created in the post-conflict nation, and how this related to homophobic violence. It had been 4 years since I was in the region and the only glimpses I had of change were reported in news stories or from friends' various emails, Skype, and Facebook messages.

Sitting in my advisor's office in 2011, I pitched a project that would afford me the opportunity to see if Serbia's attempts at democratization were making daily life better for LGBT individuals. My MA work also laid the groundwork for my PhD research, as it generated a bevy of questions about how Serbia's history plays a critical role in shaping contemporary LGBT and feminist politics.

These various interests generated my return to the region, and more specifically to Belgrade, Serbia. I wanted to interview my activist colleagues and friends to see how Serbian EU integration was impacting LGBT politics and issues. I spent the summer of 2011 engaging in a small ethnographic study with my former colleagues as well as with newly emerging leaders in the LGBT activist and NGO communities. Building on my work in 2011, in 2015-2016 I moved to Belgrade, Serbia to conduct a multi-sited field study in Novi Sad, Belgrade, and Niš, Serbia.

Project Claims

This project interrogates the connections between the anti-war activist movements of the 1990s in the former-Yugoslavia, and the LGBT and feminist work happening on the ground in Serbia in 2015-2017. The connection between the seemingly divergent movements not only influenced contemporary LGBT and feminist organizing, but also enabled it. My research reveals that historical events, such as the 1990s Balkan Wars, are a major component of current gender and social justice work in Belgrade. In addition to the armed conflicts themselves, thinking of the wars as part of the present in Serbia sheds light on an understanding of European Union accession, outsider intervention, and the East/West binary for Serbia's LGBT and feminist communities. My project uses three case studies to support my claim that the past is always part of the present in Serbian politics.

Methods

Whenever possible, I conducted interviews with activists and members of the LGBT community in Serbia in Bosnian, Croatian and, Serbian (BCS)¹². My language skills granted me a certain level of access and sense of belonging and my status as a U.S. citizen, and thus an outsider, was mitigated because I am queer, speak the language, and have lived in the region on and off for over a decade.

Drawing on my interdisciplinary training, I used a number of qualitative research methods including: participant observation; open-ended, in-depth interviews; as well as textual analysis of primary and secondary sources. In addition to engaging in multiple methods of research, I attended major events in Belgrade, including a citywide anti-gentrification protest, the 20th anniversary and memorial of the Srebrenica massacre, the 15th anniversary of Labris lesbian week, Belgrade Gay Pride, and Gayten's inaugural regional conference on Trans Identity in the Balkans, as well as numerous protests. I had access to individuals, organizations, and activists who were instrumental in Serbia's feminist, LGBT, and anti-war movements in the 1990s because I was primarily situated in Belgrade. That location also provided me with access to a cross-section of legislators, NGO-workers, and internationals working alongside activists to promote human rights—something that I will further interrogate in this dissertation.

¹² Pseudonyms are used in this project to protect participants' anonymity.

Having close ties to the region afforded me access to a number of non-public events including LGBT organization meetings, lesbian consciousness raising circles, volunteer events, fundraisers, feminist anti-war meetings, pride parade planning and private press events and conferences, and social events such as those held at Belgrade's only underground gay and lesbian night club. Through participant observation in these more private spaces, I gained a better understanding of contemporary LGBT politics and life in Serbia. Such experiences and observations were especially useful to make the link between anti-war histories and contemporary LGBT politics.

During my fieldwork I gained access to primary print sources and publications (including flyers, posters, press releases, educational handouts, white papers, lobbying talking points, etc.). I accessed archives at Labris, the first and longest running lesbian organization in Serbia, Gayten, one of the newest LGBT organizations, Egal, the transgender rights group, and the now-defunct *Gej Strejt Alansija* (Gay Straight Alliance). These organizations granted me access to grant reports, policy publications, press releases, and other materials. I had access to private conversations between international funders, politicians, and other decision-makers which elucidated new (and old) conflicts between outsiders and locals, the tensions of Europeanization, and the shifting landscape of LGBT and women's rights in Serbia.

Chapters

In the next chapter, I provide a literature review that contextualizes my analysis of LGBT organizing in Serbian. In the review I focus on three major bodies of literature: post-socialist studies; post-conflict studies; and transnational queer and sexuality studies. I draw from feminist, post-socialist, and queer critiques of history, empire, militarism, violent masculinity, queerness, and women's movements, to elucidate the connections between anti-war activism and today's LGBT activism. The remaining chapters present three case studies that illustrate the shifting politics and histories of LGBT activism in Serbia. Each case study focuses on a particular aspect of LGBT and feminist work in Serbia.

In Chapter Three, I explore the intergenerational feminist lesbian work that is promoting feminism in the LGBT community. I include in this chapter the longest-standing lesbian organization, Labris, the organization of the 2015 "Lavender Spring," the 2015 Belgrade Dyke March, and the 2015 Lesbian Week, to illustrate that women in Serbia are working towards new imagined spaces and communities. This case study identifies how feminists developed anti-violence and support networks during the wars that are still in use today. Only now, the women who used to provide shelter and care to refugees and inner-displaced women during the wars are providing similar emotional and material support to other queer women.

I also examine the links between activist networks that created women-only spaces in the 1990s during the Balkan Wars, and how those political ideologies have been

adopted and adapted by younger generations of feminists in Serbia. The chapter describes contemporary lesbian politics, rhetoric, and organizing in Serbia. It also presents arguments in favor of lesbian separatism from lesbian activists, as well as criticisms waged against lesbian separatism by other LGBT activists in Serbia. I argue that post-conflict and post-socialist legacies steeped in violent masculinity have led many feminist activists in Serbia to create “safe spaces” for women by excluding men altogether. It also explores notions of queer travel within Serbian LGBT politics and organizing. I examine how the term “queer” has become synonymous with men in Serbia, and the importance of the word lesbian (or *lezbejka*) in Serbia as a signifier for women’s safety and community. It is in Chapter Three that I consider the tensions between European Union’s vision of plurality of LGBT rights and local lesbian movements that seek to exclude men.

In Chapter Four I analyze at another important aspect of LGBT rights in Serbia—the shifting nature of Gay Pride and its significance to international acceptance and belonging in global LGBT politics. I argue that Gay Pride in Serbia represents a neoliberal transition of arrival. Serbia can now safely hold a pride parade, and this ushers the country into a globally acceptable position. I interrogate how the international community uses Serbia’s Gay Pride Parade as a litmus test for Serbian democracy and human rights. I suggest that the government uses the Gay Pride Parade to commit other forms of human rights violations through pinkwashing. I define pinkwashing as the use or promotion of particular LGBT issues to cover up other human rights violations and

atrocities. In Chapter Four, I interrogate the state's use of Serbia Gay Pride to distract from other forms of state oppression and homophobia. The dynamic of Western/international attempts at democratization and the state's disingenuous compliance is imperative if we consider the dynamics between these groups during the Balkan Wars. In Chapter Four, I explore war intervention residue, and the legacy that emerges. I also explore how the legacy of war intervention resurfaces in the planning of the Gay Pride Parade in Serbia.

In the final case study in Chapter Five, I focus on questions of democracy, the state, and the international community—particularly when it comes to the allocation of monetary resources for LGBT organizations. In this chapter I examine how Serbia's transitional economy created new possibilities as well as problems for LGBT activists and the larger LGBT community. Serbia's transition from a distinct Yugoslav socialist economy to a neoliberal global capitalist economy has opened up funding opportunities for LGBT community based organizations (CBOs), but at a cost. In particular, I argue that the economic transition in post-Milošević, post-war, and post-Yugoslav Serbia is transforming LGBT organizing and activism, creating class divides in the LGBT movement, all the while opening up new opportunities for solidarity work between social movements in Serbia. The chapter concludes with explanations of new forms of class-based solidarity work surrounding the Savamala development project and the displacement of queer and art spaces in downtown Belgrade.

Each case study demonstrates how Serbia's LGBT and feminist communities are transforming in spite of or alongside the country's history of war, foreign interventionism, and nationalism. This project in its entirety engages with and contributes to post-socialist, queer, and transnational and global studies literature by suggesting that when engaging in these bodies of literature, we must re-conceptualize history as dynamic and ever-present. One can simply look at an image of the 2016 gay pride parade marchers walking past the crumbling remnants of NATO-bombed buildings to see the vestiges of war in the ether to see why and how history is forever present in Serbia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a common joke made in Belgrade about football fans. If one of the main soccer teams in the city—*Fudbalski klub Partizan* (FK Partisan) or *Crvena Zvezda* (Red Star)—lose a match, fans and hooligans take to the streets in riotous protest. The joke goes that the football fans will first march to the Croatian Embassy and throw stones, bottles, and other objects, whilst chanting nationalistic slogans. Once the police come, the hooligans will move to the U.S. and European Union embassies, and chant the same right wing slogans. After they are dispersed from those embassies they will then make their way over to the Turkish Embassy and chant, “800 years! We suffered under Turkish rule for 800 years!”¹³

The punch line of the joke is that Serbs, represented in this story as football hooligans, never forget those who attacked the nation. Even in a drunken and defeated stupor (most likely emboldened by and/or induced by said alcohol), Serbian soccer fans project their frustration and discontent with the opposing team onto what they perceive as a meta-defeat—the historic opposition and occupation of Serbia. They start with the Croats—the common ethnic enemy, stemming from the 1990s wars that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. They then move to the United States—the country that led the NATO air strikes against Belgrade and parts of Kosovo during the Kosovar War.

¹³ Interview with Didi R. November 20, 2015.

Finally, they head to the Turkish Embassy, which represents the nearly eight centuries of Ottoman. For non-Balkan audiences, this story captures the ephemerality of history and time in Serbian culture, politics, and social spaces. Even at innocuous events like a friendly¹⁴ soccer match, sports fans express their malcontent with the current geopolitical and economic climate by harking back to centuries of conflict and empire.

This project argues that history is dynamic and porous as it informs and transforms contemporary LGBT and feminist politics. Rather than thinking about history as a linear timeline of major events, it is the interconnectedness between historical events and social movements that I interrogate. My project argues that there is an interconnectedness between anti-war efforts in the Balkans and contemporary LGBT politics, which impacts current politics, beliefs and practices. A prime example is the anti-war activism and work women were doing during the 1990s Balkan Wars, and how many of same women are currently engaging in similar activist practices, but with a different issue- LGBT rights. Women, such as Lepa Mladjenović and activists with Women in Black, held public anti-war protests, feminist consciousness raising circles, and provided direct support, such as counseling services for survivors of sexual and other trauma during the 1990s Balkan Wars. These women carry the experiences and lessons learned from living through historical moments into their current work to support and

¹⁴ “Friendly” is a term used in soccer to describe a non-conference, non-tournament, and/or low-stakes game.

promote women's and LGBT rights in Serbia. One cannot engage in an analysis of contemporary LGBT activism in the Balkans without considering how historical moments and events impacted the culture and individual activists in Serbia. In other words, that analysis of this topic cannot be conducted without the forefronting of historical moments. The past and present are not situated on a linear trajectory; conversely, I reimagine the act of remembering historical moments as similar to the nucleus during cellular division. As a cell divides, the mitochondrial DNA in the nucleus is replicated. In mitosis division, a new cell is more or less a replica of the original. If we think of the lingering cultural, social, and political historical moments that are reimaged and retold as the DNA in a cell, we see that particular historical events or features are replicated and passed on into the new cell. The mitotic cell division metaphor is useful when thinking about the ways in which history is part of the contemporary and cannot be deconstructed, nor ignored, if we want to understand contemporary politics. Thinking about history as a dynamic and non-linear helps serves helps explain the joke with which this chapter began.

It is not that Serbian football fans have a particular axe to grind against Croatia, the U.S., and/or Turkey. Rather, the residue and legacy of empire and domination in the region remains part of the contemporary understanding of Serbian political, cultural, and social identity. The joke describes the angst and frustration of centuries of outsider intervention and rule. The football fans target a select group of imperial leaders and/or

opposition to the Serb nation—Croatia, the U.S. and Western Europe, and Turkey. It invokes memories of historical events that were pivotal in Serbian nation-making. However, the football fans did not engage in a comprehensive march against all imperial symbols in downtown Belgrade—focusing instead on the ones that correlate to contemporary global order. The hooligans never march to the Austrian or Hungarian embassies (to protest Austro-Hungarian rule in the early 20th century), or to the German embassy (to protest Nazi rule during WWII); and they also never go to the Russian embassy (to protest Stalinist influence and control in the early days of Yugoslavia). The football fans do not consider Austrian, Hungarian, German, or Russian influence and empire as a threat to the Serb nation—ergo the memories of said empires are not invoked.

The joke also describes how the movement between spaces serves as a structural reminder of the current world order. In the joke, the football fans march from the football stadium in *Novi Beograd* (New Belgrade) into *Stari Grad* (Old City), past the bombed out buildings that still haven't been rebuilt following the NATO strikes in 1999, to the newly paved Embassy row, where new shiny buildings have large walls with guards and concertina wire. In the marching across Belgrade, the football fans also walk across sediments of history—along the same topography as the soldiers and regimes of Mehmed the Conqueror, Đorđe Petrović, Miloš Obrenović, Franz Ferdinand, Adolph Hitler, Josip Tito, and Slobodan Milosević.

This project identifies and reimagines history as ever-present. It is not a blueprint or backdrop to contemporary issues; rather, its residue shapes contemporary nation-making, culture, and socialization. With this in mind, I consider how historical events are dynamic and ever-present in LGBT and feminist movements in Serbia and are as important to the creation of a unique Serbian LGBT politic as globalization and Europeanization.. The LGBT and feminist activists, alongside subsequent anti-gay and misogynist backlash, demonstrate how understandings of history get remade through processes of nation-making and through specific historical moments.

Drawing from three major bodies of literature—post-socialist studies, post-conflict studies, and global and transnational queer and sexuality studies—I assert that historical events are dynamic and ever-present in LGBT and feminist movements in Serbia. More specifically, I draw from feminist, post-socialist, and queer critiques and understandings of history, empire, militarism, violent masculinity, queerness, and women’s movements to elucidate the interconnectedness of anti-war activism with LGBT activism. As best as I can, I avoid giving a comprehensive linear history of the Balkans; however, some background context—particularly regarding the conflicts in Serbia, right wing nationalism, and the LGBT and feminist movements—is needed.

De-Centering Western Sexuality Studies

A major component of my project involves interrogating how global and transnational theories of sexuality and feminism can be used to interpret LGBT

organizing and politics in Serbia. I draw heavily on transnational and global queer and feminist critiques of the West (the U.S. and Western Europe) as being the authority on LGBT issues. For example, Bosia and Weiss write that the “clash of civilizations,” or the pitting of a modern/pro-gay society vs. a backwards/homophobic society, is problematic and rooted in Western exceptionalism and orientalism (Weiss and Bosia 2013). Grewal and Kaplan argue that historically, the transnational study of sexuality in the academy is focused on the West. As a result, the West is often located as the center of analysis, a tendency that then defines all non-Western locations and sexual and gender identities and practices as other (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Grewal and Kaplan’s critique of transnational sexuality studies addresses four major divides: the separation of the study of sexuality from race, class, and nation; the divide in the U.S. academy of international studies and American studies; the modernity vs. tradition split; and finally, the global/local divide. My project is significantly influenced by and relies heavily on these critiques. In addition to blurring the aforementioned binaries, my work also considers how narratives of modernity and tradition are deployed in Serbian LGBT politics.

Grewal and Kaplan argue that in transnational sexuality studies a modernity vs. tradition split often is perpetuated. Western practices and understandings of sexuality are presented as modern and all those that deviate from Western models are presented as traditional or backwards (Kaplan and Grewal 2001). They also argue that this form of analysis fails to consider how nation-states, cultures, economic structures, and other

governing institutions interact with and work together to construct and maintain sexual subjectivities and communities. Furthermore, such analyses fail to consider how globalization, nationalism, and geopolitics work together to create a framework of Western-exceptionalism, which positions the West as liberal in regards to sexuality and all other locations as backwards and primitive. A number of sexuality studies scholars have engaged in a critique of the modernity vs. tradition split and how it reifies Western forms of identity politics as the ideal. According to Puar, U.S. foreign policy has uses sexuality as a determiner of a place's freedom and democracy. Not only does this practice engage in a tradition vs. modernity binary, it also reiterates orientalist frameworks while reinforcing Western ideology. If you do not have particular types of gay rights policies and laws, such as gay marriage and anti-discrimination protections, then you are failing to protect your citizens. Joseph Massad's work interrogates organizational practices that engage in this form of neo-imperialism. His work reveals how international organizations, such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Campaign (IGLHRC), and other U.S.-based international gay rights organizations engage in modernity vs. tradition frameworks (Massad 2007).

A clear example of how Western/American norms about sexuality have global reach is the common language used to describe same- gender/sex intimacies and how the English words, "queer," "gay," and "lesbian," are now part of many non- English

languages, and are used to represent non-normative sexual identities (Gosine 2009)¹⁵. However, the use of English words is a double-edged sword and requires further reflection. Many people use English-originated words describing sexuality, gender identity, and practices in order to connect with and organize international support. Using English helps bolster international support (for better or worse). Additionally, some languages do not have a specific term for particular non-normative identities and practices. That being said, further interrogation of western-centric is imperative in the field of global sexuality studies, particularly in social movements, global campaigns, and gay tourism and consumerism (Alexander 2005; Grewal and Kaplan 2001; Massad 2007). In addition to critiquing the ways sexuality is theorized from a Westo-centric position, postsocialist scholars like Stenning and Hörschelmann reveal the tendency to universalize postsocialist European experiences. This is particularly salient to the Serbian context since it stands out in the region as being the only nation-state to have endured NATO military intervention (via air strikes) during the 1990s.

In their work, Stenning and Hörschelmann examine how a linear approach to postsocialist studies needs to be complicated and deconstructed (Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008). Specifically, they argue for a rethinking of postsocialist history as a web of multiple interconnected histories and geographies. This is in part because

¹⁵ For example, the words “queer, lesbian, and gay” are transliterated in Serbian to “kver, lezbijeski, and gej.”

postsocialist studies, as a methodology, looks beyond the contemporary phenomenon associated with transition. Rather, used as a methodological framework, postsocialist studies considers how history and historical contextualization influence and impact contemporary phenomenon. If we are to consider the recent homophobic backlashes in Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Serbia, and Croatia to the EU's demands for LGBTQ rights laws, we must look not only at the influence of neofascism and the church, but also how social, political, and cultural concepts around sexuality have developed in each of those countries prior to the fall of communism (Blagojević 2010, Kahlina 2013, Mikuš 2011, Moss 2009, Takacs and Szalma 2011, and Waitt 2005).

Rather than stating that accession to the European Union and its support of LGBT rights singularly created a homophobic backlash among right-wing nationalists in postsocialist spaces, I engage in a deeper analysis, outlining the role of socialist era and post-conflict times on current political activism. Stenning and Hörschelmann's approach informs my own because I am looking beyond the EU/modern vs. isolationist/backwards binary understanding of Serbia. I consider how the post-war legacy affects contemporary notions of sexuality and nationalism in Serbia. Furthermore, my research incorporates a multi-method approach that will give a more comprehensive picture of contemporary LGBT politics in Serbia. In addition to being informed by literature that critiques and de-centers a Western framework when looking at sexuality in a global context, my project

engages with questions of Europeanization and homonationalism as it relates to postsocialist, transitional Serbia.

(Post)Conflict Studies and Nationalism in the Serbian Context

While historically there have been various forms of violent extremism and nationalism in the region¹⁶, a fact analyzed by many scholars (e.g., Judah 2000; Silber and Little 1996; Malcolm 1996), what we are witnessing now is a deployment of rhetoric and violence that is both reminiscent of the war, but also new. This new form of violence centers around the struggle over bodies and desires, and how they reflect what it means to be Serbian. One can see the tensions that develop from being a post-conflict society in transition particularly when considering the new forms of gender and sexual violence that have shifted towards targeting those who identify as LGBT. Additionally, Serbia's economy is undergoing a drastic shift from state-run socialism towards a neoliberal capitalist model. Thus, Serbia is in the unique position of enduring new forms of violence precisely because society has not been reformed, and the economy has not been miraculous and has not improved conditions for people.

¹⁶ Such as the Srebrenica massacre of Muslim men and boys at the hands of Serbian militias, the Serb rape camps where Muslim and Croat women faced atrocious sexual violence as a method of ethnic cleansing during the war, the use of beheading as a form of combat due to its historic connections to the Serbs who fought against the Ottomans in the 14th Century, and the destruction and burning of thousands of homes as another tool for ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo (Judah 2000; Silber and Little 1996; Malcolm 1996).

Many feminist publications focus on Serbia during and directly following the wars in the former Yugoslavia. These publications examine nationalism, militarism, and violence against women. However, there is a lack of feminist research on current challenges faced with post-conflict transitional Serbian government and society, including the connection and relationship with new forms of gender and sexual violence against lesbians, gay men, and people who identify as transgender. Likewise, while there has been much debate about gender and neoliberalism in Europe (see for example Squires 2007: 7-8), there has been little discussion of how regional integration and the general move toward economic liberalization converges with and/or puts into question Serbia's history of militarism and conflict.

Focusing on post-conflict transitional Serbian society allows us to examine the lasting effects of war, militarism, and nationalism on not only those who fought in and were victims of the conflicts, but on the civilians who survived the war as well. This approach also reveals that typically there is a continuum of violence that extends past the limits of a war, particularly in the realm of everyday life; an observation that feminist political scientists have long observed (Shepherd 2009; Enloe 2000). In post-conflict situations, intimate partner violence is often common (as it is during full-fledged conflict), and the post-conflict situation itself can create new anxieties (in the case of Serbia, often anxieties related to national identity) that exacerbate gender roles in the heteronormative family.

Mladjenović and Kesić discuss the surge of domestic violence and their work to address it in post-conflict Serbia (2001). Following the war, feminist and anti-war activists provided (and continue to provide) support services, group therapy, and public education about the prevalence of violence against women in post-conflict Serbia. Mladjenović and Kesić draw connections between the terror and sexual violence committed during the wars and the increase in domestic violence following the wars. While the authors' arguments rely heavily on anecdotal evidence, a major component of their work links nationalism and violence against women. Part of their analysis, also, relies on a critique of violent masculinity and the role returning soldiers play in Serbian society. Mladjenović and Kesić's work is useful, because it demonstrates the interconnectedness between nationalism, the constructed heteronormative nuclear family, and gender. Their work explains how Serbia's post-war legacy impacts the family. Additionally, it critiques violent masculinity as it relates to nationalism and violence against women. I want to collect more of this kind of research in order to connect nationalism to homophobia in the Serbian context.

Applying a queer theory lens to my work is crucial to understand Serbia's relatively unexamined realm of antigay violence and political homophobia. By "heteronormative," I am referring to the assumed naturalization of and implementation by institutions, structures, and practices work that idealizes certain types of heterosexuality, thus prioritizing dominant forms of heterosexual couplings as universal and the norm

(Bedford and Rai 2009: xx). Heteronormativity is the structural emphasis, reiteration, and creation of sexual and familial hierarchies; the heterosexual, presumably monogamous, and married couple is the ideal, normal, morally righteous, and universal form of love and desire. Historically, the heteronormative family has typically served as the foundation of capitalist democracies as well as socialist and fascist forms of governance; the family/nation dualism is central to understandings of colonial and postcolonial nation-states and nation-making (McClintock 1995). According to Correia, right-wing antigay violence is directly connected to Serbian nationalism, and public antigay rhetoric has increased since the passing of the anti-discrimination laws in 2009 (Correia 2010). A nationalist Serb concerned with the proliferation of the nation, thus, typically has a vested interest in the promotion of a heteronormative perspective and lifestyle. Most explicitly, Serbia's transition into becoming a EU member state not only threatens heteronormativity by promoting LGBT rights, but also threatens the Serbian nation.

Heteronormative constructions of the ideal Serbian nuclear family proliferate and combine homophobia and nationalism (Mladjenović 2001; Kahlina 2011). One can look at the rhetoric deployed by Serbian political figures and nationalists to see how the wars' legacies have impacted current debates around LGBT issues in Serbia (Correia 2010). In her essay, "The Making of Political Responsibility: Hannah Arendt and/in the Case of Serbia," Daša Duhaček suggests that the Serbian public is politically responsible for the

proliferation of nationalism and the crimes committed in its name during the Balkan Wars.

Homonationalism and Europeanization

A major question that my project seeks to answer is how LGBT activists and organizations negotiate the precarious position of being associated with EU support. To better understand this precarious positionality, I turn to Jasbir Puar and Katja Kahlina's work on homonationalism and Europeanization, to explore the double bind LGBT individuals experience in Serbia. In her foundational work, *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar posits a theory of homonationalism to describe the disingenuous adoption of gay rights initiatives in order to further nationalist projects. She describes homonationalism as it operates in the recent embrace and mainstreaming of a normative (read: white, middle class, monogamous, and gender conforming) queer subject in the United States (Puar 2009). Through homonationalism, queer and LGBT rights organizations adopt particular political agendas that are copasetic with state initiatives, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. The state, in turn, tacitly adopts particular gay rights politics, as long as they fit within a narrow parameter of behavior and performance. A number of scholars have written about how homonationalist politics are used to support particular nationalist policies that further racialize Muslims and promote U.S. militarism, particularly in the post-9/11 era (Ahmed 2011; Puar 2006, 2011; Keating 2013).

Homonationalism also works in the context of Europe. Since the early 2000s, the European Union has created a number of accession policies addressing gay rights that are designed for postsocialist Eastern European countries (EIDHR 2000-2006). The integration of gay rights into EU accession policies has resulted in the Europeanization of gay rights politics (Kahlina 2013). Rather than policies and laws being crafted by grassroots activists and organizations, EU policies are implemented in a top-down model in applicant states, which has resulted in a lack of local political support and homophobic backlashes in a number of states. O'Dwyer and Schwartz discuss homophobic backlashes against LGBT communities in their comparative study of Poland and Latvia (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010). They write that the association of LGBT individuals with the EU top-down mandates has created both new forms of security as well as cultural backlashes. Quoting an activist, they write, "activists feel more secure in Poland now. They know EU is watching" (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010: 221). O'Dwyer and Schwartz assert that one of the main causes of homophobia is consistent with failure to adhere to new "Europeanization norms" within Poland and Latvia (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010: 234). This notion of a new form of norms, one that incorporates a discourse of LGBT rights while concurrently promoting a new form of neoliberalism, begs further investigation.

Jon Binnie, in his interrogation of sexual politics and transitional economy of Poland, builds on O'Dwyer and Schwartz by arguing that not only do Polish LGBT communities face homophobia, but neoliberal economic policies in Poland have also

created new class tensions within the LGBT community—creating further turmoil (Binnie 2013). Binnie’s work further demonstrates how transitioning into a neoliberal state has created new queer subjects. There are those who thrive in the new Polish economy, and there are those who are less ideal, and who experience new forms of economic precarity. Binnie’s work is useful here, because it in part draws on the work of Puar and others who engage in discussions of homonationalism. There is the ideal queer that complies with and thrives within postsocialist Poland, and there is the less ideal individual who is not a model neoliberal citizen. Binnie’s work on transitional Poland and its effects on sexuality can be further complicated and nuanced in the Serbian context, particularly because of Serbia’s unique role in the Yugoslav Wars.

Like Binnie, Jelisaveta Blagojević’s work also considers postsocialism and Europeanization of sexuality. Unlike Binnie, she considers the role of nationalism and Serbia’s post-war legacy as having a direct connection to homophobia. Conversely, Kahlina’s work suggests that the homophobia seen in Serbia is more than just a nationalism phenomenon, but is also indicative of an overall lack of public and cultural outreach (Kahlina 2013). Kahlina engages in a comparative study of Serbian and Croatian transitions and EU accession to support what she describes as the Europeanization of LGBT rights and the “leveraged pedagogy” used by political elite to promote these rights (Kahlina 2013: 74). An overwhelming trend in the literature mentioned above is that the Europeanization and postsocialist transitions Central and

Eastern European countries are undergoing are creating unique sets of struggles for LGBT organizations.

Discussing homonationalism and Europeanization is integral to my project because they provide frameworks to investigate the disconnect between public anti-gay political rhetoric (Correia 2010) and Serbia's adoption of pro-gay laws per EU accession mandates, such as anti-discrimination legislation, and anti-hate crimes laws in 2009 (Blagojević 2010). Another aspect of homonationalism and Europeanization as it relates to Serbia is how national identity and Serbia's post-conflict legacies create (or recreate) new challenges to LGBT individuals. More specifically, what is the link between current LGBT activism in Serbia and past anti-war activism? To help answer these questions, I turn to feminist post-conflict studies and conversations on nationalism and sexuality, which help to inform my analysis.

Serbian LGBT Activism in a Global Context

The historic tracing of the identity, language, and religious formations of the various Balkan ethnic groups is critical for understanding the more recent Balkan Wars and ethnic tensions. Many contemporary ultra-right-wing nationalist groups will reference battles that occurred five or six centuries ago—the most common and salient battle being the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, when ethnic Serbs reclaimed a part of Kosovo from outsider Turks and indigenous Albanians. The ultra right-wing group, 1389, is named after that battle, and is one of many Serb political parties that advocates for the

annexation of modern-day Kosovo. The ultra-nationalist group has also organized and participated in numerous anti-gay rallies and gay bashings, and was founded by paramilitary soldiers who engaged in ethnic cleansing campaigns in the border regions of Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia.

The group 1389, along with other ultra-nationalist groups, works closely with right-wing members of the Serbian Orthodox church to advocate for anti-gay legislation. The majority of the rhetoric used by nationalist groups are rooted in a particular interpretation of Serbian history that both reifies Serb superiority, while also reminding the public about past atrocities committed against Serbs. Oftentimes, nationalist propaganda will discuss how various imperial powers attempted to conquer the Serbs, but were eventually defeated. One example is the previously mentioned regular marches by football hooligans. The rhetoric of imperialism and Serb resiliency is still used, especially when discussing Kosovo, and Western and other outsiders' attempts to recognize Kosovo as an independent state. The question of Kosovo and Serbia's failure to recognize its sovereignty is one that is rooted in various interpretations of Serb and Balkan history. Kosovo is thought to be the birthplace of the Serb Orthodox church in the 14th century by many Serb nationalists. It is also home to one of the few ancient indigenous groups to the region—Albanians. For many Serbs and Albanians, Kosovo symbolizes a collective identity and a nationalist logic. If Kosovo serves as a marker of Serb-nation-making, then any threat to the nation of Serbia, such as Kosovar independence, is a threat to the nation.

This includes any potential threats to the proliferation of the nation, such as a lack of reproduction.

A major source of anti-gay rhetoric draws from a pro-family and pro-reproduction ideology, or the assumption that only heterosexuals can reproduce and raise functioning members of Serbian society. But this logic is incomplete, as it does not recognize that the sheer concept of a “Gay Pride Parade” is not indigenous to Serbia. Instead, Gay Pride Parades are a Western import promoted by international NGOs such as IGLHRC, ILGA Europe, and Amnesty International. By assuming that the antigay riots were merely an extension of violent Serbian nationalism that will do anything to preserve the nation, such as engage in antigay violence, we are failing to recognize how international efforts (such as promoting gay pride) also threaten Serb nationalist identity. Focusing only homosexuality and its threat to the Serb identity also fails to consider the other historic, political, economic, and cultural threats that the European Union and U.S. have and continue to pose to Serb nationalists. To point to homophobic violence as being a marker of a lack of sophistication, and barbaric and backwards nationalism, fails to implicate the West in this scenario. Thus, we are simultaneously absolved in being connected to the violence while feeling compelled to further intervene.

A bevy of feminist scholars critique the western-centric interventions in the name of human/women/LGBT rights. These feminist critique gained significant traction in the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly in the fields of feminist international relations,

feminist security studies, critical human rights discourse, and transnational feminist political economy criticisms (Hesford 2005, Lind 2010, Nagar and Lock Swarr 2010, and Jindy Pettman 2004). In her criticism of Western Anglo-feminist critiques of liberalism, Nanette Funk warns of the limitations of centering the analysis from a Western perspective. She notes that a critique of individual “rights”-centered rhetoric and politics is valuable, but rarely neatly fits in the post-socialist space.

A comprehensive understanding of the specific state, region, and its history is imperative if we are to engage in a critique of “liberalism”. To be more specific, if we wish to critique the international community’s pushing of LGBT rights discourse and politics in Serbia, we also must look at the international community’s involvement in establishing rights discourse in the region in general. This means we must consider NATO’s interventions in the Balkans (with the U.S. and UK at the helm) in the 1990s. A critique of sexual politics in Serbia cannot be divorced from a discussion of the international community using force to intervene—a move that is paradoxically embraced and detested in the region. To further extend Funk’s analysis as it relates to critiques of liberalism in the Balkans, the tensions that liberalism and rights discourse as it relates to sexual politics in the Balkans must be recognized. In the case of Serbia—still fraught with corruption, inert bureaucracy, and an overall public lack of confidence in the state—creates a need for liberal human rights initiatives and at times, intervention.

There is a sense of distrust in the region surrounding state officials, their relationships with the former Communist party, ultra-nationalist parties, and/or the Serb Orthodox church, and implementation of laws—specifically pertaining to human rights. International intervention (and democratization) is embraced by many in the region, but the same time, this embrace is not without reservations. Many theorists and activists in the region are deeply concerned about a paternalist intervention, agenda-setting, and monetary funding of particular types of LGBT local politics. Serbia's transition has created new forms of xenophobia and homophobia, and reinvigorated the ultra-nationalist activism that reared its head during the Yugoslav wars. Many nationalists and isolationists associate the LGBT community with outside interventions, namely the EU.

For example, as a part of accession, the EU has required that Serbia pass laws that grant protections and rights to LGBT individuals (Blagojević 2010 and Kahlina 2013). Nationalists and isolationists view the new laws (including anti-discrimination protections and access to adoption) as foreign and European. Many nationalists, such as 1389, view EU accession as a loss of national identity and sovereignty. Nationalists see the EU as another imperial power set to rule Serbia. Here history is being invoked to fuel nationalist anxieties of Serbian autonomy. The EU is seen as a governing body intending to exploit Serbian resources and dictate progressive social agendas, including a pro-gay, pro-immigrant/migration, and pro-diversity. Thus, anti-EU sentiment is common among right-wing groups such as 1389. We see this trend in other EU member states, such as

Brexit, along with the rise of popularity of Fascist and right wing parties in throughout Europe¹⁷. In this way, LGBT rights represent not only a threat to Serbian nationalist identity, but also a pro-EU agenda.

Not only are those who identify as LGBT targeted by nationalist and right wing leaders, they are also constantly negotiating a precarious relationship with the Serbian government. In an attempt to comply with EU mandates, the Serbian government continues to pass laws and policies in order to line up with neoliberal-inspired policy recommendations.

The same politicians allegedly supporting these laws are also engaging in public homophobic rhetoric in the media, refusing to meet with LGBT organizations, firing government staffers, and/or refusing to implement the laws. The only time they are seemingly in support of LGBT rights is when the EU delegation pressures the government¹⁸. For example, the only time the government has supported gay pride parades in Belgrade was when the European Union delegation pressured government officials to support the parade (a phenomenon that I further explore in Chapter Four). The lack of sincere government support has further created a chasm between the laws on the books—which protect LGBT rights—and public support of LGBT rights, resulting in a

¹⁷ For example, record numbers of ultra-right wing politicians were elected in the U.K., Poland, Greece, Hungary, France, and other parts of Europe as of 2017.

¹⁸ Labris Annual Report 2013.

continued anti-gay public sentiment (Blagojević 2010). Additionally, the EU's approach to pressuring the Serbian government to support gay rights leaves out a critical voice in the fight for LGBT rights in Serbia—the activists. The EU's work with the government fails to engage with the LGBT grassroots efforts and initiatives that activists have been working on for decades. This tension between local and global LGBT politics in Serbia will be further explored in Chapters Three and Four, where I engage in two case studies— feminist lesbian activism and the 2016 LGBT Pride Parade in Serbia. These chapters will also explore the rise of homonationalism and pinkwashing in Serbia. In Chapters Three and Four I draw on Jon Binnie and David Bell's (2000) work theorizing non-heterosexual assemblages in Russia, Kevin Moss' (1995) work on homonationalisms in Eastern Europe, Jelisaveta Blagojević's (2011) work theorizing homophobia in Serbia, Roman Kuhar's (2007) work out of Slovenia, Anniko Imre's (2008) examination of lesbian representation in the Balkans, and Connor O'Dwyer's work on EU integration and political homophobia in post-socialist states.

Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska's (2011) edited work, "Decentering Western Sexualities," serves as an intervention in sexuality studies epistemological production. The authors assert that there has been a Western focus on theorizing sexuality and sexual politics. This focus has reified East-West binaries and Cold War logic, and in turn, gives an incomplete picture of sexuality and sexual politics in Eastern Europe. In

addition to de-centering sexuality epistemologies, the chapters are regionally located and contextualized in Central and Eastern Post-Socialist Europe.

Referencing the work of Walther Rathenau, Todorova describes how the terms “Balkan” and “Balkanization” gained ground and were used as a rhetorical tool in post-World War I. She writes, “[Balkanization] was used, however, as an effective specter to wave in the face of Western allies, playing on the fear of an imminent clash between East and West...” (Todorova 2009: 34). Todorova asserts that the Ottoman legacy as the colonizers of the Balkans carried on into Cold War and later Post-Cold War assumptions and legacies. More specifically, the area we now know of as the Balkans (South Central Europe), and the associations the international community has developed alongside the concept of “Balkan” is a direct result of Byzantine and Ottoman conquer and colonization of the region. Todorova notes that the predominant narratives of a divisive and violent Balkans rest in an incomplete history rooted in the notion of a dichotomous relationship between Ottoman/Turk/Islam/foreign and Byzantine/Christian/Orthodox/indigenous legacies.

The assumption in this dichotomous discourse is that there has always been a tension between the conqueror and the conquered, particularly around the elements of politics, economics, and culture.¹⁹ However, according to Todorova, the practices in the

¹⁹ By culture I am referring to language, dress, customs and traditions, food, and entertainment.

Balkans that surfaced in the late 19th and 20th centuries developed organically in the region. Thus, the notion that Balkan violence rooted in Ottoman imperialism is incomplete. According to Todorova, the concept of “Balkan” has strong roots in the Europeanization of the region in the 19th century. It was during this time that narratives of an exotic, backwards, foreign, and barbaric region began making their way West and North. This was in part due to the consolidation of European powers prior to and following World War I, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Bulgarian empire, and the Russian empire, and their attempt at influencing the region. I include Todorova’s genealogy of the Balkans because it helps contextualize the historic roots in Western critique of the region. If we are to consider that there are historic influences that continue to percolate in contemporary society, then we are better able to understand why major news networks, which are highly influential in Western cultural production, have continued to engage in a legacy of Balkan othering as intolerant, different, and not as enlightened as the West.

War, Violent Masculinity, and Feminist Strategies for Peace

The 1990s wars that led to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia have often been cited as the reemergence of ethnic nationalism and tension in the region (Judah 2000, Malcolm 2006, Devic 1997, Zizek 1993). While extensive work has been done to theorize the root causes of the bloody conflicts (insert citations), my work focuses on particular aspects of the conflicts that remain salient in contemporary LGBT and feminist

politics. More specifically, I argue that Serbian nationalism and homophobia, Western interventionism during the War, violent masculinity and feminist resistance to militarism and feminist and LGBT protest during the Yugoslav Wars continue to shape and impact contemporary LGBT and feminist politics in Serbia.

Charting the decline of the Serbian socialist economy is important when discussing anti-war and LGBT activism in the region, in two ways. First, we can look at the number of NGOs and non-profits that were founded during and quickly following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. After the wars, foreign aid services flooded the region with international aid and democracy-building techniques, such as investing heavily in civil society. Many young professionals who were previously employed by the state began to work for international aid organizations such as USAID, UNICEF, and EU Commission on Human Rights.

Post-Socialism and Economic Transition

One cannot talk about Serbia's contemporary LGBT and feminist politics without discussing post-socialism and the history of Titoism in Yugoslavia. Class tensions, state socialism and state control, nationalism/isolationism, nepotism and cronyism, and the shift towards neoliberal privatization have created unique tensions and problems for Serbian LGBT and feminist politics.

Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1992, Jović (2001) describes the former Yugoslav economy as being an alternative to Soviet Communism and capitalism.

This third way, or self-management model, has also been called Yugoslav socialism. Under this model, the Yugoslavian government of Tito (1945-1980) redistributed housing, had free health care for all, promoted trade unions, and produced the majority of goods within the nation. Despite all of the privatization efforts, Serbia has a weak currency and faces looming inflation mostly due to the fact that since 2000, the monetary value of Serbia's exports has only equaled half of the monetary value of their imports, leading to a precarious debt balancing act (ibid). The Serbian government's solution to stabilize the economy has been to further sell off state enterprises to private buyers. Privatizations of Serbian industry along with the market expansion that EU integration promises are further examples of Serbia's shift towards a neoliberal capitalism. Another major shift in the Serbian economy has been directly connected with the labor market as mentioned previously.

Danilo Šuković, Director of the Center for the Economic Research in Belgrade and Serbian economist, argues that Serbia has experienced drastic increases in the labor market, which has resulted an increase in the poverty rate (Šuković 2009). The consequences of war, such as an influx in refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) has created a glut in the labor market (Šuković 2009: 99).

Šukovic also points to the global recession of the mid-2000s as another contributing factor to the decline of the Serbian economy as well as a decrease in employment opportunities. When considering Šukovic's assertions, one can further see

the paradox and tensions Serbian workers are confronted with in terms of joining the European Union, particularly when considering that economic aid has been designed precisely to transition Serbia's economy into the global market²⁰.

During the war period, Serbia experienced drastic economic sanctions from the international community from 1992-2001. This, coupled with the costs of the wars and the disintegration of the Yugoslavian economy left the Serbian economy crippled, and with the Gross Material Product²¹ (GMP) dropped from \$24.6 billion in 1989 to \$9.5 billion in 1993 (Judah 2000: 263-272). It was during this time that the Serbian banks collapsed and inflation skyrocketed, leading to hyperinflation, and rendering pensions and wages for the everyday Serbian worthless (ibid). This resulted in food scarcities and starvation (primarily of pensioners) (ibid). The Middle and Professional classes were hit the hardest by the war and the economic collapse, and a massive emigration of young educated professionals to Canada occurred (Judah 2000: 277).

In the case of Serbia, neoliberal values are contributing to the structural and institutional restructuring of the socialist government and economy away from a welfare

²⁰ Figures according to the IMF, "World Economic Outlook Database April 2010." *IMF.org*. Accessed June 1, 2017.
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2008&ey=2015&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=49&pr1.y=10&c=942&s=NGDPD%2CNGDPDPC%2CPPPGDP%2CPPPPC&grp=0&a=>

²¹ According to Tim Judah, Yugoslavia, and later Serbia measured the economy based on the Gross Material Product (GMP) (2009: 267). The GDP is estimated at about 15-20 percent greater than GMP (ibid).

state towards rapid privatization of both enterprises as well as an investment in civil society to be the new harbingers of welfare services. In Chapter Five, I explore how neoliberal privatization has created new alliances between LGBT, feminist, leftist, and economic nationalists in Belgrade.

In addition to privatization of state-owned industries, major austerity measures are currently being implemented in Serbia's welfare programs. The privatization of social welfare programs creates a need for forms of aid and support through international and supranational foundations, such as the USAID, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the EU, UN Global Fund for Women, numerous nation-state funders such as Sweden and the United States, Mama Cash (The Netherlands), Mott Foundation (UK), and the European Commission Fund for Women. International funders are not only charged with promoting and sustaining Serbian civil society projects, but also with helping to craft a new Serbian democracy and economy- one that promotes neoliberal capitalist values that fit with the European Union. This includes the design and implementation of gender mainstreaming projects and programs.

Chapters Four and Five specifically draw on the work of critical development theorist Suzanne Bergeron, transnational feminist scholar Millie Thayer, and human geographer Doreen Massey to examine how international development initiatives have created new economic and social status tensions among LGBT activists. Chapter Five, uses Bergeron and Thayer to consider how the state's privatization and neoliberalization

of the economy (at the urging of the EU) created new class divides among LGBT and feminist workers and activists.

Chapter 3: Post-War Residue, Lesbian Separatism, and Imagined Communities

In early October 2015, I was asked to speak at a local Serbian feminist and lesbian activist organization about my racial and queer justice work in the States. I went into the meeting thinking I would give a short presentation, make some research contacts, and engage in a lively discussion about transnational feminist and queer solidarity. Little did I know that my visit, and more specifically the use of the the term “queer” in my talk title would be controversial enough to bring together activists in the lesbian feminist movement in the Balkans who had not all been together since April of that year. Several of the attendees had not set foot in Labris’s office in months, due to an ongoing debate on where the lesbian feminist movement was headed in Serbia, and more generally, the Balkans. Was Labris, the longest standing LGBT organization in the Balkans, supporting and promoting this notion of “queerness” over lesbianism? Why was the organization hosting a foreigner, and American to come and talk about her “queer justice” work abroad? Many of the women in the room expressed concern about using the word queer vs. lesbian or bisexual.

For many of the women in the room, queer meant Western, not women-centered, and a term that did not resonate with Serbian women. To many in the room that night, and in my subsequent interviews, the use of the word queer symbolized more than a linguistic turn. It meant a turn away from the tight-knit feminist women-only spaces that emerged in the 1990s in the Balkans.

The concern was, and is, less about adopting an all-genders inclusive politic, and more about allowing men into the political organizing space of the movement. For many women at Labris, and in the lesbian movement in Serbia, opening up spaces to men also posed a risk of reverting back to earlier social movement organizing during Yugoslavia- where both the grassroots leadership and the political elite were predominantly sexist men. Additionally, many women in the lesbian movement in Serbia associate men and male-dominated leadership with right wing violent masculinity during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. The anti-war work in the 90s of women-led groups such as Women in Black led to the creation of groups such as Labris later on that decade. That being said, the contemporary women-centered politics of the lesbian movement is not simply linked to generational feminism. It is not just the old guard of the lesbian movement who seek to maintain women-only spaces. Rather, there has been a surge in young lesbian feminists (late teens to early 30s) who are invested in maintaining the few women-only spaces left in Serbia whilst working to establish new lesbian-centered activist organizations and consciousness raising spaces.

This chapter explores the intergenerational work in Serbia that maintains current and seeks to establish new women-only spaces. Using the case studies of Serbia's longest-standing lesbian organization, Labris, the organization of the 2015 Lavender Spring, the 2015 Belgrade Dyke March, and the 2015 Lesbian Week, I explore how women in Serbia are working towards new imagined feminist women-only spaces. I

examine the links between activist networks that created women-only spaces in the 1990s during the Balkan Wars, and how those political ideologies have been adopted and adapted by younger generations of feminists in Serbia. I also describe contemporary lesbian politics, rhetoric, and organizing in Serbia. It presents the arguments in favor of lesbian separatism from lesbian activists as well as criticisms waged against lesbian separatism by other LGBT activists in Serbia. It also considers how post-conflict and post-socialist legacies steeped in violent masculinity have led many feminist activists in Serbia to create “safe spaces” for women by excluding men altogether. How do notions of queer travel within Serbian LGBT politics and organizing? I examine how the term “queer” has become synonymous with men in Serbia, and the importance of the word lesbian (or lezbejka) in Serbia as a signifier for women’s safety and community.

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, it describes the development of lesbian-only spaces in Serbia, and explores the inextricable link to socialism and war in the Balkans. Next, it presents the case study of three important moments in contemporary lesbian activism in Serbia- the Lavender Spring, Dyke March, and Lesbian Week. It examines how these three events have shaped and influenced current LGBT politics in Serbia. Finally, it considers how younger generations of activists are seeking a total break from working with men in the LGBT movement. I examine how women-only activism is being supported (and not supported) by other LGBT organizations inside and outside Serbia.

Yugoslavia and Lesbian-Identified Women

Historians such as Bojan Bilić chart the birth of the LGBT movement in the former-Yugoslavia with the first-ever queer film and cultural festival, Magnus Festival in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1984 (Bilić et al 2014: 65). Magnus Festival was the first gathering of out and closeted LGBT individuals in Yugoslavia in a public space-celebrating queer culture. Concurrently, a network of feminist and lesbian activists in Yugoslavia were developing women-only networks and organizing regional consciousness raising meetings²². The establishment of lesbian-only networks and promotion of feminist spaces in Yugoslavia would later lead to the first-ever women-only gathering, also set in Ljubljana.

In 1987, the first lesbian group was formed in the Balkans. Based out of Ljubljana (which later became the capital of Slovenia), ŠKUC LL, held their first regional retreat. This gathering brought together women from throughout Yugoslavia, and is widely thought of as the first major launch of a lesbian feminist movement in the Former-Yugoslavia. It was here that lesbians and other non-heterosexual-identified women and feminists gathered to discuss politics, feminism, and lesbian liberation. The retreat was organized by a number of anti-war feminists and lesbians who would go on to found

²² Mladjenović presentation at Labris Lesbian Week, December 2015.

organizations throughout the region during and following the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The organizers promoted the event using grassroots techniques such as word-of-mouth and flyers (below).



Figure 2. Photo of the Lila Inicijativa Zine made in 1989. Photo credit Lepa Mladjenović

Soon after the first retreat, Lila Inicijativa (Lila Initiative) formed in Zagreb (later the capital of Croatia). Other LGBT feminist groups followed including Ljubljana-based Cassandra (1993-2000), Belgrade-based Labris (1995-present), Zagreb-based Kontra (1997-present), Rijeka-based LORI (2000-present), Novosadska lezbejska organizacija

(1994-2004), and the Skopije-based LezFem (2013-present). Most of these organizations were founded and sustained by the work of anti-war feminists, including Lepa Mladjenović, Daša Duhaček, Zorica Mrsević, Vesna Kesić, and others.



Figure 3. Serbian Lesbian Meet Up in 2001. Photo credit Lepa Mladjenović

In their comprehensive history on feminism and anti-war activism in Serbia, Lepa Mladjenović, Donna M. Hughes, and Zorica Mrsević map the emergence of feminism during and after Yugoslavia (1995). They write that as a non-aligned nation-state during

the Cold War, the porous nature of Yugoslavia's borders created more space and opportunities for transnational conversations about feminism. As feminist movements were gaining support and ground in the West, Yugoslav feminists were holding conferences, teach-ins, consciousness-raising meetings, and other outreach and educational events to promote feminism. The first-ever feminist conference in Yugoslavia was held in 1978. Following almost a decade of outreach and education, in 1986, women in Belgrade (the capital of Yugoslavia) decided to formalize their organization, naming it "Women and Society." Many of the women who attended the conference were called "anti-state," "pro-capitalists," and "pro-Western" by the Yugoslav government (Mladjenović et al 1995: 1). Soon after Women and Society was formed, other feminist groups were formalized, and women from throughout the Balkans joined local activist networks.

In 1990, as the "democratization process began," and Yugoslavia was preparing for major elections in December, women from all over the Balkans gathered in Belgrade in the summer of 1990 to create a non-nationalistic lobbying group, Women's Lobby. Alongside the Women's Lobby, a group of Gay and Lesbian men and women formed Arkadija, the first Gay Lobbying group in 1990.

Working together, Arkadija and Women's Lobby began organizing and educating the Yugoslav public about the pitfalls of nationalism in 1990. Despite feminist organizing, ultra-nationalist groups won representation in the parliament for the first time

in Yugoslavia's history. What ensued was war in Slovenia (1991), Croatia (1991-1992), and most brutally, Bosnia (1992-1995). 300,000 people are estimated to have died or disappeared during the wars.

NGOization and Regional Divisions

The 1990s wars ravaged the Balkans and created a desperate need for services for refugee and inter-displaced persons. Feminists and lesbian and gay organizations responded to these needs and provided both direct services as well as organized anti-war actions. Feminists helped organize mothers' and women's groups to appeal to the larger population's respect and reverence for mothers. Direct service organizations were formed to respond to the thousands of women who survived being interned at camps and raped as a war and ethnic cleansing tactic. During this time, grassroots organizations worked alongside international NGOs and aid organizations. This also marked the beginning of feminist and women's groups cooperation and later collaboration with international aid organization. This relationship remains intact in the Balkans in 2017. The relationships with international aid groups such as UNICEF, UN peace keeping troops, USAID, and the European Commission created a demand for more formalized networks. What began as grassroots response teams began to morph into professionalized care centers. A fledgling democracy in the early 2000s, the Serbian state relied heavily on international aid organizations and NGOs to fund and provide the bulk of the support for

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), survivors of war-related violence, and refugees from the Balkan Wars (Uvalić 2010).

After the Croatian and Bosnian wars, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Mostar experienced a large influx of Europeans and U.S. American aid workers and foreign policy experts. The goal was to help democratize the region- particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina (Judah 2000; Silber and Little 1996; Malcolm 1996). It wasn't until the overthrowing of Milošević, that sanctions were lifted and internationals were granted more access to Belgrade in Serbia. Thus, Europeanization and democratization in Serbia was somewhat delayed in the Balkans. In many ways, however, the delay of foreign intervention and aid made way for activists in Serbia to foster strong networks and ties within the country, meanwhile maintaining their connections to their former countrywomen. It is here, with the delayed Europeanization and democratization in contrast with Bosnia and Croatia, that the case study of Serbia's lesbian movement is unique.

In contrast to their other Balkan cohorts, Serbian feminists and lesbians survived severe economic sanctions, the Milošević regime, and managed to topple the regime. This is not to say that Croatian and BiH women had it easier, nor that feminists were cut off from one another during the post-war 1990s. Rather, the sanctions and isolation that Serbs experienced (1996-2000) created a space for localized activism and resistance without significant influence from foreign aid workers and funders seeking to

Europeanize²³ Balkan politics and policies. This was both a blessing and a curse for activists, as there were more opportunities to create movements indigenous to Serbia, but resources were scarce, and Milošević's government was hostile to feminist and LGBT activism. Thus, feminist and LGBT activists living in Belgrade under Milošević experienced hyper masculine violence and ultra-nationalism on a daily basis. An extreme example of this was the 2000 Gay Pride Parade in Belgrade, when dozens of LGBT and ally marchers were attacked by right-wing nationalists, with the Belgrade police standing idly by.

²³ Perhaps a footnote or paragraph on why Europeanization is significant to LGBT rights- LGBT rights and other forms of human rights are considered a symbol of "European" democracy, and often go hand-in-hand with economic reforms and aid. See Grabbe (2006) and Maljkovic (2014) for sources. Also Ayaub and Patternotte (2014, p. 3). Bilic discusses in intro to edited book, page 5.



Figure 4. Women Protesting Masculine Violence in the main square of Belgrade in 2001. Photo credit Lepa Mladjenović

Nationalism, and more specifically, Serbian ultra-nationalism has been in the backdrop of Serbian politics for years, and it is this ultra-nationalism that pits itself against the European Union and LGBT groups. Just a decade following the most recent bloody ethnic conflict in Kosovo, including the breakup of and wars in the former Yugoslavia (and the arrest and trial of the former Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević for war crimes), Serbia is slowly rebuilding. During this time of transition, many women's

organizations and LGBT organizations have reported a continuance of ultra-nationalism and xenophobic radicalism as evidenced through public hate speech, vandalism, anti-gay sermons, and anti-gay violence (Bakić 2009). That being said, those who identify as LGBT are not the only targets of the ultranationalists. There have been numerous reports of xenophobic actions against the Roma community, Muslims, Jews, and Croats in Serbia. These groups, like those who identify as LGBT, are perceived threats to the reproduction and subsequent proliferation of the pure Serb bloodline by both Serb citizens as well as political elites. What's more, is that the current administration, run by Vučić, oscillates between embracing nationalist rhetoric and keeping it at bay when interacting with European Union officials²⁴.

If we look at the 2000 march in comparison to other marches happening around that time in the Balkans, such as the Zagreb pride march in 2002, there is a striking difference between perceived cooperation and support from the public and political elites. Katja Kahlina discusses the difference between Serbian and Croatian LGBT politics as being caused by a lack of cultural and political education and outreach by the state (2015). What Kahlina fails to discuss in her article, however, is how radical feminist and LGBT activism in Serbia has created a space for non-normative individuals to gather and find a safe haven. Rather than assimilate into Serbian culture- which has been critiqued

²⁴ I will revisit the current administration's ambivalence to LGBT protections and rights later on in this chapter.

by Mladjenovic as rife with nationalism and hyper-masculinity- the lack of sincere acceptance and support by the state has created its own form of political backlash and resistance on the part of the feminist and LGBT activists. To many activists in Serbia cooperating with the state means a particular acceptance and endorsement of nationalistic, nepotistic, and corrupt policies. The historic and adversarial relationship with the state is further complicated when looking at the influx of NGOs following the fall of Milošević, and the double-bind they have created for LGBT and feminist activists.

In my interviews, one topic that was unavoidable was discussing how Serbia has transformed since the 1990s and 2000s Yugoslav wars and the fall of Milošević. The majority of activists commented that many of the same actors who were an integral part of Milošević's party are still decision-making within the Serbian political elite. A paradox of leadership and cooperation has begun to surface particularly around EU integration. The same actors who were in violent opposition to NATO and many of Western Europe's leaders now find themselves across the table from delegates from said NATO member countries. This contradiction also affects activists. International funders and NGOs see state involvement as progress towards a form of European democracy. Thus, rather than working independently of the state, international funders are asking LGBT and feminist activists to work *with* the state. This may seem like an obvious move towards developing a "strong" democracy in Serbia. However, most activists struggle to

accept that there will be a significant change in the treatment of LGBT and women communities from leaders who were once Milošević lackeys.

Many of the international funder-supported programs and policies that activists are working to promote (both within and outside of the state) rely on state cooperation and at times endorsement. Thus, feminist and LGBT activists who have historically organized in opposition to the state have to work with explicitly anti-feminist and anti-LGBT state officials. Activists are also wary of what happens to their position in society once EU enforcement subsides. In other words, if the carrot of EU accession is withdrawn, and the Serbian government has no political reason to support feminist and LGBT causes, will all of the gains made in Serbia be for nothing. This precarious position contemporary LGBT and feminist activists are in has created new forms of resistance of opting out of organized NGOs and civil society.

Progressive Movement Fissures

Serbia's application to join the EU symbolizes a major shift towards engaging with the international community, and with the urge for global participation comes the pressure to adopt and adhere to EU values, which are inherently neoliberal. Neoliberal and EU funding reforms have also impacted the oldest lesbian organization in Serbia, Labris, particularly in regards to their efforts to transform public Serbian public opinion of LGBT issues. Jelena, one of directors of Labris, mentioned the changes in approaches they have been forced to make due to the new focus on working with the state. Over the

past year, Labris has been designing a curriculum to be implemented in the Serbian [public] schools to educate young people about what it means to identify as LGBT. In reaction to Labris's project, the state has been unwilling to allow the group access to the high school students, and has even threatened to "adjust" their funding if the group attempts to move forward with the trainings. Even though the funding the state is "adjusting" actually comes from international donors who support (at least in name) women's and LGBT projects and organizations, those on the ground level, such as Labris, are being forced to negotiate state policies and mandates as well as needs from their community. As Marija said in our interview, "the state does not care about LGBT, but it does need money. They will send a representative to a press event, but they will not meet with us in private to listen to our concerns. They only listen to EU. It is all an act and we suffer for it." Marija's quote highlights the disingenuous relationship the state has with LGBT organizations. They will implement policies and laws as long as EU delegates are there to ensure implementation. Regardless of whether the EU is setting the agenda or the state is, LGBT organizations, like Labris, are not being consulted in the design and implementation of said policies.

In addition to the intention to join the EU, Serbia's government has also been experiencing a shift towards expanding the number of regional and political parties beyond the 50 years of dominance by the Yugoslavia Communist Party and then

Milošević's Socialist Democrat Party (Bochsler 2008: 1)²⁵. This transitional state has put LGBT activists in a liminal position, particularly when it comes to new forms of political participation.

The case of Boris Milicević is a very interesting profile, which exemplifies some of the complicated relationships LGBT activists have established within Serbian politics. Milicević, one of the first openly gay politicians, began his activist career as many other progressive and LGBT activists did, by protesting the various wars Serbia was engaged in during the 1990s and early 2000s. In our interview he said that his passion for LGBT politics was ignited after he attended the 2001 parade and witnessed the violence and antigay backlash. This inspired him to join an underground graffiti and activist group called "gay-rilla." He said that the secrecy and civil disobedience aspects served multiple purposes. Not only did the various graffiti pieces establish a gay presence to the people of Serbia, but also the various messages, such as "Gay is OK," garnered significant national media attention. Their various art pieces created a media stir in the early 2000s, but as he said in my interview with him, it wasn't until he began the Gej-Strejt Alansija (gay-straight alliance, or GSA), that he began seeing more changes. For nearly nine years Milicević worked to develop the GSA, fostering new relationships with government

²⁵ For a United States historical account of the formation of the Communist party in the former Yugoslavia see Fred Warner Neal (1957).

officials, while attempting to build coalitions among other LGBT activist groups.

Additionally, Milicević began working with Serbian political leaders, and EU delegation members to address issues affecting LGBT communities. It was during this time that Milicević began developing a strong interest in politics. During our interview he said that when surveying his options for joining a Serbian political party, his choice was clear. Most of the larger mainstream parties had rather nationalist tendencies and were rather cold towards (if not downright opposed to) LGBT rights. He thus became a member, and later a leader within the Serbian Socialist Democrats party, the former party of Slobodan Milošević.

The irony of the once anti-war activist joining the party that stoked the flames of war during the conflicts is not lost on many in the LGBT activist community, and Milicević also recognizes the strange transformation. When I asked him about his decision, he said that the party has changed, and is one of the most receptive to LGBT rights. He also pointed to the support of the highest-ranking member of the party, the Minister of the Interior's, for various Belgrade Pride initiatives as an example of the party's commitment to LGBT rights. Hearing Milicević speak, it is clear that he will make a career in politics. His answers were calculated and thoughtful-- almost as if they were talking points designed by a communications expert. In his eyes, this is the main way Serbia will attain equal rights for people in the LGBT community. When asked about the disconnect between the general public and the laws on the books, and what it

will take to get more people on board, Milicević points to the media as one of the key vehicles for change. Yet one cannot help but wonder if his approach, working within the baggage-riddled party, will appeal to the hearts and minds of Serbians.

Boris Milicević's case is an example of the ways the Serbian nationalist parties, in this case, SDP, are adopting pro-LGBT policies to appease EU demands. As O'Dwyer and Schwartz reported in their study of Poland and Latvian EU accession and LGBT organizing, "activists feel more secure in Poland now. They know EU is watching" (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010: 221). There is a sense that the EU is limited, especially considering that there is still a division between political rhetoric and political will. According to O'Dwyer and Schwartz there is a Europeanization of norms happening in Poland and Latvia (ibid). However, Kahlina and others have noted that the political will for protecting LGBT individuals is lacking in Serbia. I experienced this myself when I was living in Belgrade in 2015 and 2016. In the short time that I lived there, a group of lesbians, informants of mine, were attacked in a bar following an educational event on homophobia in sports. These women were brutally beaten by a man who had followed them from the event. One needed reconstructive surgery.²⁶

²⁶ "U Beogradu Napadnute i Pretučene četiri Lezbejke," *Medija Centar Beograd, mc.rs*, Last modified September 29, 2015, Accessed September 30, 2015. <http://www.mc.rs/u-beogradu-napadnute-i-pretucene-cetiri-lezbejke.4.html?eventId=9899>

Subsequently, the power structure within the LGBT and feminist organization is also divided along the lines of gender identity. Thus, many lesbian activists see progressive politics in Serbia as falling along two lines- there is the leftist movement, which is primarily led by cisgender men, and there are gender inclusive LGBT organizations who are forced to cooperate with the state at the behest of international funders. In my interview with a self-identified leftist straight cisgender man ally, he said, “the most important part of the {leftist} struggle is to fight the corrupt state. They are a puppet for Russia and the West. We cannot have LGBT rights working with the state. They cannot free LGBT, women, or Roma. We must free ourselves from them²⁷.” Many feminist lesbians in my interviews, conveyed a lack of belonging in Serbian progressive politics. Either they join a masculinist leftist movement (that oftentimes shrugs off LGBT and feminist agendas as simply identity politics) or they join an LGBT organization that cooperates with the state. Thus, the need for a queer community that rejects masculinist politics and the state has emerged.

Lesbian Spatiotemporality and Resisting Masculinity

In the past three years, lesbian activists in Serbia have organized three major events designed to foster lesbian community and empower women. The three major events, Lavender Spring, 2015 Dyke March, and the 2015 Labris Lesbian Week, were designed

²⁷ Interview N. Porodović. April 2, 2016.

to create an imagined community for women who love women in Serbia. This section explores what an imagined queer community looks like in Serbia as it was envisioned by activists during these three events. I will consider how establishing a women-only space was and is integral to sustain a lesbian and feminist movement in Serbia. I will also discuss the significance of what Talburt and Matus call the spatiotemporality of identity politics in lesbian spaces. I assert that the need for women-only spaces in Serbia's LGBT and feminist movements is not new, but it is being deployed more by younger generations of non-heterosexual feminist women in Serbia. This section also describes the various events and the reported reactions from both the lesbian and women who love women community in Serbia as well as non-women identified LGBT activists.

In the Spring of 2015, a group of women in Belgrade, Serbia, approached Labris organizers about possibly sponsoring a month of community education and outreach about topics affecting lesbian women in Serbia. These topics covered a large swath of issues primarily affecting Serbian lesbians including intimate partner violence, surviving sexual trauma, lesbians and sports, veganism and vegetarianism as a feminist issue, feminism and the refugee crisis, and safe sex in lesbian relationships. The lavender month would also educate the larger Serbian public about lesbianism in Serbia. The goal of the lavender month was twofold- 1. To do outreach to the lesbian and non-heterosexual women community in Serbia to foster community and educate one another, and 2. Promote lesbian visibility to the larger Serbian public. Activists from Nis, Novi Sad, and

other parts of Serbia would gather in the capital, Belgrade, to conduct these events and learn from each other. The public visibility event culminated in the first-ever Serbian Dyke March, which was modeled off of U.S. American dyke marches. The organizers of Lavender Month were adamant that all of the events should be women-organized, women-led, and women-attended. Few activists resisted the women-only mandate for when it came to the internal community events. However, the women who organized Lavender Month faced a large backlash from others in the LGBT movement as well as from international donors.

In my interviews with Lavender Spring organizers, they recounted a number of pressing questions that were posed to them during the organizing stages²⁸. According to two of the Lavender Spring organizers, outsiders had a bevy of questions regarding the intentions of the organizers and questioned the efficacy of their women-only policies. Why would the organizers of the Dyke March not let men march in the parade as well? Can't men be allies? Wouldn't it help for numbers sake to have men involved too? What message is having a women-only march giving to the public? Is the intention of the parade to promote lesbian visibility or lesbian acceptability? Would having men attend and participate in the march bring more media attention? What about transgender men?

²⁸ Interview with Zlata and Tina on October 15, 2015.

Could they attend and march? Most of these questions were met with unsatisfactory answers to the wider LGBT community.

Those who were not involved in organizing the Lavender Spring Month events could not or would not accept the answer that lesbian feminists in Serbia needed to have a time and space that fostered community among themselves. One self-identified lesbian feminist said in our interview, “I do not think we should exclude all men from our work. Lavender Spring does not speak for me or my politics. It is not effective to exclude everyone.”²⁹ They also wanted to show the broader Serbian public that there were significant numbers of women who supported lesbian rights and protections. To the organizers, a women-only led and attended month of events signified empowerment as well as a sense of arrival for broader lesbian and feminist politics in Serbia. As one informant said, “how are we supposed to support them if we can’t walk alongside them? We are so small of a movement; why would they exclude such a big group.”³⁰

The occupation of space- both within the community for the workshops and in public during the Dyke March, was crucial to crystalize a lesbian feminist politics in Serbia, *especially* since the international community was pushing for gender integrated events and a diffusion of lesbian politics into a larger LGBT politic. Having women-only

²⁹ Interview with Mila R. November 11, 2015.

³⁰ Ibid.

events was a way to push back on outside interventions in localized politics. It was indigenous to Serbia (even if the entire concept of “Dyke March” came from the U.S.).

The move towards women-only spaces as a source of resistance to both forms of aggressive masculinity within the Serbian LGBT movement as well as the outside community of international donors indicates a strategic move to establish a new lesbian politic in Serbia. This politic relies on what geographers call the spatiotemporality of location and identity. In other words, a women-only, month-long event such as the Lavender Spring relies on the occupation of material space, such as the public square, the histories and nationalities associated with that space, and the identities of those occupying that space at that time. Talbert and Matus describe spatiotemporality as it relates to identity as integral in establishing a lesbian politic independent of other issues in the larger LGBT community. In their work on lesbian separatism in Chile, they argue that interrogating lesbian separatism from a spatiotemporal perspective allows for more nuanced and fruitful interrogation of social movements and activist strategies (Talbert and Matus 2014). Rather than simply looking at lesbian separatist moves as a form of identity politics, the authors argue that the political action *is* the occupation of the space and its history in concert with identity politics (and subsequent opposition). The fact that lesbians in Serbia organized a month of programming and workshops for them was a political act in that it demonstrated that needs of lesbians are not being met by larger LGBT organizing. Additionally, the women-only occupation of space during the Dyke

March is significant due to the historic and spatial symbolism and Serbia's post-conflict and nationalist legacy.

The 2015 Dyke March consisted of dozens of women walking the streets of Belgrade in protest and celebration. The marchers were protesting the lack of resources and attention paid to women in Serbia. The celebration was of queer women's lives and existence in Serbia. The simultaneous act of protest/celebration was designed to bring awareness to the larger Serbian public that 1. Lesbians existed in Serbia, and 2. Their needs are not being met by society. Many of the organizers said they wanted to occupy the streets with women to show that they had strength in numbers. That women were out in support of a feminist cause, like the March 8th International Women's Day marches during Yugoslavia.

The organizers held a number of planning sessions and trainings for parade marshals and participants. Other LGBT organizations offered their services, and were taken up on them, but were asked not to be in media attention. At each of these meetings a small group of gay men attended in support of the event, however they were asked to keep their comments to a minimum. As one organizer reported, "the men could not be quiet. Even when we asked them to, they wouldn't listen and said that we were doing it wrong. It was all sexism³¹." Other organizers reported similar interactions with men

³¹ Interview with Nina S. October 19, 2015.

representing LGBT groups at the planning sessions. What was obvious to the organizers of the Dyke March was that they were going to have to be explicit about the roles they wanted men to play during the event.

At the final planning session one of the organizers said that they decided to ask the men to not march, and if they wanted to attend the March they could, but they'd need to stand on the sidelines and support the women marchers. According to attendees of the meeting, many of the men and a few of the women spoke up in opposition. Some of the participants got into yelling matches. According to one of the participants at the parade, one man shouted, "if we can't march, what do you want us to do? Yell from the sidelines? What will that do? That's ridiculous³²." The organizers responded that that was what a good ally should do- provide support and not take the spotlight.

The exclusion of men from walking alongside women in the Dyke March had a rippling effect in the community. Many of the Dyke March organizers were ostracized by members of the LGBT community. According to march organizers³³, some of the Dyke March women decided to remove themselves altogether from LGBT organizing because they felt betrayed by their feminist sisters. As one Dyke March organizer put it, "they see me as an extremist. No one wants to work with a lesbian feminist that wants a lesbian-

³² Interview with Kira. December 2, 2015.

³³ Interview with Zlata and Tina on October 15, 2015.

only space. They think I hate men. I don't hate men! I just love women and want women spaces!" This particular statement points to the risks lesbians face in Serbia if they seek women-only spaces in LGBT politics. To inhabit a space where men are asked to be quiet and/or not participate at all is interpreted as an act of aggression against men. When really, the intent of the women-only space is to politically empower women who historically get looked over and/or ignored by the larger umbrella of LGBT organizing in Serbia. Additionally, it provides for a space that is explicitly critical of sexism and patriarchy. This is not to say that larger gender-integrated LGBT spaces in Serbia are sexist. Rather, that Serbia, like most parts of the world, is a patriarchal society. Thus, even the best-intentioned men in the movement will assume some unmarked privileges solely based on their gender. In a place like Serbia, where men run the government, and gender equity has not yet been achieved, to have women do the work and march on behalf of themselves is a thumb in the eye of a larger patriarchal society. It says, "we see how things get done here, and we reject that! We don't need men to advocate for ourselves. We can do it on our own."

In addition to the Dyke March acting as a form of resistance by not allowing men to participate, having women-only marching also evokes a historical imagery of the 1990s wars when women were some of the most visible protesters of the Milošević government and the war. This is where the "temporal" aspect of spatiotemporality is particularly salient. Having women march in the same square and streets that women marched in

protest during the 1990s wars was strategic on the part of the Dyke March organizers. They wanted to occupy a space that has been one of resistance and protest for generations of women in Serbia. During the war women came out in droves to the square and main promenade, dressed in black, and mourning the deaths of innocent people in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The organizers of the Dyke March drew on their memories of the anti-war protests and wanted to have similar optics of women protesting in the square and calling for change. However, the exclusion of men from participating in the organizing had detrimental effects to attendance to the Dyke March. In the end, only about 45 women marched in the first (and possibly last) Serbian Dyke March on April 15, 2015. According to the organizers the Dyke March was a failure, and they will not attempt such a public women-only event in the future. As one activist said, “Serbia isn’t ready for lesbians yet. They are barely ready for feminists³⁴.” Another activist blamed internal politics of the LGBT community for the poor attendance. The potentiality of a lesbian queer imagined community has not been abandoned by many lesbian activists. After the Dyke March some organizers decided to build on the success of the internal outreach of Lavender Spring- mainly the educational workshops and community building events. Hence, the largest-ever Lesbian Week in the Balkans.

³⁴ Interview with Zlata and Tina on October 15, 2015.

In November and December 2015, I was privy to the planning sessions and organizing of the 2015 Labris Lesbian Week. The event marked the 10-year anniversary of Labris, and lesbian and queer women activists from throughout the Balkans gathered in Belgrade for a three-day celebration and conference on lesbian and non-heterosexual women's issues. The theme was "Ljubaslavija," which is a play on words- "ljubav" meaning love, and "Jugoslavija," which is how Yugoslavia is spelled in BCS. The theme of the conference was to gather lesbians from the former-Yugoslavia (Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, and Kosovo- no Albanians, though), and to celebrate and strengthen lesbian politics in the region. The event was sponsored by Labris and was sponsored by a both local women's organizations and international funders.

The event was women-only during the daily conference and workshops, however, each night had a social event where men were allowed to join if they wanted to. The overall tenor of the event was warm and celebratory. It was held at a local activist space, and about 100 women from throughout the region attended. Like the Lavender Month events, the workshop topics covered a large span of issues affecting women. However, unlike the Lavender Month events, the speakers and panels consisted of prominent feminist and lesbian activists in the region. The formality of Lesbian Week seemed to be directly connected to the amount of funding associated with the event. Lesbian Week had a significant budget and was the largest event organized by Labris for 2015. It was a stark contrast to the accounts of Lavender Spring events. The exclusion of men at Labris

events also had little backlash compared to the other lesbian-only events earlier in the year. This is in part due to the political clout and sway that Labris has in the LGBT movement in Serbia.

As the longest-standing LGBT organization in Serbia, Labris is thought of by many leaders in the movement as a stalwart for LGBT rights, even if they primarily serve lesbians. Additionally, Labris has resources that other LGBT organizations in Serbia do not have, and many organizations rely on cooperation and collaboration with Labris.

Does this mean that spatiotemporality also depends on what groups have the resources to sustain women-only spaces? Perhaps. If only well-funded and highly-influential organizations are allowed to dictate who can enter what spaces, what repercussions does this have on grassroots groups who also seek women-only imagined communities? How might scarcity of resources and lack of political support and/or will for more radical grassroots women-only lesbian work create further fissures in the LGBT movement? In other words, can Labris mandate gender restrictions because they have funding and a history of doing work in the region, unlike the organizers of the Dyke March? Or is it that Labris's Lesbian Week was a private conference, and not a public march that they received less backlash?

I argue that the lack of backlash to Labris's women-only policies is an and/both situation. Yes, Labris is more accepted and respected because it has resources and a history of doing work in the region. Labris also did not hold a public march during

Lesbian Week, so any potential public backlash did not occur. Understanding the differences between the reactions from the larger LGBT community to the Lavender Spring and Dyke March in comparison to Labris's Lesbian Weeks suggests that even in women-only spaces designed to promote feminism and lesbian-empowerment, power and hierarchy remain despite efforts to create a lesbian utopic community.

Queer Communities and the Limitation of the State

Throughout this chapter, I have touched on the generational divides within Serbia's lesbian community. What is striking is that the younger generations of lesbians who are in their late teens to early 30s, and who spent their formative years in post-war Serbia, are the voice of lesbian separatism in Serbia currently, and seek to establish a utopic lesbian-only community. They are wary of working with the state, they reject using Western terminology to describe their sexuality, and they avoid working with men to organize if possible. The separatist feminists are vocally critical of organizations that cooperate with the state. It is not that the separatists do not understand the compromised situation organizations such as Labris are in in regards to attempting to make meaningful change in Serbia, which means working with those in power. Rather, they have no confidence in the state, and would rather see an overhaul of the government than

cooperation with “Milošević’s guy,” (as an informant called him), meaning Vučić, Serbia’s current Prime Minister.³⁵

The rejection of cooperation with the state is also an extension of rejecting what the state has symbolized to the majority of progressives in Serbia. For “radical feminists,” lesbian separatists, and the larger LGBT community, the current state in Serbia is a neoliberal, capitalist, and nationalist entity that uses corrupt and oppressive means to maintain authority. For many of the women I interviewed, Vučić’s government is reminiscent of his former boss, Milošević. The main difference between the two is that Vučić has the West’s support, whereas Milošević was an enemy of the West due to Serbia’s position as the aggressor during the Bosnian and Kosovo wars.

Vučić has gained favor from the West (Western Europe and the U.S.) by adopting particular human rights policies and gay rights protections that are primarily in name only³⁶. He also recently appointed the first ever out lesbian to serve as the Public Administration Minister, Ana Brnabić. Passing anti-discrimination laws and appointing openly gay and lesbian officials is an attempt on Vučić’s part to pinkwash over less savory policies that the West would reject, including refusing to acknowledge Kosovo’s sovereignty, nepotism and corruption within the government, hyper nationalist rhetoric, and a warm relationship with Vladimir Putin and Russia. Many activists see Vučić’s lip

³⁵ Interview with Zlata. October 15, 2015.

service to the LGBT community as just that and have no confidence in his support of LGBT rights. Hence, the fissures in the LGBT movement around whether or not to work with a government that does not support LGBT rights and protections.

I define imagined queer communities as the constructed space, culture, politics, and shared history a group, in this case lesbian separatists in Serbia, creates as a form of both solidarity and political resistance. There is the imagined community- a group of lesbian separatist women working in women-only spaces to promote feminist causes. The imagined community also relies on and is dictated by sexuality and identity. In this case the lesbian-identified woman and/or women who love women. There is no space in this particular imagined queer community for men to serve leadership positions, nor is there much desire for men to be involved with the community altogether. I draw from Edward Said's concept of imagined geographies, or the constructed space, assumptions, histories, and knowledges assigned to and associated with a particular geography (Said 1978).

The main features of this new imagined queer community is that it is a DIY culture and grassroots movement that does not rely on large funders. It is secretive and exclusive to non-heterosexual women. Many activists including the lesbian separatists are using other forms of outreach and education to engage the larger public and promote LGBT rights, such as theater, arts festivals, and forming lesbian caravans that travel throughout the region doing teach-ins in remote villages and towns. These alternative

forms of activism are part of an imagined queer community that seeks liberation from the state, masculinity, and oppressive forms of hierarchy.

The majority of the women building an imagined queer community in Belgrade congregate at least once a week at Labris for fellowship and community building. The Wednesday night meeting serves as a safe haven for many who are not necessarily out in their communities. These weekly meetings rarely discuss politics and/or organizing, but instead foster queer kinship. The weekly meetings are hosted at Labris- an organization that many of the lesbians attending the event do not necessarily support nor agree with, regarding their work with the state. However, the Labris office is on an unassuming street in a residential neighborhood and is one of the few safe spaces lesbian women can gather in without fear of being attacked or harassed.

For many activists, building an imagined queer community must span beyond the urban center of Belgrade, and into more remote areas of Serbia. Activists rely on online forums and private groups to network and discuss activism and programs when they cannot get to one another due to geographic location. Thus, the imagined queer community spans beyond a particular geographic space. In addition to interacting online, each year lesbian activists organize a week-long camping trip in a remote part of Serbia where women gather to discuss and teach feminist theory and talk about lesbianism. The goal for the week long camp or school is to do outreach to remote parts of Serbia where lesbians do not have a strong support system. This helps manifest and broaden the

imagined queer community to stretch across Serbia. In addition to the summer school, there are year-round activities and practices that further foster lesbian community and strengthen queer kinships.

Located in Belgrade, a masked group of lesbian separatist activists go out a couple of times a month and make feminist, vegan/vegetarianism, and anti-fascism graffiti throughout Serbia. This group of women recruit and teach other women how to do graffiti in their hometowns. Another group of women have a weekly lesbian-only football/soccer match. Those who do not play soccer are invited to attend and cheer on the players. There is also weekly queer tango, where women dance tango with one another. There are also a variety of feminist and socialist reading groups. All of these activities are conducted secretly in order to protect women participants. Violence against lesbians is on the rise in Serbia, and it is not safe to be “out” and publicly congregate in many parts of the state. This is yet another reason many lesbian activists seek an imagined queer community, for security and comfort.

In addition to building community within Serbia, many lesbian activists are building grassroots networks throughout Europe and the Middle East. In Summer 2015, a group of lesbians from Canada, France, Armenia, Italy, Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Serbia traveled from Turkey to the Italian coast to fundraise and build awareness around violence against women. The group, called the Lesbian Caravan, conducted teach-ins, town halls, and made a documentary about their experiences. They discussed violence

against women in war, intimate partner violence, and lesbophobic violence. The caravan was small- just a few cars and about 20 women- but it was powerful in a couple of ways. First, it did not rely on significant money from large NGOs, the EU, or other international funders. Instead, they used crowd funding on the internet to pay for gas and food. Next, it was created through online networks of lesbian activists. With an exception of those who were from each other's regions, most of the participants had not met one another before they set off. This two-month long action was instrumental to the Serbian participants, because it inspired them to do more activism independent of formal NGOs and more professionalized non-profits. Many of Serbian participants have expressed a desire to duplicate the lesbian caravan but keep it regionally specific and focus on the experiences of women in the Balkans.

All of these forms of resistance are critical to building and maintaining an imagined queer lesbian community in Serbia. But one aspect of this community that has not been fully fleshed out by activists is *who counts* as a member of the women-only lesbian community. This question is currently being debated within the LGBT movement and has also created fissures in addition to excluding men.

The question of *who* gets to be invited in and participate in women-only imagined queer community in Serbia boils down to whether or not to include two groups of people- transgender women who identify as lesbians, and queer and/or bisexual women who have relationships with both men and women. For the most part, activists in the lesbian

separatist movement are open to including queer and bisexual women, as long as they keep their male-identified partners out of women-only spaces. There is some criticism by a few activists about hetero-privilege, but for the most part women who love women (regardless of how they identify) seem to be accepted in the community.

In contrast, allowing transgender lesbians and transgender men in the group has created more debate and discussion within the movement. The argument made by some, albeit not all, activists is that transgender men have male privilege, and ergo, they are part of the patriarchy. Others have pushed back saying that in Serbia, heteronormativity and cissexism are the product of patriarchy, so to exclude transmen and genderqueer individuals that want to be in women-only spaces is to turn one's back on those most affected by violence and patriarchy. Most out transgender men do not associate with lesbian separatists in Serbia. As one informant said, "if they don't want me, I don't want them." It is important to note that trans-exclusion is not a universal belief among lesbian separatists in Serbia. One leader at Labris said, "I don't understand why we can't support trans people and women? We are all fighting the same oppression. Why can't we fight it together³⁷?"

The question of trans inclusion is further complicated by ambivalence from leaders of one of the largest transgender rights groups, Egal, in regards to issues

³⁷ Interview with Jelena D. November 13, 2015.

pertaining to violence against women and the need to provide direct aid to refugee women stranded in Belgrade. Additionally, the highest profile transgender woman, Helena Vuković, is a retired military officer in the Serbian army. She transitioned after her retirement. Vuković is seen by the wider Serbian public as a hero and also an aberration of Serbian masculinity. She has faced death threats, has been physically assaulted, and has had to go underground due to transphobic threats of violence. However, she strategically uses her two-decade long military service to call into question hyper masculinity, forcing the media and public to interrogate what makes a Serbian soldier.

Her history of serving in what many activists consider an oppressive force- the Serb army- has both catapulted her to European celebrity³⁸, but also alienates her from LGBT activists who were and are fervently anti-war. Vuković identifies as a lesbian, and in my time in Belgrade we had a number of interviews. We also attended several lesbian events together. Her identity as a transgender lesbian is widely accepted and embraced by

³⁸ Helena Vuković has spoken to a number of LGBT organizations, conferences, and served on advisory boards and panels in Western Europe, including The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and Hungary, as reported to me in our interview on November 17, 2015. She has also gained national and international press attention and is regularly interviewed and featured in Serbian and international media. See Jovičević, Mihajlo. Major Helena Vuković za 'Blic': Zaplakala Sam od Sreće Što Sam i u Krštenici Žena, *Blic.rs*, Updated August 24, 2016. Accessed September 24, 2016. <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/major-helena-vukovic-za-blic-zaplakala-sam-od-srece-sto-sam-i-u-krstenici-zena/s7xbncw>

the lesbian community. Where people have reservations, however, is how she is being lauded by some for serving in the military. In a country with deep wounds from war and hyper nationalism, many activists cringe when asked about their most prominent transgender rights activist serving in the military during the Balkan Wars. It is here that the anti-war legacy of the LGBT movement once more emerges. Can the lesbian movement in Serbia, who have deep roots in anti-war organizing, accept a woman who is proud of her time serving in the ultra-nationalist Serbian military? The question of Vuković and her place in the movement is one of several complicated and nuanced challenges for the lesbian community in Serbia.

There are several challenges that Serbian lesbians are facing. First, how will activists sustain an imagined queer community, and not experience burnout. During my time in Belgrade several activists took “time out” from activism to rest and recuperate because they were working two full time jobs- their paid job, and their unpaid activism job. One activist said after a month-long hiatus from activism, “it feels so good to be back in Belgrade, but I’m already exhausted and I haven’t even gone to a meeting³⁹.” In addition to facing burnout physically and emotionally, many activists are also living with the constant physical, emotional, and economic threat associated with being a lesbian in Serbia. Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the October 2015 assault on a group of

³⁹ Interview with Tina. October 15, 2015.

lesbians. It is still unsafe for lesbians to go out in public for fear of being identified and harassed or worse. Most women know how to go unnoticed when out in public, however, those who are gender non-conforming and have a more masculine appearance and/or affect regularly experience harassment.

Many lesbians in Serbia also experience homelessness due to being kicked out of their homes. In Serbian culture, most people live with their parents until they get married. Since gay marriage is still illegal in Serbia, many lesbians live with their parents until they can afford to move out. However, due to a failing economy most women cannot find full-time work. Thus, some women rely on their parents for housing, which can be particularly precarious if their parents do not know about their sexuality and/or are homophobic. A major part of the imagined queer community in Serbia is providing shelter for one another if and when women are kicked out of their homes. There is no formal aid agency or network, so lesbian networks cover each other. These informal networks or imagined queer communities are currently sustaining each other, but determining how the movement continues to grow is a salient question. How do activists keep doing the work, despite their precarity, especially in an economically depressed country? Unless activists are working for an NGO and/or non-profit, such as Labris, most of the work they are doing for the movement is on top of their paid job, if they are lucky enough to have found employment. Organizations are also feeling the economic pinch.

Since the 2011 economic crash in Europe, many LGBT organizations are operating on a shoe-string budget. Thus, professional activists are being asked to work full time on a part time salary. On top of a scarcity of funding for organizations, funders are prioritizing transgender-inclusive policies and outreach. Thus, historic funders of Labris have withdrawn funding and reallocated money to organizations that explicitly serve transgender populations. This has created new forms of tensions within the LGBT community, which will be explored in Chapter Four.

Even though lesbian separatism has created rifts within the LGBT movement in Serbia, it has also created space for marginalized women. In Serbia, women-only spaces and women-leadership has empowered new generations of young women to work outside of the system and engage in creative and, at times, subversive forms of resistance to heteropatriarchy. The imagined queer community in Serbia has linked urban and rural lesbians via online networks, in-person teach-ins, as well as provided housing and care for those who were ostracized by their family and community. The imagined queer community is not without flaws or complications. The question of transgender individuals and their role in the movement is still being hotly debated. Additionally, the tensions between non-women only LGBT organizations and activist groups and lesbian separatists is creating a lack of cohesion and agreement in broader LGBT politics. That being said, the lesbian separatist community's resistance to state cooperation, toxic

masculinity, and anti-war and militarism provides a radical politics that professionalized organizations, such as Labris may not be able to publicly support.

Chapter 4: Parada Ponosa/Gay Pride in Serbia

In mid-September 2016, on a bright warm day, I walked from my sunny apartment in Sava Mala in the center of Belgrade, up the street to a military barricade. I was confused. I was supposed to join friends and colleagues about a mile away at the gay pride parade. The Serbian police officer said (in Serbian) that I was not allowed to cross the barricaded line. I asked why and he politely, but sternly, replied that there was an event up the street, and unless I had an armband I could not go to the event. My face flushed and I quickly assured him that I was supposed to be at that event, but that I had not yet gotten my arm band. Me, a small white woman who spoke broken Serbian, was clearly not a threat and he smiled and let me pass. This was my first encounter with the Belgrade Pride parade.

Rather shaken, I hurried up the street to a check point where I had to register with one of the parade organizer, I got my gold arm band and continued on my way through the abandoned streets of Belgrade. All of the main streets had been barricaded off and police dressed in riot gear, armed with guns and water hoses, lined the main promenade. I shuddered at the hyper-militarism and wondered how my friends, many of whom faced down the same police fifteen years earlier when protesting the war in Kosovo, would react to the armed men. I turned the corner to see a sea of rainbow and glitter. The paradox of extreme military force juxtaposed with vibrant colors, balloons, flags, music,

and smiles felt utterly surreal. We marched, unscathed and without harassment, but with the peering eyes of armed police officers and military men staring us down.

The 2016 Belgrade Pride Parade serves as an example of the tensions and negotiations LGBT activists must navigate in contemporary Serbian politics. Over the past six years there has been a shift in the broader Serbian political culture from a heteronormativity and homophobia rooted in hyper nationalism to a pinkwashing and normalization of LGBT rights. In order to comply with EU mandates for accession, Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić and his government have begun to promote and protect LGBT rights. However, Vučić's government is using LGBT rights to distract from a corrupt nepotistic government, to privatize Serbia's state industries, and to promote and enforce oppressive economic and human rights policies.

The government's supposed pro-LGBT efforts, pressures from Western LGBT organizations, and internal fighting rooted in misogyny and transphobia have created ruptures in Serbia's LGBT community. This chapter charts the rise and fall of public homophobia and the shift towards pinkwashing caused by Western interventionism. It compares the 2010 Gay Pride Parade to the 2016 Gay Pride Parade to identify the new tensions in the LGBT community. It also uses the two parades as case studies to examine how both European Union as well as U.S. interventions have created opportunities and problems for LGBT people in Serbia. I argue that the European Union's top-down approach to implement LGBT rights has created a rift within the LGBT movement itself,

particularly surrounding the pride parade. I also interrogate the history of U.S. and EU human rights interventionism in Serbia, and the EU and U.S. current cooperation with the Serbian government. The relationship between the international community and the Serbian state, I argue, has created both a symbiotic and ambivalent relationship between LGBT activists and international actors. On the one hand, activists are enthusiastically in favor of promoting LGBT rights. On the other hand, however, activists are suspect of any form of cooperation with a corrupt and nepotistic Serbian government (Bilić 2012 and Mikuš 2011).

Violence in the Streets: 2010 Belgrade Gay Pride

In 2010, Serb and international LGBT activists and allies marched Belgrade's city center to hold the first gay pride event since the bloody 2001 event that left scores of LGBT activists shaken and several injured (Blagojević 2010). 2010 was supposed to be a test- could Serbia hold a successful pride parade? Would the government protect activists? Could Serbia follow through with their commitment to the European Union that they would protect human rights? The parade happened without any LGBT activists getting injured. Technically it was a success, but the events following the march resulted in a four-year ban of the parade.

Following the gay pride parade, thousands of antigay counter-protestors flooded the streets of Belgrade, damaging property, chanting "death to fags" and other violent homophobic rhetoric, and attacking the Serbian police who were assigned to protect the

parade participants⁴⁰. Over 100 people were injured in the attacks, and over 100 people were arrested. Protestors attacked the pro-Western Democratic party headquarters, setting the building's garage on fire⁴¹. The counterprotest came on the heels of the Serbian Orthodox church releasing a statement condemning the parade. Right-wing Serbian groups echoed the condemnation of the parade, saying, "homosexuality is contrary to Serbian religious and family values" (BBC 2010). The homophobic statement plays to Serbian ultra-nationalist rhetoric, "othering" those with non-heteronormative sexuality and/or gender roles. Here we see how Serbian nationalism clashes (in this case violently) with attempts to transform into a more equal society.

The homophobic rhetoric and threats of antigay violence serve as a snapshot of the many challenges that have faced LGBT communities in Serbia, and reflect the broader gender norms crisis underway in the post-conflict transition region. By gender norms crisis I am referring to the tensions concerning gender, sexuality and the family. Currently, Serbia's political economy is going through a major shift from being a socialist nation whose economy was ravaged by war to becoming a neoliberal capitalist member state of the European Union. During this transition, there has been massive privatization of previously public industries and companies, the unemployment rate has

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Serbia Police Clash with Far-right Rioters at Gay Pride March." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, updated October 10, 2010. Accessed July 2, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/10/serbia-police-rioters-gay-pride>

risen, and the overall birth and fertility rates have dropped (Šuković 2009; Rešavić 2004). Serbia's application to join the European Union in hopes to become part of a larger global market with the hope of improving the Serbian economy. Yet, the everyday citizen still faces a poor labor market, and has yet to see the full benefits of being citizen of a EU member state (Šuković 2009).

This state of transition has heightened forms of xenophobia and homophobia by associating the EU's entry requirements such as Serbia's adoption of equal rights laws for the LGBT community (Blagojević 2010). Because of these tensions and, as witnessed in many countries undergoing processes of transitional justice, joining the EU after decades of nationalist and ethnic-based war and conflict – a transition seen as a loss of national identity and sovereignty by Serbia's right wing - has triggered a resurgence in a hetero-centric, pro-family agenda. Additionally, the nationalist rhetoric calls for the need to reestablish traditional hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine roles and a heterosexual nuclear family structure. This, coupled with the massive transitions to the Serbian economy, politics, and society associated with European integration, is creating a volatile backlash from the religious and nationalist right wing, including against the LGBT community.

Not only are those who identify as LGBT under regular attack by nationalist and right wing leaders, they are also constantly negotiating a somewhat precarious relationship with the Serbian government. The government wavers in its support for

LGBT rights by passing laws and policies to line up with neoliberal-inspired European Union mandates and policy recommendations. The same politicians allegedly supporting these laws are also engaging in public homophobic rhetoric in the media, refusing to meet with LGBT organizations, and/or refusing to implement laws that protect LGBT people. The only time the government is seemingly in support of LGBT rights are when the EU delegation intervenes, as with the case of the 2016 pride parade. Historically, the lack of government support has further created a chasm between the laws on the books, which protect LGBT rights, and public support of LGBT rights, resulting in a continued anti-gay public sentiment (Blagojević 2010).

For many nationalists, the increasing visibility of the LGBT communities represents a threat to the proliferation of a nation, in part because of the perceived inability to procreate. The enthusiasm and promotion of Serb bloodlines through procreation has been a common value held by many Serb nationalists for centuries as a means to combat outside threats coming into Serbs' territories and communities (Judah 2000). With this in mind, Serb fertility and birth rates dropped significantly during the 1990s due primarily to the wars, and their economic ramifications (Rešavić 2004). This has further emphasized the need for procreation in the rhetoric of nationalist leaders. In addition to the need to repopulate the Serb nation, religious and political leaders regularly reference homosexuality as an outside threat designed to disturb the Serb legacy. To encourage reproduction, Serbia has implemented pro-natalist policies, such as tax

deductions for people who have children, access to pre-natal and post-natal care, and paid family leave (Đoric and Gavrilović 2006). In addition to state heterocentric mechanisms designed to promote reproduction, some right wing Serbian elected officials openly link homophobia to nationalism.

The founder of the Serbian Radical Party, Voljislav Šešelj, has publicly condemned homosexuality as being an import from the West, bringing with it HIV/AIDS and drug addiction (Bakić 2009: 200). The Serb Orthodox church also regularly condemns homosexuality publicly. In an interview following the cancellation of the 2011 Gay Pride Parade, the head of the Serb Orthodox Church, Patriarch⁴² Irinej called the Gay Pride Parade a “Parade of shame,” and went and “foreign to our history, tradition, and culture.”⁴³ The public condemnation of homosexuality by political and religious leaders has contributed to a rise in political homophobia, with the tragic response resulting in anti-gay violence, violent counter-protests, and an increase in cultural homophobia.

One Serbian LGBT activist captured this tension when talking about the 2010 Belgrade Gay Pride Parade and the violent anti-gay protests that erupted: “the [2010]

⁴² A Patriarch in Serb Orthodoxy is a head of a congregation, like a Priest in Catholicism or Rabbi in Judaism.

⁴³ “Serbian Patriarch Calls for Ban of Gay Parade, Exhibit.” *B92*, updated October 3, 2012. Accessed June 1, 2017.
http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2012&mm=10&dd=03&nav_id=82467

pride parade was a really significant event because for the first time there was a successful public showing of differences in a collective manner. It was a success because it happened, it occurred. It wasn't a success at the same time because there were a lot of attacks...so it was like a war zone... but it happened."⁴⁴ The war zone he is describing included the flooding and rioting of 6,000 Serb nationalists into the main square in Belgrade, Trg Republike, which resulted in numerous attacks on riot police resulting in 140 people injured, the firing of shots and hurling of Molotov cocktails at parade participants and the police protecting them. Additionally, thousands of dollars' worth of property damage, and the setting on fire of the Pro-Western Democratic Party headquarters⁴⁵.

The Serbian state is simultaneously contending with nationalism (which tends to be protectionist and inward-looking), on one hand, and economic/political integration into the EU (which tends to orient the state and nation outwards, to the regional/global market and global political community) on the other. In this context, like elsewhere, struggles concerning gender norms and "the family" are heightened, as we witness an increasingly heteronormative nation, one that seeks to define itself as "different from" the "imposing" EU.

⁴⁴ N. P. interview. April 11, 2016.

⁴⁵ "Police Clash with Anti-Gay Protesters in Belgrade." *B92*. Updated October 10, 2010. Accessed April 27, 2012. <http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2010>

Neoliberalism and Homophobia

Serbia's application to join the European Union has impacted the national narrative of the family, particularly in the context of newly articulated forms of nationalism and Serbia's neoliberal economic arrangements, while at the same time undergoing a Europeanization of norms. The EU austerity demands of privatization and liberalization of the Serbian welfare system have put Serbs in a precarious economic situation. Many Serbs see the EU as the cause of their economic turmoil. They also perceive the EU as the driving force behind promoting LGBT rights. Thus, the economic effects of neoliberal policies are being collapsed with liberal LGBT rights policies.

I argue that Serbia's transition and attempt to join the EU creates a dual effect of both precarity and increased rights and political power for LGBT individuals in Serbia. These contradictory effects, which often occur in rights-based rhetoric and initiatives, are at once local and transnational. Indeed, international institutions and networks have played a major role both in supporting local LGBT activists and, in the case of neoliberal-inspired EU integration, in heightening tensions within Serbia concerning "Serbian" vs. "EU" or "foreign" values, essentially a struggle concerning neoliberal state modernization in Serbia.

While historically there have been various forms of violent extremism and nationalism in the region, a fact analyzed by many scholars (e.g., Judah 2000; Silber and Little 1996; Malcolm 1996), what we are witnessing now is a deployment of rhetoric and

violence that is both reminiscent of the war, but also different. Over the past ten years, political rhetoric of violence centered around the struggle over bodies and desires, and how they interact with what it means to be Serbian. One can see the tensions that develop from being a post-conflict society in transition particularly when considering the new forms of gender and sexual violence that have shifted towards targeting those who identify as LGBT. Couple this with fact that Serbia's economy is undergoing a drastic shift from state-run socialism towards a neoliberal capitalist model. Thus, Serbia is in the unique position of enduring new forms of violence precisely because society has not been reformed and the economy has not been a miracle and has not improved conditions for people.

Nationalism and the Rise of Homophobia in Serbia

Nationalism, and more specifically, Serbian ultra-nationalism has been in the backdrop of Serbian politics for years, and it is this ultra-nationalism that pits itself against the European Union and LGBT groups. Just a decade following the most recent bloody ethnic conflict in Kosovo, including the breakup of and wars in the former Yugoslavia (and the arrest and trial of the former Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević for war crimes), Serbia is slowly rebuilding. During this time of transition, many women's organizations and LGBT organizations have reported a continuance of ultra-nationalism and xenophobic radicalism as evidenced through public hate speech, vandalism, anti-gay sermons, and anti-gay violence (Bakić 2009). That being said, those who identify as

LGBT are not the only targets of the ultranationalists. There have been numerous reports of xenophobic actions against the Roma community, Muslims, Jews, and Croats in Serbia. These groups, like those who identify as LGBT, are perceived threats to the reproduction and Serbian bloodline. Additionally, their so-called failure to “perform” heteronormativity and the subsequent gender roles within an opposite-gender relationship is also a perceived failure of performing Serbian citizenry. The ideal Serb citizen is a heteronormative citizen.

A 2008 study conducted by political scientist Bojan Todosijević on political attitudes in Serbia found that regardless of their political position (left or right), the Serbs in his sample exhibited nationalist sentiments as well as a feeling of alienation, distrust of other groups such as “homosexuals,” and anti-liberalism (Todosijević 2008). Tina Gianoulis writes, “Anti-gay laws existed in Serbia until the 1990s. During that decade, the repeal of homophobic laws went hand in hand with a rise in gay and lesbian organizing” (Gianoulis 2007). Despite the anti-discrimination laws, Serbia does not have an equal marriage law, and many activists in the LGBT communities face increasing harassment and attacks by anti-gay perpetrators (Gej Lezbejski Info Centar 2011). Because of this, in 2009 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on Serbia to investigate and publicly condemn homophobic acts and violence against Serbian LGBT activists.

Serbia's gender norms crisis stems from the country's longer history of hyper-heteronormative nationalism. In his book, *Ideology of Serbian Nationalism*, the founder of the Serbian Radical Party, Voljislav Šešelj, writes, "'instead of investments, jobs and bread' what arrives from the West is 'drug addiction and homosexuality to destroy our national morals and family'" (Bakić 2009: 200). Bakić is quick to point out, however, that it is not only the far right in Serbia that maintains anti-gay sentiments. Quoting a Serbian gay rights activist, Boris Milićević, he writes, "'none of the parties openly support sexual and gender minorities in Serbia', and 'a large proportion of the gay population is conservative and support the Serbian Radical Party and Democratic Party of Serbia'" (Bakić 2009: 200). These observations paint an interesting picture of both the right and the left in Serbia holding on to heteronormative values during this time of government transition.

EU Integration

Despite these tenuous trends, the Serbian government is making attempts to gain international recognition and transition towards a peaceful formal democracy with hopes of joining the EU. One well-publicized example of Serbia attempting to demonstrate compliance to EU requests was their recent cooperation with the search, arrest, and handover to the International Court of Justice in The Hague of Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and Goran Hadžić following years of pressure from the international

community⁴⁶. The EU accepted Serbia's application to join on March 2, 2012⁴⁷. Serbia now has to wait a year to begin negotiations for accession, which are expected to primarily focus on Serbia's recognition of Kosovo as an independent state.⁴⁸ Joining the EU represents to the global community as well as Serbia itself, that Serbia has "progressed" and/or achieved a level of wealth, democracy, modernization, cosmopolitanism, and civilization.

EU integration also means unfettered access to migration and economic opportunities in Western Europe. Currently Serbs face restricted movement in the EU member states, and are not allowed to work. Between the region's former communist regime(s) and its bad human rights reputation, becoming an EU member state is particularly significant. Attaining a new affluent, stabilized, modern, democratized, and capitalist image full of investment potentiality is crucial for a global market where image and perception are key. (Elman, 2007: 1). Proponents of joining the European Union argue that becoming a member would create significant improvement to Serbia's post-socialist economy. In addition to the economic gains, supporters also argue that entry to EU would further legitimize Serbian democracy and help reposition the state from a post-

⁴⁶ The Bosnian Serb war criminals charged with engineering and leading the execution of unarmed Muslim Bosniak men and boys in Srebrenica, Bosnia during the war.

⁴⁷ "EU Enlargement: The Next Seven" *BBC*. Updated October 2, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11283616>

⁴⁸ Ibid. As an example for a timeline, Croatia's application to join the EU was accepted in 2005, and they are slated to join in 2013.

conflict society to a fully functioning democracy. However, in order to fully understand the complexities and historical baggage associated with Serbia's application to join the European Union, a brief history of the most recent wars in a global context is necessary.

In April 2008, Serbia and the European Commission signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), beginning the process of Serbian integration into the European Union⁴⁹. The treaty assures Serbian integration as long as key benchmarks are achieved in the areas of economic and political⁵⁰ liberalization, a development and implementation of human rights laws, and representation and equal rights for minority populations. In addition to emphasizing political and social recognition of human rights, the treaty explicitly calls for Serbia to adopt, "the principles of free market economy and sustainable development as well as the readiness of the Community to contribute to the economic reforms in Serbia" (SAA 6)⁵¹.

Nationalism and the Family: Yugoslavia to Serbia

⁴⁹ "European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policy and Negotiations." *European Commission. EC.Europa.eu*, Updated June 9, 2016. Accessed January 6, 2017.

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/conditions-membership_en

⁵⁰ The SAA refers to political freedom as "democratic principles through a multi-party system with free and fair elections."

⁵¹ "Stabilisation and Association Agreement Between the European Communities and Their Member States of the One Part, and The Republic of Serbia, of the Other Part." *EC.Europa.eu*. Accessed June 1, 2017.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/serbia/key_document/saa_en.pdf.

Constructions of the family and nationalism have undergirded Serbia's (and the former Yugoslavia's) transitions for quite some time. Frantz Fanon describes the nation as a symbolic family. He writes, "Militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father... the family is a miniature of the nation" (Fanon 1967). Desiree Lewis describes gender as being essentially connected to nationalism, beyond only masculine forms of control and policymaking. She writes, "Gender is linked to nationalism in ... intimate and insidious ways. We see this in the way that sexual violence can become both a weapon of war and a potent symbolic act in patriarchal ethnic cleansing and the gendered creation of nations or national pride" (Lewis 2008: 105). Serbian feminist theorist Vesna Kesić echoes Lewis's statements in her writing on nationalism and gender and sexual violence against Yugoslav women (Kesić 2000: 26). Yuval-Davis and Werbner discuss the ways citizenship discourses and democratization efforts designed to promote liberal ideals of freedom, individualism, and difference, can be subverted by traditionalists and nationalists to promote and/or reiterate nationalist and heteronormative pro-family rhetoric and politics (2005: 1). We see this also in the pro-family, pro-natal rhetoric used by politicians following the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Lepa Mladjenović and Donna M. Hughes write about the ties between nationalism and motherhood in Serbia, stating, "Mythic figures are evoked to coerce women into supporting nationalist goals, while the lawmakers are changing the constitution and laws so that women will have no choice but

to comply” (Mladjenović and Hughes 2000: 19). Controlling women’s reproduction to serve nationalist interests is another example of furthering heteronormative family values, alienating those who fall outside of the symbolic national nuclear family. Serbia’s gruesome history of gender and sexual violence during the Yugoslav Wars⁵², along with an investment in maintaining the idea of a national family, creates a breeding ground for anti-gay violence and institutionalized homophobia. Yuval-Davis and Werner, in their influential work, consider the ways citizenship discourses and democratization efforts designed to promote liberal ideals of freedom, individualism, and difference can be subverted by traditionalists and nationalists to promote and/or reiterate nationalist and heteronormative pro-family rhetoric and politics (2005: 1).

When considering Serbia’s recent move to transition into a member state of the EU, looking at other states’ experiences is useful. In “Minority Rights After EU Enlargement,” O’Dwyer and Schwartz engage in a comparative political discussion considering the effects EU incorporation has had on LGBT rights in Poland and Latvia. An activist articulated a sense of security with joining the EU, saying, “activists feel more secure in Poland now. They know EU is watching” (O’Dwyer and Schwartz 2010: 221).

⁵² As mentioned above, the Yugoslav wars lasted from 1991-1993, and led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Judah 2009). Numerous war crimes were committed by paramilitaries as well as members of the Serb military, including the ethnic cleansing of towns and villages as well as the rape and torture of women based on their ethnicity (Judah 2009).

O'Dwyer and Schwartz assert that one of the main causes of homophobia is consistent with failure to adhere to new "Europeanization norms" within Poland and Latvia (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010: 234). This notion of a new form of norms, one that incorporates a discourse of LGBT rights while concurrently promoting a new form of neoliberalism begs further investigation.

In my interviews, one topic that was unavoidable was discussing how Serbia has transformed since the 1990s and 2000s Yugoslav wars and the fall of Milošević. What came up time and again was that many of the same actors who were an integral part of Milošević's party are still a part of the Serbian political elite and decision-makers. A paradox of leadership and cooperation has begun to surface particularly around EU integration. The same actors who were in violent opposition to NATO and many of Western Europe's leaders now find themselves across the table from delegates from said NATO member countries.

Belgrade 2016 Pride Parade serves as a case study of how LGBT politics have shifted in Serbia over the past six years. This is largely due to the cooptation of LGBT issues by the Serb government, which has a vested interest in appearing to support LGBT rights, thus resulting in pinkwashing. As mentioned earlier in this project, the cooperation of LGBT activists with the state has resulted in a double-bind for activists. They must cooperate with the state, which results in less accountability and a depoliticization of LGBT issues. Additionally, my interviews and participant observations of the 2016

parade unearthed rumored misogyny on the part of Pride Parade organizers, and the hyper-militarization of Pride security. The attendance and unofficial boycotting by several prominent feminists and lesbian and transgender activists point to Belgrade Pride being inclusive for a particular section of the LGBT population in Serbia. All three of these issues- government pinkwashing, misogynistic LGBT leadership, and militarization of pride, are rooted in the 1990s wars and the anti-war activism on the part of feminists and LGBT individuals. Additionally, the boycott of the Pride events points to a continuation of the chasm within the LGBT movement, and can be traced to larger global trends of depoliticization of what have historically been seen as acts of protest and resistance, such as other Gay Pride Parades.

Serb Pinkwashing

Serbia's Prime Minister, Vučić walks a fine line between appealing to a liberal Western Pro-EU agenda and maintaining a semblance of Serb nationalism. Ultra-right wing nationalists criticize Vučić of being too pro-EU and too centrist, however left wing and center-leftists point to Vučić's governance strategies and his nationalist rhetoric as more of the same- right wing Serbian nationalists running the country.

The Vučić regime's support of Gay Pride and LGBT rights in 2016 was designed to pacify European Union representatives and Western aid groups. If Vučić supports LGBT rights then he can continue to move forward with massive privatization of state-owned businesses and properties. For example, Vučić appointed the first-ever out lesbian

Minister of a Serbian arm of government in July 2016. Minister Ana Brnabić's job, running the Public Administration, is to identify redundancies, corruption, and inefficiencies in state-run industries. She will be laying off massive amounts of state workers in an attempt to streamline government agencies and privatize social welfare programs. When I asked lesbian activists about what they thought of Vučić's decision to appoint a lesbian minister one leader said, "we had never heard of her until the press release. She's been in abroad for years! She's not part of the community! Plus, now everyone will hate her because she will fire so many people. Of *course* he chose a lesbian to do such a dirty job."⁵³ Vučić's selecting Brnabić is just one example of a recent attempt at appearing pro-gay. His enthusiastic support (by sending extreme security forces to protect marchers) is another example of his pinkwashing efforts.

In the summer of 2015, Serbia experienced a flood of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees. Serbia was the new route for many escaping the wars and armed conflicts in the Middle East due to a crackdown at the Greek border. Serbia was thought of as the new gateway to the EU. As mentioned earlier, thousands of refugees camped out all over Serbia's cities and towns. Vučić made several public statements about how Serbs can empathize with refugees and that Serbia would house and take care of the refugees. Meanwhile, EU delegates and foreign aid organizations were funneling money into

⁵³ Interview with Tina P. September 18, 2016.

Serbia to support the refugees. In the Summer of 2016, following a year of political pressure, Vučić began enforcing the Serbian border and deporting refugees.⁵⁴

Concurrently, Vučić cancelled trips planned to Brussels and the U.S. around the same time of the announcement in mid-July. Many pundits reckoned that his decision to tighten border control along with his ongoing warm relationship with Russia and China has been souring relationships with the West⁵⁵.

Two weeks later, Vučić announced the appointment of Ana Brnabić, and a month following, he sent her to Gay Pride as a representative of the government. Brnabić's attendance to the Pride Parade was the highest ranking government official to attend. The symbolism of the country's first out-minister attending gay pride was lauded by EU delegates at Gay Pride 2016. This was seen by many as an extension of Vučić attending pride. Vučić's use of Brnabić at Pride is yet another example of how his government uses gay pride to demonstrate progress. Just a year earlier, Vučić threatened to pull police support altogether when activists asked for less of a prominent police presence.⁵⁶ This

⁵⁴ "Serbia Tightens Borders Amid Refugee Build Up" *Al Jazeera*. Updated July 16, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/serbia-tighten-borders-refugee-build-160716125116845.html>

⁵⁵ Misić, Milan. "Vučić Hits a Crisis with His Western Friends" *Balkan Insight*. Updated Jun 15, 2016. Accessed June 1, 2017. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vucic-hits-a-crisis-with-his-western-friends--06-15-2016>

⁵⁶ Dragoljo, Sasa. "LGBT Activists March with Politicians for Belgrade Pride." *Balkan Insight*. Updated September 18, 2016. Accessed June 1, 2017. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/third-belgrade-pride-parade-passed-without-incidents-09-18-2016>

threat is an example of the Serbian government's lack of support nor investment in LGBT individuals and their safety.

Public Ruptures in Serbia's LGBT Movement

In September 2016, I attended and observed the third consecutive Belgrade Gay Pride Parade. The event consisted of a week of educational and celebratory events hosted throughout the center of the city. The event was held and sponsored primarily by Parada Ponosa Beograd (Belgrade Pride Parade), however a handful of foreign aid groups and governments, as well as local human and LGBT rights groups co-sponsored as well, such as the Serbian LGBT group, Gayten and The Norwegian embassy. The events were relatively well-attended, although many common faces were missing. This was in part due to the unofficial boycott of Pride events on the part of many feminists and trans activists in Belgrade.

Leading up to and during the weeklong pride events in 2016, prominent members from Egal (one of Serbia's emerging transgender rights groups) and Parada Ponosa (Belgrade Pride) engaged in a press war. Egal organizers, Jelena Vuković and Vesna Zorić went to the press talking about the lack of inclusion in Pride Parade organizing. In turn, Parada Posona organizers, Boban Stojanović and his partner, Adam Puškar, released a statement that Egal organizers worked in cahoots with the government and were government spies. The public feud showed an overall lack of cohesion in the LGBT movement. Many activists that I interviewed following the parade described that public

debacle as disgraceful and disappointing. One activist said that the “LGBT movement in Serbia works so hard to gain public respect and public displays of disagreement and mistrust sets the movement back, not forward”⁵⁷.

In addition to tarnishing the movement’s public reputation, the media feud also illustrated an important rhetorical strategy used by politically savvy activists. To associate Egal with the government and to call them spies invokes a particular public fear harkening back to the days of Yugoslavia and socialism. Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the threat of government surveillance and control was palpable. To be called a spy was to be against the *people*. Stojanović and Puškar were using that fear and rhetoric to delegitimize Egal and their organizers as being aligned with the government and subsequently inauthentic representatives of the LGBT movement. There are multiple points of irony in this feud. First, Vuković is one of the most well-known transgender women in Serbia due to her public persona as the first “out” Serbian military veteran.⁵⁸ Helena Vuković has been publicly critical of her treatment by the military after she came out as a transgender woman. However, it is not a stretch for the public imaginary to associate her with having a relationship with the government.

⁵⁷ Interview with Kris. September 20, 2016.

⁵⁸ Jovičević, Mihajlo. Major Helena Vuković za 'Blic': Zaplakala Sam od Sreće Što Sam i u Krštenici Žena, *Blic.rs*, Updated August 24, 2016. Accessed September 24, 2016. <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/major-helena-vukovic-za-blic-zaplakala-sam-od-srece-sto-sam-i-u-krstenici-zena/s7xbnew>

Next, for Puškar and Stojanović to point to Egal's cooperation and relationship with the government as a threat to the movement is an ironic claim, because Parada Ponosa boasted a co-sponsorship with the Serbian government this year. Perhaps accusing Egal as working with/for the government was a dog whistle attempt to downplay the relationship between Parada Ponosa and the state. In other words, it was a way to say, yes, we are working with the government, but not the way that *they* (Egal) are. No matter what the motivation was behind accusing Egal as being government operatives, the lasting effects of the media dispute has been a complete fracture of the LGBT movement in Serbia. For activists working inside the movement, but not with Egal nor Parada Ponosa, the unexpected public feud placed additional tensions and expectations on Pride Parade attendance.

LGBT activists outside of Egal and Parada Ponosa reported being conflicted about attending Gay Pride 2016 events in part because of the media feud between Egal and Parada Ponosa. To attend the parade was to risk being seen as complicit and complacent with Stojanović and Puškar's accusations against Vuković and Egal. Activists in the movement were outraged by the claim that they were spies and saw it as a dirty slander that was inherently not true. However, many outside of Egal and Parada Ponosa also disapproved by the public provocation on the part of Egal as well. In the end, many used the feud as another excuse to not be involved in the Parade events. One activist reported that it all seemed petty and distracting from the real problems LGBT

people face in Serbia, such as brutal anti-gay violence, a lack of implementation of rights laws, and continued public attacks by nationalist parties and politicians. All of which, some activists claimed, were downplayed and depoliticized by Gay Pride Belgrade 2016.

The state support and promotion of pride was one of the main reasons LGBT activists boycotted the parade. Activists interviewed argued that if the goal of pride is to protest the state's failures to support and protect LGBT populations in Serbia. As one activist said, "I didn't like going in the past because it felt like I was complicit with the state and state violence. It was creepy."⁵⁹ For most activists in the movement the Serb state still represents corruption, nepotism, right wing nationalism, and violence. Another activist said, "How can we support Vučić?! He worked for Milošević!"⁶⁰ Boycotters' claims can be substantiated when looking at how the Serb government, particularly under its current leader, Vučić, has used gay rights to promote his party's political agendas. In other words, one can look at Vučić shift towards supporting LGBT initiatives (such as pride) as a form of pinkwashing.

In 2011, the Serbian government banned the gay pride parade, stating they did not have sufficient resources and manpower to protect activists. The state used the 2010 antigay riots as a reason for banning the parade. Many activists, however, claimed that it was also the state's unwillingness to promote and protect LGBT rights. In response to the

⁵⁹ Interview with Tina. September 18, 2016.

⁶⁰ Interview with Jelena. April 20, 2016.

ban, the Serbian high court ruled that the ban was unconstitutional in 2011. Thus, the Serbian government no longer had grounds to ban Gay Pride Parades⁶¹. However, due to lack of resources and organization, Serbs would have to wait three years to have a “successful” gay pride event. In 2014, LGBT activists, working with the Serb government, held the first gay pride parade since 2010. The parade was successful in that it allowed participants to march through the streets of downtown Belgrade without fear of violent confrontations from antigay hoodlums. However, it was the beginning of an increasingly congenial (and to many in the LGBT community a concerning) cooperation between a corrupt Serbian government and LGBT activists.

The Serb government worked closely with foreign aid groups such as USAID and the European Commission to fund extra security for the 2014-2016 parades. The additional security included blocking off large sections of downtown Belgrade and creating checkpoints. Parade participants could only gain access at particular entrances and were required to wear wristbands. Anyone not wearing a wristband would (in theory) be ejected by police. Hundreds of police officers shipped in from neighboring cities and towns were trucked into the center of town in military-grade vehicles. Officers decked out in full riot gear lined the parade route and the barricades. The state claimed that the militarized police were there for the parade participants’ security. However, in both 2015

⁶¹ “Court: 2009 Ban Unconstitutional.” *B92*. Updated December 30, 2011. Accessed June 1, 2017. http://www.b92.net/eng/comments.php?nav_id=78051

and 2016 there were no organized counter-protestors. The excessive police force coupled with the lack of homophobic violent backlash seems to be more designed to show state force and remind LGBT folks that they *need* protection. By showing force the state is both reinforces its control over LGBT communities while coming off as a protector of said communities.

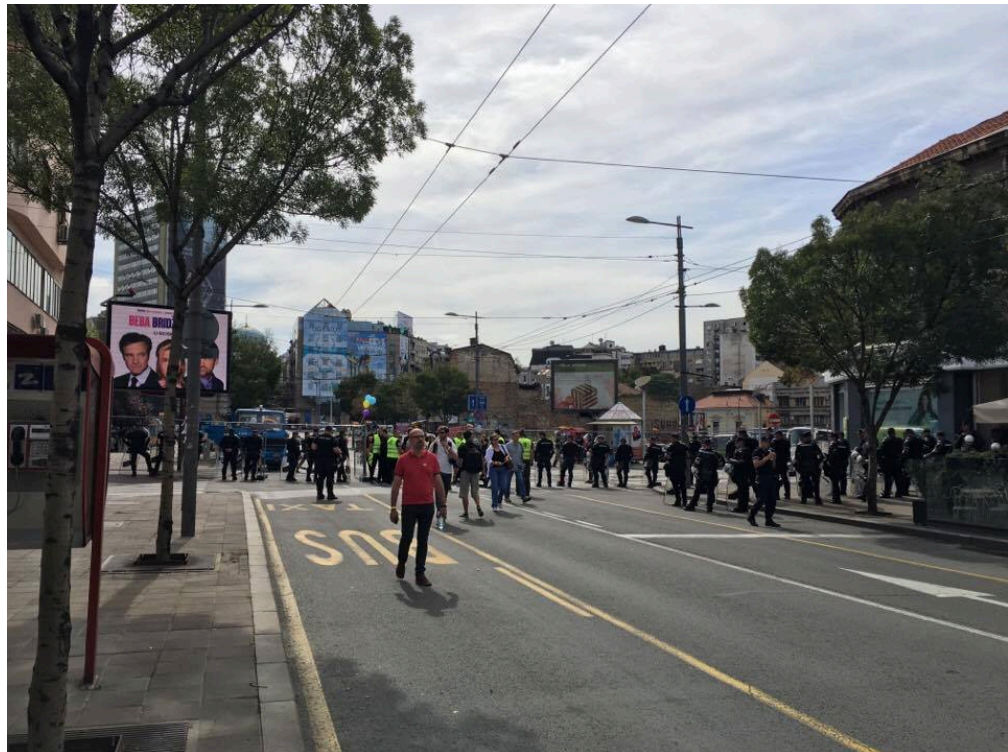


Figure 5: Police barricade at Belgrade Pride Parade 2016. Photo by author.

Many of the LGBT activists interviewed expressed suspicion that the lack of nationalist counter-protests was due to the state's close relationship with right wing

political parties and activists. One activist said, “Vučić had to have told the antigay protestors not to come out. He wants us to think we’re safe, but if he wanted to he could unleash them on us.”⁶² The claim that the Serbian government is working with right wing nationalists is not entirely unfounded, although the relationship is regularly shifting. Vučić worked as Milošević’s Communications Secretary during the 1990s wars. However, in recent years Vučić has boasted a more centrist position, particularly in regards to NATO, a governing body that is strongly rejected by right wing nationalists. That being said, Vučić’s position on Kosovar statehood, his warm relationship with Vladimir Putin, and his criticism of Western influence in Serb culture is rooted in a right wing nationalist politic.

Another major criticism by feminist parade boycotters and attendees was that the parade and events leading up to it seemed more like a party than a political action. As an observer, I had similar observations. The parade itself reminded me of the countless gay pride parades I attended in Chicago, San Francisco, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and Columbus in the U.S. in the mid-2000s-2010s where parade was more like a festival and less like a public action to make queerness visible. The main difference was that unlike U.S. gay pride parades, there weren’t any corporate sponsors at the parade. Instead, foreign governments and aid groups as well as the Serbian government were the high

⁶² Interview with Jelena C. September 15, 2016.

profile sponsors. Western pop and electronic music blasted from loud speakers during the parade. Multiple femme and butch-presenting women couples were pulled out by the press and asked to kiss for the cameras.¹ When surveying the local and international media that covered the 2016 parade, I found numerous photos of different lesbian couples kissing. By showing only pictures of conventionally attractive women kissing and not any other examples of queer affection, love, and performance, the press was both feeding into the male gaze as well as making invisible gender non-conforming people, alternative forms of masculinity and femininity, and gay male desire. Thus, representation and visibility is impartial and skewed towards a heterosexual male gaze.



Figure 6. Two Women Kissing at Belgrade Pride Parade 2016. Photo credit

Vesna Lalić



Figure 7. Women walking in Belgrade Pride. Photo credit Vesna Lalić

There were also the same amount of straight allies and families marching as out LGBT people. The makeup of the crowd was striking because it was not only half allies and half LGBT people, but there were numerous internationals there. For example, the Swedish Gay Police union was in attendance, marching with participants.



Figure 8. Gay Swedish Policeman at Pride. Photo Credit Vesna Lalic.

Many marchers stopped the ten men and asked to get their picture taken with them. It was surreal to see parade marchers flock to law enforcement, especially considering the Serbian public's overall mistrust of law enforcement. Was it because they were Swedish? Because they were gay? The answer is most likely both. In addition to the Swedish police, the new Serbian police liaison to LGBT issues was in attendance, although he maintained a low profile, walking alongside the police barricade and not engaging in any of the festivities. The makeup of the participants is significant because

several key leaders of the LGBT movement were either not in attendance or not asked to speak. Those who were asked to speak were primarily internationals.

In the middle of the parade march there was a short pause that featured two speakers. Parked in the middle of one of the main streets, Terazije, the truck holding the sound system stopped and speakers were invited to climb on bed to give short speeches. Two Turkish speakers got up and spoke about the recent homophobic attacks by the hands of the Turkish government and police. They asked for solidarity and support from Serbs, and also asked that Serbs take a position on supporting Syrian refugees. Speaking in English, one of the speakers said, “do not forget that there are LGBT people in Syria and they have nowhere to go.” This moment was important because it called for international solidarity as well as strengthening bonds with Turkey- a place and people that have historically been at odds with Serbia due to Ottoman imperial rule in the 9th and 10th century.



Figure 9: Turkish Speaker at Belgrade Pride Parade 2016. Photo by author.

It was also important and historic because Serbia has served as a haven for refugees seeking to gain access into the European Union. As a border state with both Hungary and Croatia, in 2015 and 2016 Serbia saw an onslaught of refugees camping in public parks, staying in hotels, and camping along the Hungarian and Croatian borders.

Reminding the parade goers of the need for solidarity and support for survivors of war during what was otherwise a jovial party was an abrupt and poignant moment. That is, if the parade goers could hear what was being said.

Unfortunately, the moment was lost on most of the participants due to poor planning and acoustics. The crowd for the most part could not hear the speakers, and many people did not even notice that there was a pause for speeches in the middle of the march. In debrief interviews with some of the attendees, most did not even know that there were Turkish activists in attendance. What could have been a poignant political moment designed to build international solidarity with Turks and Syrians was rushed and went unnoticed by most parade marchers. In contrast, speakers from The Netherlands, Canada (representing UNICEF), Sweden, and Norway were given ample microphone time and a captive audience once the parade landed in the main square.

After the march, in a mostly empty square, parade goers gathered around a small sound stage for the entertainment and speech section of the event. The featured speakers included two local LGBT activists- Boban Stojanović, one of the founders of Belgrade Pride and Kristina Kastelec, a co-founder of Da Se Zna, a new LGBT support group that tracks anti-gay violence in Serbia. Both Stojanović and Kastelec spoke about the importance of visibility in Serbia, particularly in the face of violence. Stojanović's speech focused on the need for protections for LGBT people, women, and Roma in Serbia, which was one of the few moments that called for political action and solidarity among

oppressed persons in Serbia. The other speakers were Western government and NGO representatives who primarily praised participants for showing up to the parade.

The Western speakers were primarily from governments and NGOs that helped fund the parade, and each speech followed a formula. They mostly compared their country's strong LGBT protections to Serbia's more homophobic culture. Speaking in English, each speaker would start by describing the types of LGBT rights and policies their particular country or region has implemented. They would then compare and contrast that to what they described as Serbia's more homophobic culture, and end by applauding LGBT Serbs for being brave to be "out" at pride in such a homophobic space. One speaker, representing Amsterdam Pride, Irene Hemelaar, said that she had no idea how bad things were in Belgrade until Boban (Stojanović) and Adam (Puškar) reached out to their organization. She said "there *must* be solidarity between The Netherlands and Serbia because things are *so bad* for Serbs." Hemelaar's statements demonstrate an overall lack of understanding daily life in Belgrade for LGBT people as well as an assumed superiority.

Most of the Westerners' speeches came off as both insulting and patronizing to many of the Serb attendees. In a debrief interview, one woman, speaking about The Netherlands, said "I mean, yeah, things are better where they are for LGBT people, but things aren't horrible here. I walk down the street every day holding my girlfriend's hand,

and we are fine. No one messes with us here in Belgrade.”⁶³ She went on to say that she attended pride mainly for her girlfriend, who is Spanish, and regularly attends her town’s LGBT pride events in Spain. For this particular attendee, Belgrade Pride Parade did not symbolize any sort of political action. Another attendee, a prominent feminist lesbian in Serbia, also said that she had not planned on attending the event, but went because she had a friend visiting from the U.S. who wanted to see the parade⁶⁴. For both women’s international guests, attending Belgrade Pride was a way to feel connected to something larger, a global LGBT movement.

The question of whether or not Belgrade Pride was a global and/or local political movement was at forefront of discussion for many of the attendees and boycotters of the parade. For many of the boycotters the parade symbolized an uncomfortably close relationship with the Serb government. Many of the boycotters also see it as an event promoted by Western NGOs and the EU to symbolize LGBT progress. The freedom to gather in public and not be harassed or face homophobic violence demonstrates progress. This logic, however, fails to recognize the extreme militarized police force that were deployed by the government for so-called protection. It also fails to address more pertinent issues facing Serbian LGBT communities, such a lack of implementation of

⁶³ Jelena interview October 2016.

⁶⁴ Interview with Lepa in October 2016.

anti-discrimination laws, rampant lesbophobic and transphobic violence, and lack of access to state services such as health care and education for LGBT people.

For parade organizers, Pride *does* represent progress and is local to Belgrade. Many of the organizers when interviewed discussed the ways international intervention via EU human rights mandates have brought a host of new protections for LGBT people, particularly when it comes to police interventions in antigay attacks. Stojanović often talks about what it was like before the EU, and the raids and attacks by right wing football hooligans on underground gay clubs. The question of whether or not Belgrade Pride is making meaningful political change was one of the main questions asked by parade organizers during the Pride Forum the day before the March.

Global v. Local at the 2016 LGBT Pride Forum

On Saturday, September 17, 2016, local and international LGBT activists gathered for a day of workshops intending to engage in fruitful discussions about the direction of LGBT activism in Serbia and beyond. Unfortunately, the majority of the speakers were not local activists, but rather, prominent international ambassadors, NGO workers, academics, and foreign aid representatives⁶⁵. The only panel that featured

⁶⁵ Speakers included Michael Davenport, Ambassador of European Union to Serbia; Tim Cartwright, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade; Irena Vojackova-Sollorano, UN Resident Advisor to Serbia; Michael Uyehara, Deputy Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia; Terry Reintke, Member of European Parliament, Germany; Stein Runar Ostigaard, Oslo Pride, Norway; Tanya L. Domi, Professor, Columbia University in

“local” (in this case Balkan) activists had representatives from Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro. There were no Serb activist groups represented at the Balkan panel. There were also no Serb LGBT groups represented on any of the panels, which indicates a disconnect between local efforts and broader efforts. This divide between the local/global is a topic many transnational feminists have interrogated in their work, and helps explain the problematic setup of having outsiders strategize and plan for local activists, because it others local efforts while maintaining an illusion of global solidarity.

William Spurlin’s critique of heteronormativity in a global and transnational context, encourages researchers and practitioners of global rights work to locate themselves in their work. According to Spurlin global work does not de-center the west, and instead further “others” the local. A key question Spurlin seeks to answer is, “global according to *whom?*” (Spurlin 2010: 11). The assumptions made in the global/local binary create fixed locations that fail to consider the multiple histories, politics, cultures, familial structures, and traditions that are fluid and ever-changing in “local” spaces. According to Spurlin, the “global” is in turn “self-evidently progressive, abstract, historically dynamic, and overriding the local” (ibid). Additionally, Spurlin asserts that the global perspective is a de facto Western perspective used to analyze the local “other”

the City of New York, USA; Irene Hemelaar, Amsterdam Pride, Netherlands; Tanja Fajon, Member of the European Parliament, Slovenia

(Spurlin, 2010: 12). This reproduces the “global” researcher as the subject and the “local” research informant as the “object.” Keeping Spurlin’s critique of the global/local binary in mind, this asks the question, how has this privileging of the “global” understanding of the “local” shaped transnational feminist knowledge production? More specifically, how does the global researcher and advisor go unmarked and unsituated in recommendations and research? How are histories, hierarchies, and forms of power unquestioned due to the invisibility of the global researcher? To answer these questions, I (along with Spurlin and many other feminist scholars) turn to Chandra Mohanty’s work that interrogates Western feminist scholarship.

In her highly influential work, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” Chandra Mohanty elucidates the imbalanced and troubled relationship between the global and local by examining Western feminist theorizing of “third world women.” Mohanty charts the ways in which Western feminist scholars collapse complex, diverse, and complicated groups of women in non-Western spaces into a single subject the “third world woman” (Mohanty 2003: 19). By creating theoretical frameworks skewed from a Western perspective that in turn are used to explain and capture the othered subject- in Mohanty’s example the Third World Woman- Western feminist practice and theory are asserting their power. Additionally, the collapsing and homogenization of LGBT people’s experiences in non-Western locations by Western LGBT practitioners is a colonial practice that furthers Western LGBT rights hegemony.

In the case of the Pride Forum, Western advisors were positioned as experts to the “other” and local experience. In other words, panelists were there to tell Serbia that they know what’s best for them and what they need to do to arrive to have the same rights and protections as Western LGBT communities.

The fact that there was only one day devoted to discussing and strategizing LGBT political tactics and it featured predominantly international speakers shows the disconnect between the LGBT global and local activist networks. The workshops were not designed to foster discussion with local activists, but rather to advise them on how to make change in their country. In a way, it was good that there was a day devoted to talking about political strategies, however, when you compare this to other events sponsored that year, such as Labris’s Lesbian Week, Gayten’s two-day conference on Transphobia, and Egal’s numerous educational workshops on transgender issues, it clearly indicates that having a strategizing session with *local* activists was a low priority.

One example was the panel, “Where is the Global LGBT Movement” did not include a single representative from non-Western states. In this example, the “global” means the “West.” Where were non-EU European states? Where were the representatives from Non-European and non-North American continents? Granted, Serbia is a small nation-state, but it would not have been hard to Skype in LGBT representatives from non-Euro and non-U.S. spaces. Locating “global” LGBT movements in predominantly Western European and U.S. contexts perpetuates a sense of Western superiority and

prioritizes Western strategies and approaches for organizing. Additionally, not inviting a single Serb nor Balkan representative to serve on the “global” panel positions local movements as not belonging to the global movement. In other words, it is foreigners presenting what everyone else is doing in contrast to Serbia and the Balkans. They are not part of the global. They are other.

It is clear that there have been many advancements in Serbian society in regards to protecting public gatherings of LGBT people. One can simply look at the bloody 2001 attempt at a parade, the 2010 antigay backlash and compare it to to 2016. It is safer to be “out” in public in Serbia, particularly for those living in more progressive cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad. However, antigay attacks and gay bashing continues to happen on a regular basis in more rural communities⁶⁶ as well as in the capitol Belgrade. This is largely due to the interrelated crises brought on by Serbian EU accession.

Earlier in this chapter I wrote extensively about how Serbia’s neoliberal transition brought on by EU accession has created different forms of homophobia and gender norms crisis. I then traced the transformation of public and state forms of homophobia towards a different form of homophobic violence- pinkwashing. The current government’s use of LGBT rights and issues to distract from other more distasteful policies, such as the displacement of Roma settlements, the clearing out of refugee

⁶⁶ Da Se Zna statistics on antigay violence in Serbia. “Da Se Zna Homepage” *Da Se Zna*. Accessed August 8, 2017. <https://dasezna.lgbt/>

camps, and the selling off of public land to private investors (and government officials pocketing the money). Additionally, in April 2016, Vučić held a special election, in an attempt to maintain power. His election has been criticized as unconstitutional, because it was before his term limit expire. It is also criticized for reporting record numbers of voters at the polls. However, because the Serbian government is complying with EU mandates for implementing austerity measures as well as maintain human rights protections (on paper at least), there has been no intervention. Protecting pride participants from non-existent violence is one way that the Serbian government can prove that they have progressed. However, if we consider that day-to-day life of LGBT people has not gotten better, it is clear that pride is not a vehicle for meaningful change.

In 2010, Belgrade Gay Pride was looked at as a political action that stared down the face of violent homophobia and asserted LGBT people's right to be out and be safe. Since then, the parade has morphed into an apolitical space for many of the LGBT community. It now represents government collusion and pinkwashing. Pride also represents forms of misogyny, transphobia, and imperialism to some LGBT activists. The media storm preceding pride and the transphobic sentiments against Egal have ruptured what were once strong bonds in the community. For many activists who boycotted the event, Pride is now for the gay elite and foreigners. It is a spectacle that many feminist activists want very little do with. Additionally, it is a space that brings back memories of

a carceral and surveillance state for anti-war activists. The hyper-militarization and security forces prevented many activists from attending the event.

The shifting political nature of Belgrade Pride indicates that Pride is no longer a space for all LGBT individuals, but for particular insiders and others connected to the international community. It also points to a depoliticizing of Pride itself. There was no criticism of the government, nor critique of the economic policies brought on by the EU. There was no criticism of Vučić's cracking down on refugees, nor the displacement of Roma. Yes, Stojanović said we must fight for Roma, women, and LGBT people, but there was no explanation nor direction telling the people *how* or *what* to fight for/against.

The presence of the international community in the 2016 Pride Parade is an example of how Western LGBT rights proponents are failing to work *with* the LGBT community. Granted, most of the organizations fund particular projects, such as Pride. However, the international community is failing to see or reflect on their own role in setting an LGBT agenda that does not necessarily work for the Serbian LGBT population. In this next chapter, I will discuss how development initiatives and international aid is creating a handful of opportunities and a bevy of problems for the Serbian LGBT population. I will interrogate the ways democracy rhetoric is being used to promote neoliberal funding structures in Serbian civil society. Finally, I will interrogate the emergence of a new NGO-class, an industry that employs the majority of LGBT activists, and the trappings of this form of political support.

Chapter 5: Neoliberal Privatization, Gentrification, and Grassroots Resistance

Walking along Savamala in 2004 as a freshly minted 21-year-old, I remember the soot on the buildings from unmonitored air quality. I remember the massive pot holes along Karađorđević, one of the main thoroughfares in old city Belgrade. I remember being mesmerized by the vestiges of socialist Yugoslavia- the city sports center (where esteemed tennis player Novak Djokovic was once rumored to practice as a little boy) with overgrown grass and broken windows. As a child of the rust belt, I was well aware of the architectural and ecological effects of post-industrial capitalism in cities- dilapidated buildings, blight, and overgrown abandoned lots. But Belgrade in 2004 was different. It was still a bustling metropolis *in spite* of the depressed economy and international sanctions and political corruption rearing its head again. When I arrived in Belgrade in 2004, it was the first anniversary of the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, the first democratically elected leader in Serbia after Milošević. The city was still reeling, but there was still hope for economic growth and democracy.

Flash forward eight years to when I returned to Belgrade in the summer of 2011. My first day back I headed straight to the waterfront, Savamala. There was a newly paved recreational trail along the riverfront. Walking along the tributary where the Sava meets the Danube I saw a number of houseboats that housed restaurants and clubs. Savamala, it appeared, was turning into a destination in the city for nightlife. The waterfront was changing, but the rest of the city and broader country was still experiencing a stagnate

economy. Boris Tadić and his political party had been in power for over eight years, and there was little hope of a change of political party. Economic sanctions had been slowly lifted, but Serbia was still under international scrutiny for their failure to recognize Kosovo as an independent state and for harboring war criminals, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadžic. Despite this, informal small businesses, underground clubs and restaurants, and street vendors continued to flourish. The LGBT communities in Belgrade were still not visible to the larger population. Small speakeasies and art collectives in flats served as gathering spaces for dancing, cruising, and socializing.

Five years later, the intimate and closed speakeasies and art spaces transformed into public clubs catering to foreign tourists and Belgrade's elite. What used to be a public green space lined with apartment buildings might describe as a high end playground for Belgrade's rich and famous. Savamala is now a flashy nightlife hub for predominantly wealthy straight and cisgender Serbs and internationals to party. The confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers are now littered with international cruise lines such as Princess and Norwegian cruises, teeming with tourists waiting to taste and experience Serbian culture. With the Eurozone crisis lifting, international consumers, funders, and investors are flooding into Serbia, ready to export/exploit resources and develop the formerly socialist country. The liberalization of the Serbian economy, in concert with human rights agendas set by the European Union have opened up new spaces for LGBT economies in Serbia.

This chapter examines how Serbia's transitional economy has created new possibilities as well as problems for LGBT activists and the larger community. Serbia's transition from a distinct Yugoslav socialist economy to a neoliberal globalized capitalist economy has opened up funding opportunities for LGBT community based organizations (CBOs), but at what cost? I argue that the economic transition in post- Milošević, post-war, and post-Yugoslav Serbia is transforming LGBT organizing and activism, creating class divides in the LGBT movement that did not exist before, all the while opening up new opportunities for solidarity work between social movements in Serbia. The chapter is organized into three segments. First, I present an overview on Serbia's economic transitions in the late 20th and early 21st century, and reviews critical literature on post-socialist economic transition. Next, the chapter features interviews and case studies with LGBT activists in Serbia, examining how economic transitions and the subsequent influx of international money has reshaped activism and direct services in LGBT organizations. Here the paper interrogates the neoliberalization of the Serbian economy and the rise of the CBO and the relationship with international donors. I assert that the reliance on foreign donors has created a double bind for LGBT organizations that pits them between a results-driven metric system and attending to the direct support needs of the community. This disjuncture has pitted the CBO workers against the grassroots. Additionally, foreign aid has led to the development of a non-profit professionalized middle class. This class divide is explored in the second section of the chapter, where I

turn to the archives to explain how class has historically been conflated with nationalism in Serbia. In this section I argue that it is melding of nationalism and class that has created new forms of tension between the general Serbian public and LGBT CBO employees. This class divide further compounds existing homophobia and xenophobia. Not only are LGBT organizations “European,” but they are also becoming a part an integral mechanism to sustain the burgeoning middle class.

The final section considers how the neoliberalization of Serbia’s economy creates a crony capitalist regime, which alienates the general Serb public and opens up possibilities for solidarity work. I use the gentrification of Savamala, and the subsequent backlash as a site of analysis. I argue that the solidarity between LGBT movements and leftist and anti-gentrification activism surrounding the development of Savamala is in part due to the spatial displacement of LGBT people, feminists, and artists. Furthermore, I consider how the Savamala development project and the coalition that has surfaced in opposition, which seemed to come up out of nowhere, has deep roots in Yugoslav solidarity networks.

Economic Transition in Serbia

Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1992, Jović (2001) describes the former Yugoslav economy as being an alternative to Soviet Communism and capitalism. This third way, or self-management model, has also been called Yugoslav socialism. Under this model, the Yugoslavian government of Tito (1945-1980) redistributed

housing, had free health care for all, promoted trade unions, and produced the majority of goods within the nation.

The international communities war-time economic sanctions against Serbia, coupled with the costs of the wars and the disintegration of the Yugoslavian economy left the Serbian economy destitute, and with the Gross Material Product⁶⁷ (GMP) dropped from \$24.6 billion in 1989 to \$9.5 billion in 1993 (Judah 2000: 263-272). It was during this time that the Serbian banks collapsed and inflation skyrocketed, leading to hyperinflation, and rendering pensions and wages for the everyday Serbian worthless (Mikuš 2016). This resulted in food scarcities and starvation (primarily of pensioners) (Judah 2000). The Middle and Professional classes were hit the hardest by the war and the economic collapse, and a massive emigration of young educated professionals to Canada occurred (Judah 2000: 277).

Serbia's economy slowly began to rebuild following the lifting of the sanctions, despite the fact that the economy was half the size in 1999 as it was a decade earlier (Upchurch and Marinković 2001). According to Upchurch and Marinković, under Milošević, the Serbian government began to privatize industry, however, that process pertained to profit sharing and division of assets among workers within a company.

⁶⁷ According to Tim Judah, Yugoslavia, and later Serbia measured the economy based on the Gross Material Product (GMP) (2009: 267). The GDP is estimated at about 15-20 percent greater than GMP.

Following the fall of Milošević privatization became a priority for the Serbian government in an attempt to rebuild the economy, and wholesale sales of factories and industries became more common⁶⁸. Additionally, this rapid privatization led to the selling off of thousands of state enterprises⁶⁹ over the past decade (ibid).

Despite all of the privatization efforts, Serbia has a weak currency and faces looming inflation mostly due to the fact that since 2000, the monetary value of Serbia's exports has only equaled half of the monetary value of their imports, leading to a precarious debt balancing act. The Serbian government's solution to stabilizing the economy has been to further sell off state enterprises to private buyers. Privatizations of Serbian industry along with the market expansion that EU integration promises are further examples of Serbia's shift towards a neoliberal capitalism. Another major shift in the Serbian economy has been directly connected with the labor market⁷⁰. When considering Bucolic's assertions, one can further see the paradox and tensions Serbian workers are confronted with in terms of joining the European Union, particularly when

⁶⁸ Milošević was thrown out of office on October 5, 2000, following massive public protests.

⁶⁹ According to Upchurch and Marinković, the first state industries to be privatized included the steel works, tobacco, alcohol, and gas stations (2011: 323).

⁷⁰ Chapters One and Four summarize the shift in Serbia's economy over the past thirty years.

considering that economic aid has been designed precisely to transition Serbia's economy into the global market⁷¹.

Prior to and throughout the Eurozone crash in 2011, supranational development agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, are working with the state to privatize a number of state-owned industries and social welfare programs. As Serbia moved closer towards joining the EU international funding continued to filter in an attempt to strengthen civil society and promote democratization through privatization. A 2007 EU funding report showed a trajectory of funding for Serbian Civil Society organizations from 186.7 million in 2006 to 198.7 million in 2010. While that may not be a major increase, it is important to note the types of categories with which the funds are associated. According to the report, the funding was divided into two categories, "Transition Assistance and Institution Building" and "Cross-border Cooperation" (209). This particular report targets key objectives for Serbian projects writing that the key objectives focus on improving, "interethnic relations and civil society; trade and private sector development; infrastructure development; reform of the judiciary; integrated border management; immigration and asylum; and fight against crime" (223).

⁷¹ Figures according to the IMF,
<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2008&ey=2015&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=49&pr1.y=10&c=942&s=NGDPD%2CNGDPDPC%2CPPPGDP%2CPPPPC&grp=0&a=>

Similarly, the United Nations Development Program invested nearly half of the \$8,777,592.09 funds allotted for Serbia on “Good Governance” programs, which were designed to promote private/public cooperation, gender mainstreaming programs, educational programs regarding EU integration, and several programs designed to strengthen the private financial institutions.⁷² Interestingly, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development pulled their funding from Serbia in 2011, citing Serbia’s successful transformation from the post-conflict society toward the path to EU membership⁷³. These reports demonstrate how a focus on developing a private sector and investing in civic society was and still is a priority to the European Union along with other democratizing nations, such as the United States as they consider Serbian post-conflict transformation. This form of privatization creates a tension between neoliberalist development and nationalism. Serbia’s economy is no longer inwardly sustained, but instead is forced to depend more on international dollars and trade to be viable in the global economy. And it is forced to rely on outsider “support” for democratization and human rights.

In the case of Serbia, for example, social conscience development policies are administered to help stabilize the post-conflict government, economy, and/or civil

⁷² For a full list of UNDP projects in Serbia visit UNDP’s website *undp.org*, Accessed August 6, 2017. <http://undp.org.rs/index.cfm?event=public.projects>

⁷³ “Serbia and the UK,” *Gov.UK*, accessed August 9, 2017. <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Where-We-Work/Europe/Serbia/>

society. In the book, *Fragments of Development*, Suzanne Bergeron encourages the reader to interrogate the discourse of economies and development. Bergeron emphasizes the need to think beyond the located markets (regional, national, global), and “think about what ideas about space and economics do and what kinds of social and political effects these have on development theory and practice” (Bergeron, 2004: 2). Rather than simply engaging in an analysis of economic supply and demand as it pertains to borders of nation-states and foreign aid, Bergeron stresses the need to think beyond the monetary transactions and borders, and consider other factors that are implicated and impacted development theory and practice. Bergeron points to the lack of discussion of gender in development thought as an example of an area that needs to be further explored.

In addition to interrogating how ideas of economics impact development theory, Bergeron also discusses the assumptions of the “Imagined Economic Community.” Bergeron describes the imagined economic community as an assumption that everyone has the same economic ideals and goals in mind, such as the idea that the free market is the key to modernity (Bergeron 23). One could look at the global acceptance and embrace of neoliberalism as a form of imagined economic community. One of the key problems Bergeron identifies with the Imagined Economic Community is that it further leads to constructions of the other. Either one gets on board with the program, or is expelled from the community. So in the case of environmental aid, the recipient country either gets on board with the project or loses the funding opportunity. Bergeron

challenges this construction of imagined economic community mechanisms currently in place, calling into question the assumption that they are “unified, intentional, and non-contradictory economic logics” (Bergeron 156). She extends her interrogation of global imagined economic communities to the imagined economic community of international development, calling this economic logic “hegemonic thinking” (Bergeron 157).

Bergeron asserts that once we can move away from the hegemony of imagined economic communities in development discourse and practice, we will be better equipped to critique development strategies and entities. While Bergeron’s critical framework focuses on women and development, applying this feminist lens remains useful when critiquing the United States’ recent foreign aid to Serbia for environmental projects.

Michael Rosberg is critical of economic development discourses and practices in his book, *The Power of Greed*. Rosberg’s analyses of modernization and social conscience development theories are complementary to Bergeron’s approach, and provide a useful framework to analyze foreign environmental aid to Serbia. Rosberg asks why so many international development projects fail. Is it a resistance on the local level? Do they fail because they are administered in a top-down manner on local communities? To answer these questions, Rosberg analyzes a number of theoretical and pragmatic approaches to international development projects. For the purpose of this paper, I want to focus on Rosberg’s critique of modernization and social conscience development theories.

Rosberg gives a genealogy of modernization theories, rooting their theoretical and practical genesis in the 1960s and continuing on through present day (Rosberg 117). According to the author, modernization theories are based on a number of assumptions. First, social systems throughout the world have been and are currently highly influenced by western technologies (Rosberg 117). Thus, development models, need to an extent to incorporate some form of technological advancement based on Western models for the purpose of modernization. This immediately creates the dichotomy of the West being modern and non-west being primitive or in need of replication of Western modernity models. Another assumption Rosberg chronicles is Walter Rostow's theory of linear economic growth. According to Rosberg, Rostow's modernization economic model identifies five stages of economic modernity ranging from "traditional" (stage 1) to "mass consumption"⁷⁴ (Rosberg 117). In addition to the assumption of a linear form of economic development growth based on a Western-techno-centric model, the modernization model also assumes that Western or industrialized nations are similar and followed similar paths. Rosberg critiques this assumption asserting that this assumption ignores cultural, political, and social values and ideologies that can influence economic growth (Rosberg 118). One can point to the post-World War II era and the rapid

⁷⁴ For more information on Walter Rostow's linear economic growth model see Walter W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 4-16.

economic growth in the United States and the U.S.S.R. as an example of differing ideologies and political structures that impacted somewhat differing forms of economic growth and industrialization.

In addition to critiquing the homogenizing western and industrialized nation-states, Rosberg criticizes modernization development theories as being inherently ethnocentric. He writes, “They assume that everybody wants to be a western capitalist and that everybody should want to be one” (Rosberg 118). This criticism seems very similar to Bergeron’s critique of the imagined economic community. Modernization theories make the generalization that the Western economic model as the epitome of development, the unquestionable standard. Once more, this development model ignores social, historical, religious, cultural differences between regions and nations. The model ignores, for example, whether a nation-state or region is a post-conflict society or post-colonial society. Both of these distinctions can create varying results when pressured to adopt a modernization model⁷⁵.

Bergeron gives the example of Latin American nation-states willingly adopting the National Free Trade Agreement because it symbolized a break from colonial tariffs. At the same time, Serbia, a post-conflict and post-socialist nation, is struggling through

⁷⁵ Bergeron too engages extensively in the discourses of modernization economic theory. In addition to critiquing the construction of modernization language, theory, and practice, Bergeron engages in a discussion of the contradictions in modernization discourse and national identity following decolonization. (Bergeron 14-17; 46-47; 56-61).

the transition from an isolated and sanctioned economy into a global liberalized economy at the urging of the European Union.⁷⁶ Both of these regions have and are adopting modernization models and neoliberal policies, but for very different reasons. In Bergeron's example, some Latin American countries are adopting free trade models as a break from the historical colonial⁷⁷ rule, and Serbia is adopting modernization models as a way to reenter the international economy and by extension community. Rosberg goes on to write that modernization theories of development have been employed by a variety of nation-states, as well as international development agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), further demonstrating the permeation of modernization theories into development practice (Rosberg 118).

According to Rosberg, Emile Durkheim's work heavily influences social conscience development theories⁷⁸. Rosberg writes, "Social Conscience theories make

⁷⁶ Graham Hollinshead and Mairi Maclean point to Serbia's cultural, religious, and political history as an isolated state and economy as the root of Serbia's reluctance to liberalize the economy and government. They also point to cultural sentiments of xenophobia, neo-traditionalism, and nationalism as sites of resistance to foreign aid and investment both economically and politically. To read more about the political, social, religious, historical and cultural influences that impact Serbia's tenuous transition into a globalized liberal economy, see Hollinshead, Graham, and Mairi Maclean. "Transition and Organizational Dissonance in Serbia." *Human Relations* 60.10 (2007): 1551-574. Print.

⁷⁷ Although, some feminist development theorists posit that the new neoliberal economic policies adopted by some Latin American countries at the urging of the IMF and World Bank are a new form of economic colonization.

⁷⁸ See Emile Durkheim, *Sociology*, trans. George Simpson (The Division of Labor in Society, New York: The Free Press, 1947).

use of Durkheim's ideas about social norms to explain community development action taken by NGOs, nations, and international organizations" (Rosberg 115). He goes on to say that these actions can occur in the form of interventions when needed, such as in a fight, war, ethnic conflict, genocide, etc. In terms of international foreign aid, social conscience development policies provide aid in order to restore social order.

According to Rosberg, social conscience theory assumes that public policy is created for altruistic reasons (Rosberg 115). Once more, the theories ignore other forces that can shape policy, such as political processes, cultural values, and economic entities. I would add that it also fails to recognize historical and cultural hegemonies, which have created inequalities among nation-states⁷⁹. Rosberg draws from the writings of Kwong-Leung Tang⁸⁰ in his criticism of Social Conscience theories. According to Kwong-Leung, there are three key criticisms that can be waged against social conscience theories. First, as with modernization theories, social conscience theories are a form of "well-meaning ethnocentrism" (Rosberg 115). As with modernization theories and imagined economic communities, social conscience theory is based on the assumption that others want to embrace, emulate, and/or assimilate into the donor's designed model. As Rosberg puts it, "there is an assumption that their world is less evolved and innately inferior to ours"

⁷⁹ Such as colonialism and imperialism.

⁸⁰ See Tang, Kwong-Leung, "The Marginalization of Social Welfare in Developing Countries: A Study of Four Theories of Social Policy Development," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 23, no. 2 (1996): 41-58.

(Rosberg 116). Second, Rosberg writes that critics of social conscience theories posit that evidence of altruistic community development is lacking (Rosberg 116). According to Rosberg, all of those involved in development have some sort of personal stake in the project- even if that stake is to feel personally good about helping people. To presuppose that development policies are designed in the spirit of pure altruism is naïve. It also ignores the other driving forces (as mentioned above) that influence policy making. Third, Kwong-Leung writes that social conscience theories “assume that goodwill drives public policy” (Rosberg 116). One can look at the United States’ recent shift in major funding from the Western Balkan states to now the Middle East with the interest in securitizing the region as an example of possible other influences impacting development policies⁸¹. Despite shifts in security priorities, the United States continues to fund certain programs in Serbia.

Europeanization, Neoliberalism, and the Rise of the CBO

European Union accession carries with it a chance to engage in a larger global market. In the decade following the lifting of economic sanctions, Germany and Russia bought out local markets and factories and began trading in Serbia. The local corner store was soon taken over by global chains such as the German grocery store, Idea. German

⁸¹ See United States of America. Congressional Research Service. *Future of the Balkans and U.S. Policy Concerns*. By Steven Woehrel. District of Columbia: Congressional Research Service, 2009. Print.

companies began stockpiling Serbian agricultural goods. Serbia, once known as Yugoslavia's bread basket, became a major exporter of goods such as milk, eggs, and grain to Northern European producers. In 2016, the German Ambassador to Serbia, Axel Dittman, released in a press statement that Germany alone invested EUR 1.6 billion in Serbia and created 31,000 jobs.⁸²

The question of "modern" as an indicator of both economic liberalization and human rights advancements needs to be reexamined in a Balkan and Serbian context. Numerous theorists including (Grewal 2007, Bosia 2012, Hesford and Kozol 2005), have engaged with the fraught term as it is used to develop liberal development policies and human rights initiatives⁸³. In the Serbian context, the "modern" approach is often conflated with the Europeanization of Serbia's economic, political, and social policies. Namely, the privatization of social welfare, the call for elections and political transparency, and the institutionalization (via legal and public policy standards) of human rights protections. It is this modernity discourse trajectory that both grooms Serbia for EU accession as well as becoming an active participant of the global capitalist economy. One can look at the modernization/gentrification of Belgrade's waterfront district, Savamala,

⁸² "German Investments in Serbia: €1.6 Billion and 31,000 Jobs." *Serbian Monitor*. Updated August 21, 2016. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://serbianmonitor.com/en/investing-in-serbia/24123/german-investments-serbia-e1-6-billion-and-31000-jobs/>

⁸³ See Bergeron 2004.

as a case study in Serbia's economic transition and the emerging backlash from the Serbian public.

For Serbia, in order for U.S. to employ a modernization model in the form of aid, implies that the United States has techno-modernization models that should be replicated. Numerous theorists (Bosia 2015; Bosia and Weiss 2013; Massad 2007; Puar 2007) problematize the use of LGBT and human rights discourses to promote Western/Northern European modernization agendas. To assert that the West/Global North has better human rights and LGBT protections, and thus should export this "wisdom" to less modern/developed nations is problematic in a number of ways. First, it implies that the U.S. and other Western European states have for the most part eliminated and addressed homophobia and human rights crises in their own nation-states. The recent "Bathroom Ban," which allows public spaces to ban transgender people from using public restrooms that correspond with their gender identity, is an example of U.S. government's blatant transphobic policies. One can also look at the recent rise of popularity of far right and neo-fascist parties in Northern and Western Europe (i.e. Marine La Pen's National Front in France, the Netherlands' Geertz Wilder, the UK's Nigel Farage and the Brexit campaign, the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in Greece, and Germany's AfD, a far-right and anti-immigrant party with links to the former Nazi regime) as other examples of inconsistent deployment of human rights rhetoric. The West wants human rights, but only for those individuals who *fit* neatly within particular homo/heteronorms, have Judeo-

Christian religious beliefs, and are perceived as white (Cohen 1997; Duggan 2002; El-Tayeb 2012; Puar 2007; Rich 1980). It is also a way to maintain a form of hegemony and power (Spurlin 2010). In other words, unmarried lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people, gender non-conforming, non-binary, transgender, and intersex people, Muslim, and non-white people have less protections in Western spaces with so-called progressive LGBT and human rights protections. As Judith Butler writes, some bodies are politically and socially constructed to be protected or to “minimize precariousness,” whereas other aberrant bodies are not (Butler 2009: 2).

With such a narrow scope of people protected, how does the act of LGBT rights intervention reiterate historic narratives of the East/West binary? I Using LGBT and human rights as a framework for modernizing spaces like Serbia perpetuates Western Exceptionalism and absolves the West from having to look inward and be accountable for their own perpetuations of transphobia, homophobia, white supremacy, and Islamophobia. It also untethers the West from their colonial and imperial histories egregious violations of human rights.

This is not to say that foreign states should not intervene on behalf of human rights, per se. Rather, the *methods* used need to be revisited and reconsidered. As will be discussed in this next section, the power imbalances between internationals and local activists that are created in current neoliberal capitalist development models, fail to meaningfully address LGBT issues in Serbia.

In addition to discussions about the Serbian state and post-conflict governance, activists I interviewed focused significant attention on neoliberalism, particularly on the shifting of government welfare services to private civil society institutions. Based on my interviews I found three resounding themes regarding this shift of responsibility to the private non-profit direct services sector: 1) new forms of tension between government ministries and civil society actors, 2) the dilemma of further dependence on foreign development aid and 3) unexpected consequences of heteronormative institutionalization.

The foreign funding sector in Serbia underwent a major transformation from 2006-2016 due to a number of local and international factors. First, the lifting of sanctions in Serbia following the overthrow of Milošević opened up opportunities for U.S. and other Western European countries to establish local NGO offices in Belgrade. Next, the Eurozone crisis in 2011 and the global recession hit developing economies like Serbia's especially hard. This, along with the devastating floods of 2013 further increased a need for international aid. Additionally, the Obama Administration prioritized funding for human rights programs in transitional states such as Serbia. Thus, USAID became one of the main funders of LGBT initiatives in Serbia 2011-2016. The other key funders of LGBT projects and organizations in the early to mid 2010s include The Netherlands Embassy, International Lesbian and Gay Alliance (ILGA) as well as ILGA Europe, and several smaller foundations from Northern and Western European countries. By mapping the funding from USAID and other international organizations we are better able to see

how global deployment of Western Exceptionalism inform Serbian LGBT politics by requiring top-down policies and strategies which put LGBT Serbs in precarious positions as both global and local subjects.

USAID funding priorities in Serbia break down into two categories: 1. Financial support for entrepreneurship and other private economic models, and 2. Initiatives designed to “strengthen” democracy and human rights. Through USAID funding in these areas, U.S. foreign policy initiatives prioritize the economic shift from reliance on state economic industries towards private business. The move towards developing and funding capitalist enterprises is a common practice for international donors in post-socialist spaces. Tracing the influx of support and dollars from the U.S. shows the concurrent efforts to both (1) liberalize Serbia’s economy and (2) democratize Serbian politics by increasing governmental transparency and supporting human rights initiatives. The simultaneous initiatives demonstrate that human rights efforts are directly linked to a liberalized capitalist economy. The funding organization sets the agenda for what is needed in Serbia. While funders mean well, and have good intentions, many times their priorities and desired outcomes do not align with what organizations on the ground can/want to do. A good example of this is the explicit expectations that LGBT organizations coordinate and cooperate with the state.

For many funders, such as USAID, engaging in state politics and elections via advocacy and lobbying is seen as a way to improve Serbian democracy. However, for

most CBO workers in the LGBT movement, there is very little if any trust, and there is no cooperation with the state. As an informant said, “we might write in some grant that we will work with the state, but that’s just on paper. We will never work with them. They are terrible. Homophobes. As long as Vučić is around there is no change. They might have it on paper, but that’s all.” This statement might come off as dismissive or even dishonest, but it captures the disconnect between what funders want and what LGBT CBOs want to accomplish in post-socialist Serbia. This is also supported by USAID’s claims on their website on Serbian elected official accountability⁸⁴. Actors on the ground have experienced the false promises and blatant disregard for human rights protections in Serbia since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Even prior to the disintegration, many Serbs living in Yugoslavia did not trust the state and were in constant fear of reprisal for dissent. One interviewee laughed when I asked if she thought she could implement a tolerance campaign in the government, saying, “they will only do what EU wants them to. While they’re watching, and when EU leaves, they will go back to the old ways of doing things⁸⁵.” By “old ways” she was referring to cronyism, nepotism, and corruption that was rife in the early post-Yugo and pre-international presence era.

⁸⁴ “DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE” *USAID.gov*. Updated July 31, 2017. Accessed August 8, 2017.

<https://www.usaid.gov/serbia/democracy-human-rights-and-governance>

⁸⁵ Interview with Lejla. September 16, 2016.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Vučić government engages in pinkwashing efforts in order to appease the European Union and distract from other egregious human rights violations, such as the forced displacement of the Roma settlements from Central Belgrade to the outskirts of the city. Another example is the refusal to turn over war criminals from the Bosnian Wars to the Hague. Pinkwashing is also used as a way to show that Serbia is a modern state that promotes LGBT rights even if they refuse to recognize the statehood of Kosovo. The Serbian state's efforts to promote LGBT rights is temporary and contingent on EU oversight. If, for example, Serbia's bid for accession gets withdrawn, there is no indication that the current administration will continue to protect LGBT people. Furthermore, looking at Serbia's close relationship with Russia and Vučić's personal friendship with Vladimir Putin as a possible forecast for what might happen if EU accession is no longer an incentive for protecting LGBT rights.⁸⁶ Speculation aside, the current Serbian government has done little to meaningfully protect and/or promote LGBT rights in Serbia. Expecting CBOs and local LGBT activists to cooperate with an uncooperative administration produces little results while increasing

⁸⁶ For example, a month leading up to the 2016 Serbian national elections, Russian President, Vladimir Putin, hosted Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić in Moscow and threw his full support behind the Serbian leader. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia passed Article 6.21 of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses that criminalizes public displays or "propaganda" of homosexuality in 2016. "Putin Meets with Vučić, Mentions Composition of New Cabinet" *B92*. Updated May 26, 2016, Accessed June 1, 2017.

http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2016&mm=05&dd=26&nav_id=98130

pressures on LGBT organizations. In addition to having unrealistic expectations of state cooperation, international funders are pressuring feminist and LGBT activists to change and abandon successful small-scale projects that produced qualitative results to larger quantitative results-driven initiatives.

Serving as the former Executive Director of the Serbian domestic violence hotline and direct-services provider, SOS Hotline, as well as a prolific lesbian and feminist writer and activist, Lepa Mladjenović explained the tenuous relationship SOS Corpo has had with the EU delegation, the Serbian government, and foreign aid donors. In one of our interviews she said,

The counseling scene is changing throughout the world...especially in Europe, the big funding organizations are now concentrating on our state institutions. All of them. That means European [Union] funds, state funds, all of them... to support other less developed countries. The humanitarian funds are really development funds... They're all in this region especially are concerned about efficient state development... So what does that mean? Also, because of the now liberal capitalism, and the domination of profit above all other values, this effects how these funds are going be written, how they are going to be reported, and uh, where and how they are going to be spent as well. [For example], first, individual empowerment is of no one's concern anymore. So there are no funders that want to give to individual empowerment anymore, they say that the state should be

funding [projects] through the social work centers, and through other different organizations, like ours...⁸⁷

Mladjenović went on to say in her interview that the shift towards sending funds towards the state is an attempt to improve democratization. The hope is that the state will receive funds in order to improve gender equality and human rights, which it will then distribute to civil society. Mladjenović said that this is problematic when they are working to hold the state accountable for its policies regarding domestic violence and women's issues, and yet at the same time they are expected to work amicably with the government. Another problematic aspect of this funding distribution model is that it focuses heavily on quotas and metrics, and as Mladjenović stressed, very little on individual outreach and support. I would add that this model allows the state and funders to both have full discretion over what materials, organizations, and resources are funded, all the while giving civil society and the actors on the ground little to no input on what their communities need.

Bozena Choluj and Claudia Neusuess' research supports Mladjenovic's experiences by discussing the complicated relationships between EU integration and gender mainstreaming in post-socialist/communist European countries (2004). While their study focuses on the broader category of Eastern European countries, their findings

⁸⁷ Interview with Lepa M. September 17, 2016.

are useful when considering the process of accession, EU mandates, and their implications in transitional economies and governments such as Serbia. One of the most striking findings the authors discuss is the emphasis the EU places on civil society actors as being the harbingers of transition and democratization. They write,

Gender equality advocates and groups are increasingly recognized as important agents for social as well as political change in the transition and accession processes. Activities of women's groups have focused on issues ranging from addressing violence against women, protection of women's sexual and reproductive rights, increasing women's participation in political and public life, but more recently, also women's economic rights, including addressing discrimination against women in the labor market, women's equal opportunities in new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), etc. (Choluj and Neusuess 2004: 5).

Interestingly, at the same time that Serbia and the EU are looking to private foundations to aid in the democratization, liberalization, and stabilization of Serbia's political economy and government, there is also a shift in funding implementation and project mandates from funders. State-building and democratization in Serbia by international organizations and governments is intended to create a robust civil society and government relationship. In the case of LGBT organizations, they are encouraged to work with the state to implement programs that can change cultural stereotypes and

misinformation about sexuality and gender. Many funders enthusiastically support projects that require state involvement, such as Belgrade Pride Parade. The logic is that if CBOs can develop strong relationships with the state it will be easier to implement current LGBT-friendly laws as well as create new legislation that further protects the LGBT community. One way international funders are attempting to bridge the gap between CBOs and the state is by having the state serve as the distributors of funds. Money that is earmarked explicitly for LGBT programs is given to the state with explicit directives. The state, in turn, distributes the funds in the form of community grants. International funders, such as the Dutch Embassy and the European Commission, alert LGBT organizations of the funds and ask that they work in partnership with the state. In theory, this strategy is sound. In order to create a strong democracy in Serbia, the people must have access to and hold accountable the state. In practice, though, this strategy is ineffective and the burden falls on the shoulders of the activists and their allies.

Requiring state-cooperation is a two-part problem for those in Serbian civil society: (1) there remains a strong emphasis on relying on international funders and mechanisms to maintain their projects and programs, and at the same time, and (2) these international funders are causing Serbian organizations to shift their focus back to state. Thus, gender mainstreaming and LGBT programs are double-vetted, first by the international workers and funders, and then once more by the state. On the one hand, international funders and aid work to shift services from CBOs and NGOs towards the

state in an attempt to promote democratization. At the same time, the same civil society and NGO organizations that have historically depended on international funding and support are being asked by the international funders to instead apply for grants and money through the state. Thus, organizations are forced to rely on the state to help support and fund their programs while being forced to bend to state demands and censorship. This becomes further problematic when considering that the gender mainstreaming programs that are being implemented have a heteronormative framework. Neoliberal and EU funding reforms have also impacted the oldest lesbian organization in Serbia, Labris, particularly in regards to their efforts to transform Serbian public opinion of LGBT issues.

Nina and Jelena acknowledged the changes in approaches they have been forced to make due to the new focus on working with the state. Over the past six years, Labris has designed and attempted to implement a sexuality education curriculum in the Serbian [public] schools to educate young people about LGBT issues, safe sex, and anti-bullying. In reaction to Labris' project, the state has been uncooperative, denying the group's health advocates access to the high school students, and even threatened to "adjust" their funding if the group attempts to move forward with the trainings. Even though the funding the state is "adjusting" actually comes from international donors who support (at least in name) women's and LGBT projects and organizations, those who are forced to cooperate with the state are also subject to their agendas. In this case, Labris is pressured

to work with a state that fails to implement grassroots LGBT projects that have the potential to disrupt heteronormative cultural practices.

The challenge of balancing the state's demands, funder's policies, and serving your constituency is also felt in direct services organizations, such as the now-defunct youth HIV/AIDS education and service non-profit, Mladin Puls. In our conversations in 2011, the group's executive director, Aleksandr Skundrić, discussed his organization's struggle to both educate the public, provide direct services, and also work through and with the Serbian Ministry of Health, as per the guidelines of one of their main funders, the UN Global Fund. He said, "We're supposed to comply with the millennium goals⁸⁸, but at the same time, we are perceived by the government as working with a dangerous population... the paradox is the problem. We are working with the most marginalized people, and yet we are silenced by xenophobic leaders." Skundrić continued saying that as recipients of UN dollars, they must comply with both UN demands as well as the Serbian government⁸⁹. Therefore, there is little room for accountability of the government

⁸⁸ The UN Millennium Goals are an initiative introduced in 2002, and sponsored by the United Nations to promote projects and initiatives aimed at curbing global poverty, reducing and preventing the spread of disease, such as HIV/AIDS, and promoting gender equality, health, education and environmental stability. For more about the UN Millennium goals visit <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>; "Millennium Development Goals Beyond 2015," *UN.org*. Accessed June 5, 2012. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

⁸⁹ Skundrić interview. July 11, 2011.

itself. Additionally, various outreach campaigns and strategies are forced to be approved by multiple parties, creating a further disconnect and delay for services for those affected.

Since our first interview in 2011, Mladin Puls was forced to shut their doors due to lack of funding and support. Not only did the funding sources dry up, but continuing conflict and general lack of support from the Serbian government made it nearly impossible to continue HIV/AIDS prevention work. Skundrić took a job working as a Project Coordinator for a U.S.-based study abroad program called School for International Training, where he works with a family member and her partner to run the experiential learning program. Skundrić's is one of several millennials in Belgrade who have moved from CBO to CBO as international funding and priorities ebb and flow. The tightknit and small LGBT and human rights community in Serbia, however, often ensures just temporary unemployment for the CBO worker. This creates simultaneous precarity and security for the middle class NGO/CBO professional. On the one hand, funding is constantly being courted and competed for. On the other hand, CBO professionals know that should their program get cut, they will likely shift over to a different organization and a newly funded project. The problem with this form of circulation is it makes for a very insular community. It becomes very hard to "break in" to the field. Additionally, it maintains an imbalance of power between the funding organization and the CBO. It also perpetuates a total disregard for grassroots efforts like those outlined in Chapter Three. The lack CBO engagement with grassroots has led to the development of new solidarities

between activists not affiliated with CBOs and other groups on the left in Serbia. An example of these new alliances is the Savamala protests and solidarity networks.

Savamala Development Project, Ne Davimo Beograd and LGBT Solidarities

In the twilight years of Yugoslavia, the question of class stability and inequality became a major rhetorical and ideological tool for the right wing nationalists Milošević regime. According to first name Meszmann, in 1986 a “Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences,” was released and delineated the economic development breakdown of the various Yugoslav republic, highlighting the economic disparities and inequalities among the republics (Meszmann 2015:673). This memo spurred Slobodan Milošević to use class as a rhetorical device to appeal to Serbian nationalism citing the memo’s assertions that the Serbian labor force had been exploited by more developed republics (namely Croatia and Slovenia). This “melding” of class and nation was an important node in the politics of Yugoslav disintegration, because it was used to heighten ethnic tensions (Jović 2001). Milošević wielded a new class consciousness to bolster his support and force a wedge between Serbia and the more affluent Slovenia and Croatia.

In his 1989 speech at a Gazimestan rally to commemorate the Battle of Kosovo (600 years earlier), Milošević used the moment of ultra-nationalism to further imbricate class and Serb nationalism. Speaking in front of a sea of Serbs, Milošević referenced the original goals of a socialist Yugoslavia, indicating that the current system was steeped in bureaucracy and inequality (Meszmann 2015). Milošević’s speech was designed to

appeal to the blue-collar working class Serb who saw Yugoslavia as a government supporting and protecting unequal economic structures in other republics. Labor activist-turned-scholar, Neca Jovanov wrote that Yugoslavia was comprised of conflicting entities- the blue-collar and politically disenfranchised exploited worker and the giant bureaucracy (Jovanav 1989).

The anti-bureaucratic rhetoric was highly influential to a Serb public who was saw job growth stagnate, economic conditions worsen, and a failing infrastructure. It was the bureaucracy to blame for the stagnated wages and potholes. It was the bureaucracy that enabled job growth in Slovenia, whilst holding other republics like Macedonia and Serbia back. The Yugoslav “bureaucrats” soon became shorthand for the “other” seeking to stifle Serb progress (Meszmann 2015). The anti-bureaucratic populist message helped bolster support for Milošević leading up to and during the 1990s wars. Class was productive in the move towards war, but was also instrumental in the ousting of Milošević. This anti-bureaucracy and nationalist message eventually led to the ousting of Milošević, who by 2000 ironically had become the head of a bureaucratic beast. Blue-collar workers and the working class were instrumental in the ousting of Milošević by taking to the streets and protesting the authoritarian regime. The melding of class and nation that resulted in general anti-bureaucracy sentiment remains in current Serbia. The struggle between class and nationalism is complicated, however, in the case of LGBT activists in Serbia.

The class divisions among activists in the LGBT movements in Serbia are multifaceted and complicated. The CBO workers are comfortably situated in the Middle Class. For many out LGBT individuals seeking work in Serbia, working for an international organization or business is their only option for steady employment. Even though these jobs are well-paying, they are contingent on international support and funding. Reliance on international funds creates a precarious employment situation, because it necessitates continued support and interest from the international community. What happens if and when funding priorities shift away from supporting LGBT initiatives? Will people working for organizations such as Labris, Egal, or Gayten be able to work for CBOs that serve/target other populations? Will LGBT people be forced back into the closet to work for discriminatory employers?

In Serbia's current post-recession economy, employment for the general Serbian public is stagnate. Even in non-CBO industries, there is a lopsided dependency on international corporations. Foreign direct investments (FDI) fuel Serbia's economy, with an estimated \$21 Billion invested since 2007 with the largest number of projects coming from Italy, Germany, and Austria⁹⁰. Openly transgender people are not protected in the country's employment anti-discrimination laws, and many out trans people face

⁹⁰ Reports generated from the IMF tracking Serbia's foreign direct investment (FDI) since 2007 and the RAS Serbian Development Agency database. "Razvojna Agencija Srbije," *Ras.gov.rs*, Updated Spring Quarter 2017. Accessed June 1, 2017. <http://ras.gov.rs/invest-in-serbia/why-serbia/join-the-pool-of-the-successful>

significant difficulties finding employment in most job sectors. According to one interviewee, many transgender women engage in forms of sex work in order to survive.

CBO workers are a particular type of elite middle class who primarily live in urban centers. They earn the same amount of wages as other professionals in the Serbia, such as doctors, engineers, and professors. As one of my neighbors in the traditional neighborhood of Savamala said, “[LGBT rights activists] all have good jobs. Of course they want to keep doing the work and have human rights! They want to keep their jobs!”⁹¹ The desire for steady employment and material stability is understandable. However, LGBT CBO workers face a tricky situation, because the same entities that keep them employed also displace LGBT populations via gentrification. I experienced this phenomenon firsthand when I returned to Belgrade in 2015 after being away for four years.

When I returned to Belgrade in September 2015, the first thing my friend Darko, always one for sarcasm, said was “how do you like our new city? Nice and gentrified, no? Just don’t scratch below the surface.”⁹² Darko’s seemingly flippant comment stuck with me that first week as I walked around my old neighborhood. The waterfront was fenced off and bulldozers were scattered all over the banks of the Sava and the Danube. Just a few feet from the construction sites sat newly renovated warehouse spaces with

⁹¹ Interview with Didi R. January 13, 2016.

⁹² Interview with Darko, September 30, 2015.

high-end restaurants serving everything from sushi to tacos. To the average American, the prominence of global/ethnic cuisine is nothing new. However, for a country that was isolated from global trade and globalization, having numerous high-end restaurants serving non-Serbian dishes is a marker of economic growth in the formerly abandoned warehouse district.

The aggressive economic development of a historical arts and LGBT district and the displacement of people in this area has created new opportunities for solidarity organizing among LGBT activists and leftists in Serbia. The development of the Savamala was predominantly the result of the state selling off prime waterfront real estate to foreign investors primarily from the United Arab Emirates. In addition to the upscale restaurants, there are plans for condominium and hotel construction, and the further development of nightlife and entertainment industry on the waterfront. Several cruise lines, including Norwegian and Princess cruises now include a stop at Savamala on their Eastern European tour down the Danube. The influx of international tourists and investors has been lauded as a success according to government officials. To the Belgradian public, however, the development of Savamala is just another example of corrupt government officials profiting from privatization of Serbia's resources (Mikuš 2016).

The remaining abandoned buildings were ransacked and demolished over night by a group of "masked men" in April 2016. What was initially thought to be "thugs" who

destroyed the old waterfront facades, was later reported to be government-sanctioned demolition workers.⁹³ Activists protesting the gentrification of Savamala suggested that the state sent out masked men rather than a legitimate construction crew to avoid culpability. If a group of “thugs” did it, then the government was not responsible for moving forward with the project amidst major protests. They were just cleaning up the mess made by other parts of the general public.

The Savamala development project represents these three at times competing and other times complementary social movements: nationalist isolationism, environmentalism, and anti-capitalism. The intersection of these three movements have produced strange bedfellows, such as economic nationalists, environmentalists, artists, students, feminists, anti-war activists, and LGBT activists. The results, however, were massive protests in downtown Belgrade, to no avail. Understanding the motivations behind the objection to the development project lends insight to the broader paradoxes affecting social movements, and the left in particular, in Serbia. It also helps demonstrate the broad interests of many LGBT activists in Serbia and that their work goes beyond LGBT rights. Rather, many LGBT activists in Serbia are also working to thwart neoliberal capitalist enterprises such as the Savamala development project. The Savamala

⁹³ Krstic, Emma. “25,000 Attend Savamala Demolitions Protest in Belgrade,” *Balkan Insight*. Updated June 25, 2016. Accessed August 7, 2017. <https://southfront.org/ne-davimo-beograd-or-how-belgrade-resists-its-drowning/>

protests brought with them strange bedfellows as well. Leftists, feminists, LGBT rights activists, environmentalists, and nationalists participated in the organizing and implementing of the protests.

Some nationalists disapprove of the opening of borders and selling off of land to international investors, especially Middle Easterners. Many of the protest signs were pro-Serb and nationalist rhetoric similar to the Islamophobic rhetoric being used in other parts of Europe and the United States. Even some on the left oppose the selling of land to foreign investors, particularly to Middle Easterners. As one of the women I interviewed said, “I’m not against Muslims at all! I’m against selling our land to the Arabs though. Eventually Belgrade will be little Dubai <she laughs>.”⁹⁴ This particular interviewee identifies herself as a feminist and an LGBT ally. She was on the frontlines with Women in Black protesting the wars in the 1990s. She also served as a translator for Bosnian women who survived rape camps and other horrifying violence during the Bosnian War. She is a self-proclaimed progressive feminist. However, the quote above illuminates a form of economic nationalism that is common in Belgrade- the desire to keep Belgrade, and more broadly Serbian, properties and goods in Serbian control. This can be seen as both a form of Serbian nationalism, but it can also be traced back to the days of Yugoslavia and the isolationist economic policies of the Third Way/Non-Alignment

⁹⁴ Interview with Slavica, April 2016.

movement. For many, such as the woman mentioned above, it is important to keep Serbia's economy in Serbian hands.

In addition to a desire to maintain local control over economic resources, many who oppose Savamala development are concerned with the environmental degradation of the waterfront. This is particularly interesting when considering the foreign funders supporting the environmental justice projects have remained silent in the Savamala protests. Funders such as USAID boast environmental initiatives such as promoting cycling and public transportation (and yet, not supporting infrastructure plans like building bike lanes or modernizing Serbia's deteriorating bus system). However, the local actors implementing USAID and other international funders' environmentalist programs, are organizing and protesting Savamala on their own time. The lack of overt/public support for the Savamala protests from the international environmentalist community once shows the disconnect between global and local needs and demands.

Another consequence of the Savamala development project is the destruction of leftists', artists', and LGBT youth's social spaces. During the late 2000s, Savamala's abandoned warehouses and crumbling buildings were inhabited by leftists, LGBT, and artist squatters. Underground cafes, galleries, and clubs were peppered along the banks of the Sava. This artist/activist enclave was something of a safe haven for Belgrade's punks, artists, freaks, and LGBT individuals. The development of Savamala also brought with it the destruction of counter-culture spaces. The two spaces that remained were forced to

register with the city once the development project began, KC Grad- an artist and leftist bar/club/meeting space and Apartman- a once underground gay club. Many LGBT activists about the expressed concern and discomfort about Savamala's transformation. One activist said, "I don't go there anymore. It's not safe. Too many straight people. Too many drunk hooligans⁹⁵." The transformation of the riverfront from an underground club and art scene for those who don't necessarily fit in normative Serbian society to a flashy club and entertainment space for Serbian elites also displaces young people from downtown Old City Belgrade to further outskirts of the city.

Doreen Massey's theorization of space as not just the physical space, but rather as a form of social relations informs my understanding the displacement of LGBT individuals and gentrification of Savamala (Massey 1994). This is further crystalized by considering the significance and ideological underpinnings of public space in socialist Yugoslavia. Mandić writes that space and access to shelter was a public right, rather than a commodity and potential investment (Mandić 2009). It was the responsibility of the state to provide and protect space for people to inhabit- both in terms of housing and also in public parks/squares/promenades. Hirt writes that under socialism, Central and Eastern European states had more state-designated and protected green space than their Western European counter-parts (Hirt 2016: 125). Following the collapse of socialism in CEE,

⁹⁵ Interview with Draga November 2015.

there was a rush to sell off many public parks and green spaces for development (Hirt 2016). The majority of developers were foreign investors looking to make money in a relatively untapped market (ibid). This rush was slightly delayed in Serbia due to the Yugoslav wars and subsequent international sanctions. In any case, the Serbian government sold off significant amounts of public land to foreign investors in the mid-2000s and continuing into the 2010s. Developing the formerly public spaces in Serbia is part of the development and modernization plan for Serbia. If we are to consider that space is a social relation, and furthermore that it was considered a human right in the former Yugoslavia, the selling off of Savamala land to private foreign investors represents a denial of public use.

Ne Davimo and Imagined Queer Solidarities

Savamala has served as a rallying cry for leftist and anti-corruption activists to join together in protest of the development project, forming the group Ne Davimo Beograd (“Don’t Drown Belgrade”). Ne Davimo Beograd has organized numerous anti-gentrification actions ranging from street art protests to massive demonstrations. Many of Belgrade’s LGBT activists are members of Ne Davimo Beograd, and see their work with the anti-gentrification campaign as complimentary to their work to promote LGBT rights and safety. During numerous interviews with LGBT, leftist, and women’s rights activists,

the subject of gentrification and development of the waterfront regularly came up⁹⁶. One activist said, “the left struggles to get the public engaged. Except with Savamala. Everyone wants to protest Savamala because of Islamophobia, the polluting of the waterfront, and Vučić’s corruption. It has all three.”⁹⁷ This statement crystalizes the unlikely solidarity networks that have emerged around Savamala, and the left’s desire to capitalize on the public’s interest. The Ne Davimo protests, with their vibrant giant rubber duckies⁹⁸ as the mascot for the movement, are bringing Serbs together in the struggle against aggressive privatization and the disappearance of public space.

⁹⁶ Interviews with Darko, Tina, Nina, Slavica, and Ivan.

⁹⁷ Interview with Ivan, March 4, 2016.

⁹⁸ “Another protest held in Belgrade over Savamala demolitions” *B92*. September 30, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017.
http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&dd=30&nav_id=99353
Web.



Figure 10: Ne Davimo Beograd Protest in June 2016. Photo credit Marko Rupena.

Finally, Serbia's leftist activists are using Savamala as an organizing and recruitment tool. In my interview with a lesbian activist⁹⁹, she said that the Savamala development project is opposed by the majority of Belgradians, and is a great starting point to build back a grassroots left. Another leftist activist, a straight cisgender man who identifies as an LGBT ally said, "I haven't seen people take to the streets like this since the war. This will be the younger generation's biggest fight! We must stop corruption

⁹⁹ Interview with Nina November 2015 and September 2016.

brought on by capitalism!”¹⁰⁰ If we consider Massey’s theory of public space as a social relation, then what was Savamala- the people’s river banks- continues to serve as a social relation in that people are still linked to one another by the space. Rather than walking the banks of the river or smoking cigarettes and drinking wine in one of the speakeasies or informal cafes, Belgradians from all walks of life are joining together in the *public* square to protest the loss of Savamala. This form of local protest and unlikely solidarity networks is the type of work many LGBT activists want to continue to engage in. Rather than working with a failed state that uses pinkwashing to distract from human rights abuses, corruption, and aggressive privatization efforts, activists are organizing in solidarity with leftists, students, and the broader Serb public to oppose the mechanisms that enable the corruption and failed government.

In a Post-Yugo, post-socialist, and post- Milošević era, Serbia’s economy has undergone significant shifts from an inward focused socialist economy to a neoliberal capitalist economy that relies on international money in order to sustain its transition. This chapter outlined both the for-profit and non-profit tethers to foreign aid and the problematic strings attached to said funding. Current development strategies have created a double-bind for LGBT activists and organizations. They rely on this money in order to sustain their work, but the directives force them to work with a corrupt and homophobic

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ivan March 2016.

government. While LGBT and feminist CBO workers might attend their 9-5 and attempt to work with the government, they also organize and do outreach with anti-gentrification activists in their spare time.

The Savamala development project is just one neighborhood in a small city in a small country in Eastern Europe. The lessons we can take, however, from the resistance movement have resounding effects. In order to improve the lives of LGBT individuals in Serbia (and beyond), activists engage in actions and issues that go beyond the silo of LGBT issues. The Savamala district represents the erosion of public space and social relations. It also represents the Serbian government's willingness to sell off valuable natural resources for profit. The resistance to privatization of public space compliments other anti-corruption, anti-capitalist, and anti-Vučić work.

Chapter 6: Conclusion-Ana Brnabić, Pinkwashing, and the Future of Serbian LGBT

Rights

Towards the end of this project, the Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, announced the appointment of an out lesbian to serve as his predecessor, making headlines worldwide. As he transitioned from Prime Minister to President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić selected Ana Brnabić to serve as the incoming Prime Minister of Serbia.¹⁰¹ Brnabić, a relative newcomer to Serbian politics and political protégé of Vučić's, took office on June 29, 2017. She is the first woman to serve as Prime Minister in Serbia. She is also the second out lesbian to serve as a head of government, and one of a handful of openly gay heads of states worldwide.¹⁰² The news of Brnabić's appointment was praised by the international community as a step towards a progressive gay rights agenda. It symbolizes a shift in LGBT politics in Serbia. It flips the barbaric and homophobic Serb narrative on its head. Her appointment sends a message to local and

¹⁰¹ Earlier in this dissertation, I talk about the significance of Brnabić's meteoric rise in Serbian politics. In Chapter three, I discuss Vucic's appointment of Brnabic to serve as the Minister of Domestic Affairs. Chapter four examines Brnabic's role as the first out lesbian politician to hold office and the reactions to her leadership from the LGBT community. I also discuss her tepid support of the Belgrade Gay Pride Parade in 2016.

¹⁰² Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir was the first out lesbian to serve as head of government. She served as the Icelandic Prime Minister, 2009-2013. The other LGBT heads of state are Elio Di Rupo (Belgium), Xavier Bette (Luxembourg), Leo Varadkar (Ireland).

global proponents of LGBT rights that Serbia is making strides to protect them. That said, Brnabić's appointment to Prime Minister is not without complications and problems, especially considering that the party she serves is the party of Milosevic.

This chapter uses the case study of the new Serbian Prime Minister, Ana Brnabić to revisit the main arguments of my project. Throughout this work, I argue that the interconnectedness between the Serbian anti-war efforts in the 1990s and current LGBT activism sheds new light and understanding of homonationalism and pinkwashing. The activist strategies, community building, anti-toxic masculinity, and wariness of international intervention have created new ways to resist homonationalism and pinkwashing. There are lessons that can be learned from the Serbian LGBT context. This project interrogates said lessons by highlighting the possibilities and complications that arise when resisting state-sanctioned homonationalism, pinkwashing, toxic masculinity, and neoliberal privatization.

I conclude this work with the case study of Prime Minister Brnabić because it is a blatant example of the cooptation of LGBT rights in order to promote an illiberal regime. How does the Brnabić case fit with the other issues brought up in this dissertation? This chapter explains how the Brnabić case is linked to each chapter's main arguments. I begin with a description and analysis of the appointment of Prime Minister Brnabić, followed by a reiteration of my main arguments and how they resonate with the Brnabić case.

Prime Minister Brnabić: LGBT Progress?

Whether Brnabić will be able to distance herself from Vučić and assert her own political agenda remains to be seen. Despite being lauded as a gain for LGBT rights in Europe, and in particular the Balkans, LGBT activists and Vučić's opposition in Serbia view the appointment as an effort to pinkwash and distract from Vučić's illiberal power grab. Many pundits and thinkers view this as an attempt for Vučić's party to garner support from the international community whilst degrading Serbian democracy.¹⁰³

There are three important factors that support claims of pinkwashing with Brnabić's appointment- the timing of her nomination, her connection to Milosevic and Russia, and her deemphasizing her lesbianism for the Serbian public. First, we must consider the timing of Brnabić's nomination, which came on the heels of a controversial Serbian special election- the third in less than four years.

The April 2017 special election was met with significant protests from the Serbian public. Many saw the election as an attempt to weaken the democratic process and move towards an autocracy. The special election resulted in then-Prime Minister Vučić transitioning to the position of the Serbian President. What was once a ceremonial

¹⁰³ The Serbian political scientist, Boban Stojanovic (not to be confused with the Serb LGBT activist), argues that Vucic's transition to President has been in the making since the Serbian opposition party began to garner support in early 2017. Stojanovic, Boban and Fernando Casal Bértoa. 2017. "Serbia's prime minister just became president. What's wrong with this picture?" *The Washington Post*. April 4, 2017. Print.

title (the role of the presidency) has shifted since Vučić's April 2017 election. Now, instead of parliament and the Prime Minister setting policy agendas, the ruling party, SNS, defers to the office of the President. The shift in power has caused alarm among opposition parties as well as with the European Union delegates overseeing Serbia's EU accession.¹⁰⁴

SNS's historic ties to authoritarian regimes, such as Milosevic as well as Serbia's warm relations with Russia are irrefutable and warrant interrogation. The selection of Brnabić for Prime Minister is an attempt to assuage and/or distract European Union officials. As mentioned earlier in this work, Brnabić is a relative newcomer to Serbian politics and is seen as an outsider to many in Serbia. She was educated in the UK, and spent many years working abroad. For the most part, Brnabić is considered an outsider in Serbian LGBT activist circles. When she was first tapped to work for Vučić, most of my informants had never even heard of her. As Tina said, "No one knows who she is. Some Westerner I assume."¹⁰⁵ Her outsider status has not endeared herself to the LGBT

¹⁰⁴ In December 2016, the EU delegation overseeing Serbia's accession and transition drafted a report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs voicing their concern regarding the degradation of Serbian democracy and the collapse of an independent parliament, free media, and thriving democracy. "DRAFT REPORT on the 2016 Commission Report on Serbia," 2016/2311(INI), (19 December 2016), available from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARL&reference=PE-594.161&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=01europarl.europa.eu>.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Tina October 2016.

community. However, Brnabić seems to have little to no interest in connecting with the LGBT community in Serbia.

When she first entered political life in Serbia her sexuality was contradictorily downplayed *and* emphasized depending on the audience. When interviewed by the Serbian media, Brnabić deemphasizes her sexuality. However, when engaging with international diplomats, press, and representatives, her sexuality is for the most part front and center in the discourse. In other words, her being a lesbian is used as a strategic tool to situate herself and her party as progressive, but only when it is politically useful. When she is interacting with more conservative groups, such as the Serbian media, she distances herself from LGBT issues. Koen Sloomaeckers calls this tactical Europeanisation.¹⁰⁶ An example from earlier in this work is her attendance at the 2016 Belgrade Gay Pride Parade, and Brnabić's quiet participation in the march.¹⁰⁷

The appointment of Brnabić is one of many examples of LGBT rights being used to promote Serbia's political elites' agenda. In earlier chapters, I chart the precarious

¹⁰⁶ In his white paper, Sloomaecker argues that the appointment of Brnabic was a deliberate move to appease EU member states. He also claims that Serbia's support of LGBT rights is a form of homonationalism and is disingenuous. Sloomaecker, Koen. 2017. Tactical Europeanisation: Why Serbia's decision to appoint an openly gay PM is no great leap forward for LGBT rights," *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, Updated July 17, 2017. Accessed August 7, 2017. Available from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2017/06/18/serbias-decision-to-appoint-an-openly-gay-pm-is-no-great-leap-forward-for-lgbt-rights/>

¹⁰⁷ Chapter five.

position LGBT activists find themselves in as they negotiate competing local, national, and international interests. The state uses said pro-LGBT rights initiatives to cover up or pinkwash other human rights infringements, such as the public support of politicians that spew homophobic rhetoric, the emphasis on preserving the Serbian family, the displacement of LGBT and Roma people from city centers, the political alignment with authoritarian states such as Russia's Putin regime, and the refusal to work directly with LGBT activists. I liken this incompatibility of values to the old adage, "I can't be homophobic, I have a gay friend." It is insufficient for there to be laws on the books, while *all* LGBT people still cannot move through Serbia with the same amount of security and productivity as straight Serbs. In addition to illuminating how the state uses pinkwashing, my project also explores how Serbian LGBT activists resist homophobia and homonationalism through grassroots organizing, such as with the Lavender Spring, Lesbian Week, and the Lesbian Caravan.

Brnabić, Lesbian Feminists, and Resisting Toxic Masculinist Agendas

In Chapter Three I give a detailed account of LGBT activists, and in particular, feminist lesbians' work to foster women-centered communities, which are oftentimes in conflict with both the state and the international community. Serbian lesbian feminists' organizing is important to highlight, because it works both alongside and outside homonationalist state initiatives. Lavender Spring organizers, Lesbian Caravaners, and other feminist lesbian activists in Serbia work with CBOs (such as Labris) to engage the

grassroots lesbian communities. Feminist lesbian activists regularly attend and serve on Labris and state-sponsored panels and events. Some, such as Lepa Mladjenović and Zorica Mršević serve on Labris's board of directors and steering committees. These same women, however, work outside of CBOs and state collaboration to provide women-only spaces designed to empower other women and resist homonationalism and homophobia.

One cannot overlook the connections between the feminist women-only spaces during the war and the women-only lesbian spaces in contemporary Serbia. Women, like Lepa Mladjenović, organized safe spaces for survivors of war-related atrocities during and following the 1990s wars. Women-only spaces were necessary to create safe spaces for survivors to grieve, seek counseling, and recover from extreme sexual violence at the hands of soldiers. The same women who provided direct services to survivors of war-related sexual violence are organizing women-only spaces with younger generations of feminist lesbians in Serbia to empower the lesbian community. In addition to hosting women-only teach-ins, consciousness raising, and other forms of grassroots trainings, feminist lesbians and Serbia are engaging in other forms of resistance to homophobia. Feminist lesbians create community through recreation activities such as weekly lesbian pickup soccer games, queer tango nights, and production of lesbian art, graffiti, and zines. Feminist lesbians' work in Serbia adds contour and depth to Serbia LGBT activism by resisting toxic masculinity and state homophobia and homonationalism. As mentioned in Chapter Three, having women-only events and spaces pushes against the international

funders' desires for gender-integrated events. It is a form of resistance to international mandates and intervention.

Women-only spaces bring into light conversations around toxic masculinity and power in the LGBT movement in Serbia. Critiques of toxic masculinity and patriarchy inject a feminist perspective into LGBT work in Serbia. The irony of Prime Minister Brnabić, an out-lesbian, serving as the figurehead of the party of Milosevic is resounding. Her appointment demonstrates an even greater need for the merging of LGBT politics and feminism in Serbia. There needs to be a public conversation about how toxic masculinity is an insidious factor in promoting nationalism. There also needs to be a larger conversation among LGBT activists about the legacy of the war, Serbia's sordid history with authoritarian regimes, and how Brnabić is not necessarily "progress" if her role is to be the token queer puppet of Vučić's regime. Feminist lesbians in Serbia are shifting their focus to Brnabić, but this work is still in its nascent stage.

In addition to shifting their gaze towards Brnabić, feminist lesbian activists are continuing to work in solidarity with anti-war, leftist, and anti-nationalist activists in Serbia. They are attempting to do so via outreach and education to the larger LGBT community. It is not too surprising that the same women theorizing and resisting gender-based violence during the Balkan Wars are integrating similar critiques of Serbia's LGBT movement. It is also unsurprising Serbia's history of socialism and international interventionism is once more emerging in LGBT activists' work, particularly in the Ne

Davimo Beograd solidarity work and anti-privatization efforts outlined in Chapter Five. The next two sections discuss Serbia's economic and social transitions, homonationalism and pinkwashing, and how activists resist new forms (and old) forms of oppression in post-war and postsocialist Serbia.

Post-war and Post-socialist Transitions, Homonationalism, and Pinkwashing

Both Chapters Four and Five chart the impacts post-socialist privatization, government corruption, and Western democratization efforts have had on LGBT movements in Serbia. In Chapter Four, I examine how the Serbian government and the international community use LGBT Pride Parades as a litmus of Serbian democracy. I also examine the depoliticization of LGBT activism in Serbia and state pinkwashing. Ana Brnabić made her international debut as an out Serbian elected official at the 2016 Pride Parade. Even though her role as Minister for Administration and Local Government did not explicitly interact with LGBT issues, then-Minister Brnabić attended the march acting as a surrogate for the Vučić administration.¹⁰⁸

However, despite the fact that she was the first openly gay minister in Serbia, Brnabić declined to speak at the event and simply attended. Her participation at the 2016

¹⁰⁸ Dragoljo, Sasa. "LGBT Activists March with Politicians for Belgrade Pride." *Balkan Insight*. Updated September 18, 2016. Accessed June 1, 2017. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/third-belgrade-pride-parade-passed-without-incidents-09-18-2016>

Pride Parade was ceremonial at best, and an attempt to show tacit support for the LGBT community on behalf of the Vučić regime. There is significant concern that her new appointment could be similar to that 2016 parade appearance, only now on a larger scale. As mentioned earlier, her role as the first woman and lesbian Prime Minister will be simply as a surrogate for the SNS and Vučić regime's policies, as Serbia continues to transition from a post-socialist and post-war space.

Chapter Four discusses the depoliticization, homonationalism, and pinkwashing of Belgrade Pride Parade. I argue that the root cause of the depoliticization is the cooptation of pride by the state, the international community's failure to engage activists on the ground, and the misogyny and transphobia on the part of parade organizers. Building on the work of Jasbir Puar, William Spurlin, and Chandra Mohanty, I argue that all of these efforts have served to perpetuate a particular homonationalist agenda and pinkwashes LGBT politics in Serbia. I compare the 2010 clashes with anti-gay violent protesters to the festive and apolitical 2016 parade. Furthermore, I assert that clashes have emerged between LGBT activists due to perceived elitism, foreign involvement, and elitism.

The state, under Vučić, is a flawed implementer of LGBT rights initiatives, as it continues to have direct links to ultra-right nationalist groups, aligns itself with homophobic heads of states such as Vladimir Putin, and weakens Serbian democracy. It also uses pro-LGBT rhetoric to distract from illiberal policies and corruption. To comply

with EU accession mandates, the Serbian state disingenuously supports pro-LGBT initiatives while simultaneously failing to create meaningful change for LGBT people living in Serbia. Yet, the alternative to the state- international intervention- is also fraught with competing strategies- work within the system or outside the system- to achieve LGBT rights. On the one hand, international entities, such as the European Union, in an attempt to promote democracy, try to work *with* the state to promote LGBT rights.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, the same international outsiders fund and support activists on the ground working to *resist* and fight particular homophobic politicians.

Ana Brnabić's new role as Prime Minister has the potential to further divide the LGBT community, because she represents a party and government that have done very to protect LGBT people, especially women, refugees, Roma and transgender people. With Brnabić as the state figurehead, political and international elites could potentially ignore the underserved and underrepresented LGBT people in Serbia. In other words, having a gay head of state could actually hurt LGBT rights.

Finally, Chapter Four spends a significant time critiquing Western intervention and imperialism. This is not to say that we should get rid of international support per se. Rather, we must be thoughtful and reflective about what role outsiders should play in Serbian politics. This is especially true in the Serbian context because the current

¹⁰⁹ As detailed in Chapter Four.

supporters of LGBT rights in Serbia are from governments that bombed Belgrade and other parts of Serbia during the Balkan and Kosovo Wars. In order to make lasting and meaningful change for the better, the international community needs to be more deferential to LGBT activists on the ground. They also need to let LGBT activists in Serbia set policy agendas and initiatives. That means that if activists have little faith in their head of state (even if she *is* a lesbian), outside supporters need to listen and take heed, rather than prop up the Serbian state as pro-LGBT rights.

In Chapter Five, I analyze the economic, social, and cultural transitions that are taking place in Serbia. I discuss the shift from an inward-facing socialist economy to a neoliberal capitalist global economy. I trace Serbia's economic rise and decline in the post-war and post-socialist era. I use a political economist approach to chart the lasting effects neoliberal privatization have on the LGBT community in Serbia. I suggest that Serbia's economic transition has created dependency on for-profit and non-profit foreign entities, creating an anti-globalization backlash for Serbs. Additionally, I analyze how state-cronyism, corruption, and class divisions have emerged in post-war and post-socialist Serbia, resulting in tensions within the LGBT activist and non-profit communities.

Serbia's new Prime Minister has assured the public that she will move forward with the country's plan to join the EU. The government has also made overtures to foreign investors that they plan to continue to privatize Serbia's industries. Regardless of

her sexuality, Ana Brnabić will continue to promote conservative policies that will make political elites richer. This will continue to cause fissures within Serbian society, especially among the right and the left.

I argue that new alliances are forming between LGBT activists and the left in response to neoliberal democratization efforts. LGBT activists in Serbia are wary of increasing class divisions, international economic exploitation, and the states' complacency with privatization. There is simultaneously a nostalgia for Yugoslav socialism and also a desire for EU integration in order to protect LGBT rights. This conflict between the past and future creates productive tensions within the LGBT movement. The tensions produce conversations of inequity and oppression in talks of EU integration within Serbia's LGBT community. By foregrounding critiques of class and international economic development in discussion of LGBT liberation in Serbia, activists are building new alliances with the left. They are also connecting with the broader Serbian public, which is wary of economic transition. These strange bedfellows- the anti-interventionists, economic nationalists, leftists, and LGBT activists- are creating new possibilities for solidarity work. However, anti-interventionism and economic nationalism solidarity work also have the potential to produce a new form of homonationalism in Serbia. This remains to be seen, and will likely continue to percolate as the future of the European Union and the stability of the Eurozone continue to be in flux.

Homonationalism, Pinkwashing, and Post-War Legacies

The Serbian state and the international community's intersecting histories of war, peace, post-socialism, and nation-building created a climate in which homonationalist policies and pinkwashing emerge. In order for LGBT communities in Serbia to achieve security, freedom, and access to the same rights as straight people, the state and general public must resist nationalist tendencies. There needs to be recognition of Serbia's roles in the Balkan Wars, but also the international community's violent interventions in the forms of bombs, sanctions, and aggressive privatization efforts. Both the state and the international community must recognize their shared violent roles in the Balkan Wars and how this conflict residually affects LGBT and feminist activists today. This acknowledgement will help change the nationalist and isolationist climate that perpetuates homophobia in Serbia. A working understanding of how the Balkan conflicts affect contemporary LGBT politics is imperative.

My dissertation charted links between the anti-war movements and contemporary LGBT activism. I explain the fissures within the movement and explore their origins—namely, cooperation with a corrupt and nationalist state, misogyny, and the rise of a CBO middle class. I also consider the subversive strategies grassroots LGBT activists use in order to resist class, homophobic, and gender violence. Serbia expands and deepens understandings of homonationalism precisely because of its anti-war and postsocialist history which has shaped contemporary LGBT activism.

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