Patriotically Queer: LGBTQ Activist Strategies in Belgrade

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Abstract:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) rights activists in Serbia must contend with strong anti-LGBTQ attitudes and, at times, episodes of violence. Many Serbians who hold anti-LGBTQ attitudes view non-heteronormative behavior wrong, backward, immoral, etc. The people who work in the field of LGBTQ activism must navigate through this anti-LGBTQ environment to accomplish their stated goals and objectives. Faced with nationalist opposition that ignores the legitimacy of LGBTQ rights, these activists tend to reach out to international actors for assistance. In doing so, activists may alienate the local populations. Activists must then negotiate between the domestic and the international. This thesis serves to examine LGBTQ activism and to understand the strategies that activists implement to achieve these goals and continue their work. Based on over five months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with LGBTQ activists, I argue that activists take pragmatic approaches to their activism that may be critiqued as homonormative or even supported by homonationalist stances from international actors. My research draws from draws from literature on gender and nationalism, NGO-ization, homonormativity, homonationalism, and social movement theory in order to understand these complexities within these decisions. I claim that activists work with the resources available to them, and they position themselves in ways that they believe are most productive. I suggest we reexamine our critiques of activist initiatives in order to understand what goes behind activists' decision making and to acknowledge the precarious situation in which they work.

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Chapter 1:

Patriotically Queer

In one of my first interviews during the fieldwork for this thesis, I sat across the table from an LGBTQ activist discussing her involvement with various organizations during an activist career spanning 20 years and drinking traditional domaća kafa (Turkish coffee). Near the end of the interview I asked her opinions about Serbian nationalism. She sipped her coffee and told me, "I don't consider myself part of the Serbian nation really. I belong to the Queer Nation. And I'm very patriotic."

During my fieldwork, I encountered many similar attitudes from Belgrade lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer (hereafter LGBTQ)[1] activists about their relationships to Serbia, the nation, the state, and their fellow citizens. These activists desired to make changes to Serbia that would welcome LGBTQ citizens without hesitation. It was these conversations that made me question how activists understand their work and how they do such high-risk activism in a country where the majority of people view homosexuality as wrong. While trying to find other research looking into these strategies, I failed to find studies that focused on the strategies of LGBTQ activists. Instead, much of the academic literature on LGBTQ rights in Serbia and the post-Yugoslav space concentrates on human rights policy and on the Serbian state's failure to protect LGBTQ people. This thesis seeks to contribute an ethnographic study of LGBTQ activist strategies in Belgrade.

[1] I understand that the acronym describing various non-heterosexual and non-binary sexualities and gender identities is complex and various researchers use variations of the acronym. I use LGBTQ because it was the most common in conversations with activist informants. I also use the term trans* to indicate the multitude of gender identities that often gets lumped into the term transgender, which was supported by a trans* activist informant.

Shane Phelan (2001) argues that when citizens are not protected by the state, they the state does not recognize them as actual citizen. With the lack of protection of LGBTQ people in Serbia, they are positioned in Serbian society as "strangers," not completely foreign, but still slightly unknown (ibid.). She states that "[s]trangers, like other excluded groups, are likely to share some norms with those who exclude them; this is especially likely for sexual strangers whose 'home' culture is the one that rejects them" (ibid, 83). Moreover, the stranger is always in a precarious position, "never fully inside nor fully outside" (ibid, 113). In Serbia, LGBTQ people are positioned against the traditions of the Serbian nation while at the same time are not seen as fully European, only as strangers. Yet, in the relationship with Europe, the European Union (hereafter EU) recognizes them more and more, which enables LGBTQ activists in Serbia to request and fight for their rights as Serbian citizens.

1.1 Serbia and LGBTQ Rights: Pride as a Proxy

As part of my fieldwork I volunteered with Labris, a lesbian human rights group, on a conference entitled "The Future Belongs to Us: LGBT Rights on the Road to the European Union" (hereafter referred to as "The Future Belongs to Us" conference). Using the language of the LGBTQ conference's title, Serbia is "on the road" to the EU. The country's government has been in official talks to join the EU since 2007. Though homosexuality was decriminalized in 1994, sexual orientation and gender identity rights have been marred in controversy. Domestic and international human rights groups and organizations criticize the Serbian state's relationship to the LGBTQ population,

claiming the Serbian state operates within an anti-LGBTQ[2] stance. The population in Serbia has often been cited as largely anti-LGBTQ (Barlovać 2014). We can see this issue through the various attempts by LGBTQ rights activists to organize Pride Parades and the state's weak implementation of anti-discrimination laws.

With the fall of state socialism, an increase of so-called traditional values and gender roles took place (Helms 2013), and LGBTQ rights activists attempted to secure better protections during this transition. In 2002, activists were able to get Parliament to approve a law prohibiting discrimination in the media, and then in 2005, a law banning employment discrimination based on sexual orientation—though this is still widely seen as not being implemented appropriately. Parliament passed a broader anti-discrimination law against prejudice on the grounds of sexual orientation in 2009, though gender identity was left out of these laws. In 2012, however, sexual orientation and gender identity were included in the new definition of what constitutes a hate crime. These policies have helped to create a potentially safer and more welcoming society for LGB people, while the Serbian government and police have been criticized over implementation of the laws with their efforts called "insufficient" by EU reporting (European Commission 2014, 45). Regardless of the policies in place, the EU has continued to push for better application of these policies in Serbia. Furthermore, the EU has pressed Serbian authorities "for a consistent and visible political commitment to promoting a culture of respect towards the [LGBTQ] community" and to create a better record of investigations of threats and violence toward LGBTQ activists (European Commission, 2014, 13, 48).

[2] I use anti-LGBTQ here instead of homophobia or anti-gay in order to illustrate the various negative attitudes associated with non-heteronormative behavior including sexuality and gender identity expression.

As issues with implementation exist, so too does the protection of LGBTQ-themed events like Pride. Labris, a lesbian human rights group, led the organizing the first Pride Parade in 2001, during the receding of a turbulent time in Serbia. In 2000, the Slobodan Milosević regime was ousted by what is known as the Bulldozer Revolution, where thousands of Serbian citizens came out to denounce Milosević and his dictatorship-like government. Bilić and Stubbs (forthcoming) and Blagojević (2011) claim that the Labris activists did not calculate the potential repercussions of organizing Pride and misjudged the seemingly euphoria of democracy that swept through Serbia after the fall of Milosević. This Pride was met with much hostility and violence, sending over 40 participants to the hospital. However, in recent years Serbian LGBTQ activists have been able to work with the government to implement legislation that protects lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people, with many protections for trans* people still lacking.

Within the last 13 years, Pride Parades, often considered sorts of 'litmus tests' for LGBTQ rights in the region, have only been successfully organized three times, with two of those times (in 2001 and in 2010) being met with violent anti-Pride protestors, numbering in the thousands. Activist friends told me that these events "looked like a war was happening in the middle of Belgrade." My informants often commented that in recent years, the situation for LGBTQ people has drastically improved while remaining uncertain about the future, citing a growing nationalist movement and a government with ties to Milosevic's regime.

1.2: Outline of Thesis

This thesis serves to examine LGBTQ activism and to understand the strategies that activists implement to achieve their goals. I argue that activists work with the resources available to them and that they position themselves in ways that allows them to connect in some ways with the largely anti-LGBTQ public. This thesis draws from literature on gender and nationalism, NGO-ization, homonormativity, homonationalism, and social movement theory. Chapter 2 discusses the theory, data collection, and methodology implemented during my fieldwork and its analysis. The next chapter, Chapter 3, moves to discuss the activists' usage of homonormative approaches to their work. Here, I argue that such approaches are used because of the conservative views of gender and sexuality many Serbian have. In taking a homonormative approach that minimizes the questioning of these views, activists seek to make affective connections with their audience in the hopes of warming attitudes towards largely LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) Serbians. In Chapter 4, I explore activists' relationships with international actors. I suggest that these international actors bring a homonationalist positioning to their work in Serbia. However, I show that activists still find these actors to be the most useful partners in their work due to the rejection of LGBTQ rights as a legitimate concern by the Serbian government as well as the population in general. I conclude by discussing future research endeavors, highlighting the need for more ethnographic work on the subject and a better understanding of how LGBTQ activists relate with the population they supposedly represent.

Chapter 2:

Theory, Methods, and Activism

The academic literature on LGBTQ rights in the region of former Yugoslavia has not developed in ways such as studies of ethno-nationalism, conflict studies, and the like. Much of the research in these subjects have not included the studies of sexualities. However, there have been recent developments in this area. Irene Dioli (2011) has written about the globalization and Europeanization of lesbian rights activism in Serbia and BiH. Liselotte van Velzen (2011) has provided an analysis of LGBTQ-identifying youth through in-depth interviews, studying their own understanding of their sexualities. Nicole Butterfield (2013) has contributed an in-depth look into the discourses of LGBTQ activism in Croatia and Katja Kahlina (2014, 2013) has provided an insight into the sexual politics in Croatia as well. In his ethnographic study of gay men in Macedonia, Sasho Lambevski (1999) investigates the ethnic dimensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians on the gay scene in Skopje. Čarna Brković (2014) has written on LGBTQ rights legitimacy in Montenegro and the ways in which activists articulate their work. Their approach to their work has been interdisciplinary with a focus on human rights frameworks and policy. Research is underway by academics such as Bojan Bilic, Sanja Kajnic, amongst others who are detailing the histories and the current work of LGBTQ activism in the post-Yugoslav space. Koen Slootmaeckers has been working on the perception EU integration process in Croatia and Serbia. Kevin Moss (2014) in the context of Split Pride in Croatia (2014). This thesis seeks to contribute to these strands of literature while focusing on activist strategies in Serbia through the use of ethnography.

In this section I give an overview on the literature used for this thesis, while interrogating what remains to be studied.

2.1 Gender, Nation, and the State

I begin this analysis by briefly detailing the discussions of nationalism and gender in a general sense before moving to more regional texts. The "imagined community" of the nation (Anderson 2006 [1983]) has been popularly discussed in the region by anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists. Often overlooked by more popular academic literature, though, are studies of gender and nationalism. Researchers who have written on gender and nationalism have focused predominately on heterosexual women (and thus heterosexual men). Peering through popular nationalism studies journals and conference proceedings, gender and nationalism is often. This of course does not mean that no research has been done, and there have been significant contributions to the field of gender and nationalism (see Yuval-Davis 1997, Nagel 1998, Bracewell 2000, Mayer 2000, amongst others).

In the post-Yugoslav space, literature has been developed to address the ways in which women are incorporated into the nationalist machine. Elissa Helms, for instance, has provided significant analysis of how women in BiH have become reproducers of nationalist ideologies as well as the ways in which the gendered logics of nationalism permeate post-war BiH (Helms 2013, 2014). Helms examines the uses of the notions of victimhood in nationalist affairs, and how representations of women feed into the nationalist discourses in the country (2013). Further, she also discusses how feminist activists in BiH understand and confront these representations of women. Dubravka Žarkov has also contributed important work in understandings of gender within the post-

war Yugoslav space and the representations of gender during and after the war by providing a book on the gendered aspects of media surrounding the wars in the 1990s (2007). She provides important recognition that wartime rape consisted of violence against woman and men, casting a light on the often underreported instances of rape of men.

The focus on gender and nationalism in Serbia has focused on the masculine nature of this nationalism. Wendy Bracewell has contributed to the discussion by arguing that nationalism studies have acted as if masculinities are static and unchanging, and further notes that it was the gendered make up of the discourses around politics and war that created such strong nationalism in the first place (2000, 578). Anthropologist Jessica Greenberg has also contributed to this scholarship in her analysis of the changing masculinity prized in Serbian politics (2006). My research feeds into this literature in my analysis of how LGBTQ rights activism is rejected by the heterosexist, masculine, Serbian nationalists because it does not adhere to traditional gender logics.

2.2 Queering Nationalism Studies and Investigating Homonationalism

Scholars have begun to examine how nationalism and sexuality interact within the globalized world. Inspired by post-colonial theory, some scholars have turned to asking how ideas of morality are formed within so-called "universal" human rights activism, which includes LGBTQ rights. The literature discussed in this section focuses on the relationship between the nation and understandings of sexuality, and how queer bodies might be understood as a threat to the nation itself. George Mosse (1985) wrote how nationalism and sexuality are intimately connected, concentrating on the respectability politics surrounding homosexuality. V. Spike Peterson (1999) argues that nationalism is

inherently heterosexist, and Jasbir Puar suggests the reasoning that homosexuality is understood as instability to the nation:

> If, according to binaried sex-gender-desire logic, homosexuality is that which shadows the instability of the nation's heterosexuality, then that shadow itself is not constituted outside of nationhood, but rather within it, around it, hovering over it (2007, 50).

By this Puar emphasizes M. Jacqui Alexander's (1996) claim that the heterosexual project of the nation is in itself its own undoing. Both of these scholars take from Phelan's discussion of the "sexual stranger" (2001). The LGBTQ individual is understood by the heterosexist nation as being "neither us nor clearly them, not friend and not enemy, but a figure of ambivalence who troubles the border between us and them" (Phelan 2001, 4-5). And further, foreign enemies of the state are obviously contrasted with the citizen, "but the stranger is more fraught with anxiety" because they are the internal other (ibid.). Moreover, Puar, analyzing the discourses around the U.S. government's wars in the Middle East and their relationship to queer bodies, critiques the notion that the nation is always heteronormative by her work coining the term homonationalism as "an analytic category deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation's status as 'gay-friendly' has become desirable in the first place" (2007, 336).

Puar defines homonationalism as a "national recognition and inclusion" through which an "emergence of national homosexuality" occurs (2007, 2). This results in a form of sexual exceptionalism that acts as a "regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of a racial and

national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (ibid.). And this leads to "understanding the complexities of how "acceptance" and "tolerance" for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated" (Puar 2013, 336).

Puar's work is influenced by Massad's writings on the Gay International (2002, 2007). Massad claims that Western LGBTQ activists respond to anti-LGBTQ violence in the Middle East by approaching such incidents in a missionary manner. Massad uses the term the Gay International to describe Western LGBTQ organizations' attempts to "defend" LGBTQ people around the world (2007, 161). He argues that the United States and Western European countries have created the predominant approach to human rights, which comes from Orientalizing assumptions of other parts of the world. Moreover, Massad problematically attempts to posit that homosexual is in itself a Westernized notion, adopted by middle-class Arabs and Muslims, even writing that "[it] is among members of these richer segments of society that the Gay International found native informants" (2007, 172).

I agree with Ritchie's critique of Massad's work in that Massad "vastly overstates the power of the Gay International and misreads the actual implications of its project" (2010, 566). Ritchie argues that in this analysis, Massad ignores the fluidity of culture and sees globalization as a continuous project to "Westernize" the Arab world (2010). In critiquing both the Gay International and homonationalism, Aleardo Zanghellini (2012) notes, there needs to be an examination of homonationalism as a concept when studying LGBTQ activism.

In discussing a conflict over a scheduled Pride Parade in East London that was labeled Islamophobic by scholars of homonationalism including Puar, Zanghellini suggests that so-called "instances of homonationalism are not best characterized by those terms" and that this may "unnecessarily discredit gay rights [discourses and activisms]" (2012, 2). Meaning, labeling events as homonationalist may ignore the resistance towards oppression that some of these situations are the result of. Others have taken homonationalism and applied it to various contexts. Scholars have taken the concept and used it in various spaces (see Haritaworn 2010; Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010; Morgensen 2010, Murray 2014) In these instances homonationalism has conceptually been modified to focus on instances outside of the U.S. Some scholars have used homonationalism to describe the EU integration, and I position my use of homonationalism in this mode of thought.

Similar discussions of homonationalism have appeared in discussing LGBTQ rights in Eastern Europe, arguing that the European Union (EU) integration process has brought with it discourses of a moral, LGBTQ-friendly "Western" Europe in contrast to a homophobic, backwards "Eastern" Europe. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska's edited volume *De-centring Western Sexualities* shows how the Europeanization[3] process has attempted in "forcing the 'Western present' as a '[Central and Eastern European] future' to be achieved

[3] I approach this term with caution since in academic literature "Europeanization" has become synonymous with the EU integration process. I disagree with this usage and am in agreement with Shannon Woodcock (2011) and Robert Kulpa (2013) who have used variations of "EU-ropeanization" in their work. Though countries in Balkans are geographically on the continent of Europe, the discourse frames the Balkans as a "yet not enough advanced" part Europe (Kulpa and Mizieliñska 2011, 18). Only entering the supranational organization of the EU will allow them to be "European." The same discourses are not the same for other non-EU states in Europe. Neither Norway nor Switzerland, for instance, would be considered outside Europe.

(2011, 17). In this volume, Kulpa finds Puar's use of homonationalism problematic for not allowing for alternatives to "homonormative nationalism" to exist (2011, 56). For Puar, it is an issue if someone who identifies as LGBTQ fits into a nationalist movement. So for the people who do identify within the nation, this is automatically homonormative and viewed as negative. Kulpa, however, questions her critique by asking: "What is so necessarily wrong with the willingness to be recognized as part of a national community, to build one's own identification in relation to other nationals and not be left aside as encapsulated and self-contained, ab/sub/ob/ject?" (ibid.).

He understands the struggle of LGBTQ activists as at times needing to 'belong' to the national group in order to achieve their goals against systematic violence, possibly in a way that "[reappropriates nationalism]" (ibid.). Kulpa notes that Agneizka Graff (2008) has argued that Polish LGBTQ activists should in fact emphasize their love of their country as a productive strategy in their work. It is here that I see how contextualizing homonationalism within Eastern Europe (and in Serbia) can be fruitful. Kulpa's (2011) and Zanghellini's (2012) writings have shown how homonationalism can be problematic when turning to activism and how the critiques of homonationalism may take for granted the actual agency of activists as well as the lived experiences that push for acceptance of homonationalist positionings.

Homonationalism has been addressed in scholarship on Eastern Europe outside of Kulpa's work. Overall, there is consensus that Western states and organizations have attempted to "teach" LGBTQ rights promotion in the region,

yet these approaches take various forms. Nicole Butterfield (2013, 2013b cited in Moss 2014), Kevin Moss (2014), Kahlina (2014), and Koen Slootmaeckers (n.d.) all address in some way what could be considered a homonationalist positioning of the EU towards Eastern Europe, including the successor states of Yugoslavia.[4]

Many researchers do find this approach problematic and discuss the local attitudes towards it in the work of activism and support of same-sex marriage. Alexej Ulbricht, Indraneel Sircar, and Koen Slootmaeckers reflect in their text on the queer aspects of the Eurovision song contest that the discourse surrounding LGBTQ rights in Eastern Europe as a combination of anti-Eastern European sentiments coupled with a homonationalist discourse "to construct a particular picture of a backward, homophobic Eastern Europe and a progressive [LGBTQ]-friendly Western Europe" (2015, 156). The critiques of homonationalism have made it to the study of Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia. In this thesis I will position myself both as evoking Puar's (2007) initial critique of homonationalism as well as taking an approach that protects the agency of the individual championed by Kulpa (2011).

2.3 Conceptualizing Homonormativity

A large component of homonationalism stems from "homonormativity." Puar uses homonationalism as shorthand for "national homonormativity" (Puar 2007, 2). Lisa Duggan argues that homonormativity is inspired by neoliberal formulations of the LGBTQ movement in the United States and labels it as rooted in neoliberal approaches to sexual politics (2002). She writes that homonormativity "is a politics that does not contest

[4] For discussions on the Orientalisms placed on the Balkans see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Bakić-Hayden 1995, and Todorova 1997.

dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (ibid., 179). For Duggan, homonormativity creates a formulation of "conventional gays" who are more worthy of support than queer-identifying individuals or people who reject normative gender performances. This discussion of promulgating an idea of a certain type of non-heterosexual has most closely been discussed within the context of the United States during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the country (Bersani 1987). Max Biddulph simply defines homonormativity as being attributed to "the political and social assimilation" of "some" lesbians and gays" (2010, 222).

Though Berlant and Warner (1998) argue that homonormativity cannot replicate heteronormativity, I understand Duggan's discussion as not equating the two terms. She shows how homosexuality becomes appropriated to the neoliberal project in that the difference between homosexual and heterosexual still exists, but that the homosexual becomes complicit within the project itself. Thus, the homosexual can move slightly closer to full citizenship in the state and acceptance in society at the expense of less normative sexualities and gender performances. Robert Phillips illustrates this in his ethnographic work in Singapore, where traditional values (and thus understood as homonormative values) within LGBTQ identifying people are ways to "[maintain] cohesiveness" where individuals welcome and accept such stances (2014, 51). His Singaporean informants "simultaneously [embraced a similar value system that demonstrates that they are as 'Singaporean' as anyone else, demonstrating the shift from 'us versus them' to a very homonormative 'us and them' (ibid., 46). Phillips discusses the

agency of the individual who undertakes so-called homonormative stances in order to fulfill individual goals.

Critics of the critiques of homonormativity underscore the perceived homogenous nature of the concept. Gavin Brown (2012) challenges both the theorization of the term as well as the political effects of it. He claims that homonormativity is understood as a global external entity that exists outside all of us and exerts its terrifying, normative power on gay lives everywhere" (Brown 2012, 1066). In this approach to homonormativity the variety of contexts is ignored. I seek to contribute in this line of work, suggesting that homonormativity can be understood as pragmatic in that Serbian LGBTQ activists use homonormative approaches to create affective ties with non-LGBTQ citizens through the use of sympathy and empathy. For activists, it is important to legitimize LGBTQ rights within their local contexts. As I indicate later on in this thesis, homonormative approaches to activism may be used by activists to "return back" in a way to Serbian society, where they will not be discriminated against.

2.4 Feminist Scholarship on NGO-ization

The field of LGBTQ activism in Serbia in intimately woven into the world of NGOs. All activists included in my research found their activist work in NGOs and events organized by NGOs. It is within the relationships with NGOs and the activists that work in them that we may view homonationalism and homonormativity. NGOs supposedly exist within the third sector, separately from what is the state and what is private (Hemment, 2007). This allows them to be "potentially oppositional to the state" (Bernal and Grewal 2014, 5). However, as Julie Hemment notes NGOs are always bound to their respective states for recognition as NGOs must be registered by the state (2014).

NGOs are further understood as a homogenous group. In this section I assess the term of NGO-ization and posit that NGOs are in fact, following Saida Hodžic's work (2014), places where civil engagement can exist when no other avenue is available. In the 1990s, during the rise of neoliberalism, NGOs materialized in a "shift away from experience-oriented movement politics toward goal and intervention oriented strategies" (Lang 1997, 2014). According to Alverez (2014), NGOs then become the entities in which globalized neoliberal projects form at the expense of alternatives to the NGO-model.

The NGO Boom of the 1990s (Alverez 1999) was seen in the post-socialist world. Elissa Helms writes about the NGO-ization of women's activism in BiH after the war in the 1990s, arguing that with the influx of foreign donors and international groups wanting to promote civil society, NGOs appeared in large numbers (2014). Hemment (2007, 2014) also describes the focus of NGOs during the fall of state-socialism in Russia. For those who began working in NGOs, these organization provided a way to work toward something previously unpopular. The rise of civil society and promotion of such organizations from Western groups.

Saida Hodžic argues that NGO-ization is often understood as "universally valid" (2014, 223). She argues that scholars "take issues with the NGO-ization paradigm because it hinges on an anti-institutional critique, while having itself become a stable and closed circuited of truth claims" (ibid.) Her arguments against an outright rejection of NGO, comes from her work in Ghana, where she suggests that the women's NGOs in the country provide meaningful ways in which Ghanaian women can actively participate in their communities (Hodžic 2014). Further, Keck and Sikkink find that NGOs, both international and local, can catalyze instances in which more influential actors can

attempt to pressure weaker actors to change domestic policies (1998). The literature on NGOs are thus not completely against NGOs entirely, though most scholars tend to view NGO-ization in a negative light.

Inderpal Grewal and Victoria Bernal claim that NGOs may be perceived as "less threatening than mass movements" and that they may appear safer because of the separation that exists between the sectors, meaning that NGOs are at times understood as weakening social movements for forcing them to become institutionalized in hierarchical, professionalized, and bureaucratic ways (2014, 10). Thus, "[c]ritics see NGOs and movements as antitethical to each other, to the extent that NGOization signals the end of everything in feminism is politically progressive and radical" (Hodžic, 228). Many feminist scholars understand the institutionalization and professionalization of the NGO-model as harming the political opportunities grassroots movements can create.

By including the professionalization that accompanies NGO-ization, we see local issues becoming bureaucratic by pushing activists to enter into institutions instead of the grassroots movements (Lang 2014). Thus, NGOs become intermediaries of institutional norms (arguably channeling homonationalist and homonormative discourses). In the European context, Lang argues that they end up providing the avenue for EU policy within their domestic states (ibid.).

In the context of women's rights NGOs in rural towns in Serbia, Sladjana Danković and Paula Pickering have investigated why these organizations do not possess support from their local populations (n.d., 1). They write that "[i]f NGOs do not engage in tangible activities that allow citizens to make informed opinions of them, then NGOs leave a space to be filled with second-hand information of questionable accuracy"

(Danković and Pickering n.d., 14). In the context of LGBTQ rights NGOs in the region, Nicole Butterfield's (2013) work aptly describes how the institutionalization of a social movement my drastically change it relationship to its stakeholders. She states, "the professionalization and NGO-ization of activism has been a determining factor in shaping contemporary LGBTIQ activism in Croatia and has contributed to the lack of solidarity and community outreach" (Butterfield 2013, 32). This echoes the sentiments Hodzic insists may not always be there, but by some accounts are. Further, Butterfield also notes an important aspect of the LGBTQ rights movement in Croatia, writing, "NGO-ization as it appears in many of the current LGBTIQ NGO structures and strategies, however, can be understood as a reflection of the larger transformations in the civil society sector that took place during the late 1990s and 2000s" (Butterfield 2013, 126). The case holds true in Serbia as well, where LGBTQ NGOs sprang up, not during the NGO Boom in the 1990s, but after fall of Slobodan Miloševic's regime where a climate of democratization appeared (Bilić and Stubbs forthcoming).

2.5: Boomerangs, Spirals, Ricochets: Social Movement Theory on Transnational Networks

The LGBTQ NGOs in Serbia rely on transnational networks for a bulk of their work. These activists attend to international actors in order to catalyze needed changes to Serbian domestic legislation that protects LGBTQ Serbians. These networks, I argue in Chapter 3, take homonationalist approaches to domestic LGBTQ rights.

Keck and Sikkink term "the boomerang pattern", as a mechanism that influences states by the use of transnational networks, having "domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside" (1998, 12). Further, these networks are able to create needed connections and

supports between NGOs, governments, and international groups by

> [multiplying] the opportunities for dialogue and exchange. In issue areas such as the environment and human rights, they also make international resources available to new actors in domestic political and social struggles. By thus blurring the boundaries between a state's relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty (ibid, 89).

The networks present in the post-Yugoslav region work toward highlighting human rights abuses in order to bring about international media attention and cultural debates. These organizations also use these networks to reach large human rights NGOs like Amnesty International to bring about attention to these LGBTQ rights issues[5]. Violent events tend to bring about more intention. This echoes Keck and Sikkink's discussion on the issues that seem to effectively galvanize support: "instances where violence occurs and situations involving legal equality of opportunity" (1998, 98). These situations become more salient as international instruments involving the protection of citizens on the basis of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are called on by international groups outside the country. These groups then pressure the domestic government to act according to the international laws that it has voluntarily signed (Pearce and Cooper 2013).

Keck and Sikkink write that transnational networks work to "[persuade], [socialize], and [pressure]" states to comply with international human rights norms (1998,

[5] For examples see https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/blogs/2014/10/belgrade-pride-2014-we-are-all-lgbti/ . Accessed: June 2, 2015, and http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/28/dispatches-belgrade-authorities-cancel-pride-again. Accessed June 2, 2015.

16). This is done through the use of "information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics" (ibid.). Together, these are used to change the domestic state's laws and policies:

> information politics, or the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it where it will have the most impact…symbolic politics, or the ability to call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away…leverage politics, or the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence, and…accountability politics, or the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles (ibid.)

Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink (1999) return to the boomerang model and conceptualize the spiral model in order to explain how states can regress to their human rights violations. The spiral model works similar to the boomerang, except it is created from various "boomerang throws." The model is composed of five phases. The start is when a violation that occurs in a state and becomes known internationally through transnational networks, then the denial of that state against the violation. This is followed by tactical concessions from states because of the international pressure. The fourth phase consists of a prescriptive status that actors refer to on their and others' human right records. The final phase is on rule-consistent behavior, meaning, that states must act according to international human rights norms (Risse and Sikkink 1999, 22-31). Risse and Sikkink understand that states will often continue violations. Their contribution to the theories on human rights and transnational networks serve to highlight that the

boomerangs of information are a continuous pattern that may be repeated until a state begins to follow their human rights obligations.

Bringing transnational network theories to Central and Eastern Europe, Ronald Holzhacker has placed an emphasis on how these networks may be used against anti-LGBTQ governments, with a focus on the legal frameworks in place (2013). Just as the there are boomerangs towards human rights promotion, Holzhacker notes that there are boomerangs used to work against such promotion. For instance, a state could continue to ignore LGBTQ rights, thus not preventing discrimination, which could then lead to attacks against LGBTQ people (2013, 2). He conceptualization of the "ricochet" is inspired by Keck and Sikkink's boomerang, but augments the boomerang to focus on specific targets of information and rapidly fire the information to the relevant international bodies and institutions.

I find the ricochet as essentially the same as the boomerang. However, I find Holzhacker's case studies to be worth noting. He argues that LGBTQ groups in countries that are EU member states or states on the accession path for EU membership may be able to use the ricochet more successfully than countries outside of the EU (Holzhacker 2013). In fact, he claims that there might be more success in countries still in the integration process (ibid.). The ricochet becomes powerful due to the legal institutions that are used by domestic NGOs. Though Holzhacker shies away from discussing the power relations at play between the EU and the states seeking membership, his text highlight the unique position that accession countries hold within these transnational networks. It is due to this emphasis on the integration that I find the ricochet to be a useful concept along with the boomerang, which concentrates on norms instead of laws,

while the spiral consists of the repeated back and forth between domestic governments and the international community on human rights violations and the consequences.

2.6 Data Collection

I first began researching the topic of LGBTQ rights in Serbia in 2012, while still an undergraduate at The College of William and Mary in the United States. During the summer of 2012, I interned with Gayten-LGBT for the summer. During this time I met with members of other organizations including Labris. This interest continued while I completed my B.A. and then interned with the Sarajevo Open Centre in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH). After coming to Budapest and Central European University, I decided to continue my interest in the region, focusing back on Serbian LGBTQ rights activism. I started to wonder how activist do their work within this anti-LGBTQ environment and how they engaged with their local populations to do their activism. These questions motivated me to work to understand activist strategies in Serbia and led me to others: Why are certain strategies implemented? Who are the targeted stakeholders on this activism? What do activists understand as 'success?'

I spent approximately 5 months conducting fieldwork for this thesis. The majority of this time was spent between July and September 2014, with short visits to Belgrade throughout the rest of 2014. I returned for 6 weeks in February and March concluding my fieldwork. The bulk of the data come from my engagement during my fieldwork with one organization: Labris, a lesbian human rights group that also works with gay men, bisexual men and women, and trans* people.

Sitting in the office of Labris, a lesbian human rights organization, I began interviewing the program coordinator, Jovana, over coffee she had made me. Founded in

2001 out of the remnants of Arkadija, the first LGBTQ organization in Serbia, the work of the activists at Labris is directed predominately toward women. However, they have involved themselves in broader LGBTQ issues that lie outside lesbian rights. This includes organizing the first Pride Parade in 2001, sponsoring a support group for trans* people, and planning a recent conference on LGBT rights in the Balkans called "The Future Belongs to Us: LGBT Rights and the Road to the European Union". Jovana headed many of the programs at Labris and acted mostly as the face of the organization in most instances. She routinely represented Labris at meetings with government officials and non-governmental organizations (hereafter NGOs).

After about an hour of asking about her understanding of LGBTQ activism, I turned the recorder off and we began chatting informally. I told Jovana that I was interested in becoming more involved in the LGBTQ groups in Serbia than just interviewing a few organizational heads. We discussed my previous experiences working for nonprofits in the United States before moving to Europe to pursue a graduate degree. She asked if I would be interested in volunteering for the "The Future Belongs to Us" conference on LGBT rights in Serbia. Hoping this would allow me to get more familiar with the LGBTQ activist scene in Belgrade, I said yes.

Apart from volunteering with the conference, the data collection process involved a mixed-method approach using formal and informal interviews, participant observation, following activists' online presence, and reports and documents from local and international organizations. In total, I have conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ activists in Belgrade who were involved with Labris and other organizations working on LGBTQ rights as well as with relevant actors from the National Democratic

Institute, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Belgrade, and the U.S. Embassy. All of the interviews were conducted in English and recorded with the permission of the informant. My participant observations of workshops in the city sponsored by those same organizations are also included in this research. I recruited informants using existing contacts in the country and snowball sampling, where informants recommended potential contacts, several of whom I met through workshops I attended or fellow volunteers with Labris.

The informants of this project worked primarily in Belgrade, but they described their activism in terms of "LGBTQ rights of Serbia." I extrapolate the data from Belgrade to encompass other parts of Serbia because Belgrade acts as the focal point of LGBTQ activism in Serbia. There were very few organizations working on LGBTQ rights in more provincial areas of the country. Several groups work in Novi Sad in the northern province of Vojvodina, and there are groups in the Southern city of Niš. Association Rainbow is based in Šabac, a few hours from the Serbian/BiH border. This organization also does work in Kragujevac and several small towns in rural areas of Serbia. These organizations are doing important work on LGBTQ rights in Serbia. By focusing on the Belgrade organizations, I do not want to diminish the work these other organizations and groups do, but highlight that the Belgrade organizations are still understood as the "main" organizations. Since these groups were based in the capital, the Belgrade organizations were the ones who usually met with representatives from the Serbian government as well as with international actors.

Included in my data are informal conversations and interactions I had with LGBTQ persons, activists and non-activists, throughout my time in the field and

subsequent interactions. For three weeks, I volunteered with one organization in planning "The Future Belongs to Us" conference on LGBTQ rights in Serbia and the Balkans that took place in Belgrade in September 2014. The time spent working with Labris on the conference serves as a major primary data collection period for this thesis, but is not the only event described.

2.7 Standpoints

I used an activist approach to this research, meaning that I emphasized my standpoint as a researcher who also happens to be involved in LGBTQ activism in the country. Through the use of George Smith's concept of political activist ethnography (PAE) to study a social movement (1990), I provide an ethnographic account of LGBTQ activism in Belgrade, Serbia. My ethnographic research's methodology centered around Smith's method in attempt to subvert and queer traditional anthropological methods that reinforce imperial and heteronormative structures of academic knowledge production. By approaching my research as an LGBTQ activist, my project was framed as a dialogue with my LGBTQ activist informants without strict separation of 'the researcher' and 'the subject."

In choosing this approach, I use the "queerness" of PAE—that is, the subversive nature of the method vis-a-vis traditional ethnographic work—to obtain a fuller truth as championed by feminist studies scholar Donna Haraway (1996). Following Browne and Nash's discussion of "queer research", I positioned this work in a way that "[highlights the] instability of taken-for-granted meanings and [the] resulting power relations" (Browne and Nash 2010, 4). During my time in Belgrade, I integrated and became a part of the network of LGBTQ activists. By volunteering with an LGBTQ rights NGO and

assisting the organization to plan a conference on LGBTQ Rights in Serbia and the other successor states of former Yugoslavia, I 'worked' for the NGO. I became involved with logistical support and editing English documents from non-native English speakers. In return, the activists provided a rich insight into their own work and understandings. Positioning myself in this way, I seek to provide an analysis as not only a researcher but also as an activist and as someone who is politically and emotionally connected to my research subject. Thus, my analysis is based on an activist perspective, which can be understood as a queer methodological approach.

I cannot deny that though I attempted to minimize the power relations between my informants and myself, there are some things that affected my research due to my own positioning. Coming from the U.S., I often heard from informants variations of "Why are you here? Go back to the U.S. where you'll be happier." Usually, this was said in a joking manner, but there were real implications to this. The U.S. has become more LGBTQ supportive in the past several years, with a majority of people in the U.S. 'accepting' LGBTQ-identifying people. I could easily get on a plane and leave Serbia to return to the U.S. I was cognizant that I could leave if faced with anti-LGBTQ violence or discrimination, but my informants could not.

I do not say this meaning that Serbia is more backward than that U.S., but that this is something that came up repeatedly in the my fieldwork. Several informants spoke of wanting to leave Serbia one day. One informant told me of his plans to seek asylum in Canada after an attempt to leave once before had failed. During discussions like these, it was difficult to attempt to integrate fully with my informants or achieve some common ground. I had never faced similar situations and I did not want to pretend like I had.

Throughout my conversations with the activists, I tried to be as honest and open as I could. I saw this approach as not only allowing me to gain rapport with them, but to also respect their decision to give their time to my research. Many of my informants became close friends during my fieldwork whom I continue to speak with. These emotional connections have obviously influenced how I understand the data and my analysis of it.

2.8 Organizations and Activists Involved

I worked with a total of 24 activists throughout my fieldwork who were either employed with an LGBTQ rights organization or volunteered frequently with such organizations. Most of these organization hasve been working on LGBTQ rights in Serbia for years. Two of which, were formed from the first LGBTQ group in Serbia, Arkadija. Because of the close ties that LGBTQ activists have with LGBTQ rights organizations in the form of NGOs, at times I discussed activists and organizations synonymously.

I worked mostly with Labris, a lesbian human rights organization, founded in 1995. The organization planned the first LGBTQ Pride Parade (hereafter referred to as Pride or Pride Parade) in 2001. Labris releases annual reports on the situation for LGBTQ rights in Serbia.[6] The organization is divided into three program areas: the Information Center, the Education Program, and the Lobbying and Advocacy Program. Labris also received a grant from the U.S. government to begin a PFLAG group in Serbia.[7]

[6] See http://labris.org.rs/en/annual-reports/. Accessed: May 22, 2015.
[7] PFLAG is a U.S. started organization that works to foster relationships between LGBTQ people and their families.

Gayten-LGBT[8] (informally referred to as Gayten) was founded in 2001, also out of activists involved with Arkadija. Taking the name from Ursula Le Guin's book *The Left Hand of Darnkess,"* the activists at Gayten see their work as supporting all vulnerable groups. Gayten serves the most diverse groups on the LGBTQ spectrum and currently the only group that focuses much of its work on trans* and intersex issues. In fact, activists at Gayten told me that it was the only organization working on intersex issues, having recently organized an intersex support group. Gayten also co-organized the first Belgrade Pride in 2001, and currently runs an S.O.S. hotline. Activists at Gayten receive calls from around Serbia, but also from places in BiH and Macedonia.

The activists who gave their time for this research were mostly in their 30s and 40s. All but two activists were born in Serbia. While not asked directly, activists openly spoke about their sexual orientation and gender identify with me. In many of my interviews, this was within the first part of the interview while I attempted to build rapport. Others identified themselves within the sexuality and gender spectrum sometime throughout the interview, using their identity category to emphasis their positioning and their work. Out of the 24 activists interviewed, three identified as heterosexual, three identified as genderqueer, one identified as trans*, and others identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The names of these activists have been changed and given pseudonyms in this thesis.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the theories used in my analysis and fieldwork. By applying studies of nationalism, NGO-ization, homonormativity,

[8] See http://www.gay-serbia.com/gayten_lgbt/index_eng.jsp for more details about the organizations. Accessed: May 22, 2015.

homonationalism and transnational social movements to analyzing LGBTQ activism in Serbia, I wish to broaden the present discussions of these theories and provide new insight into how these theories play out in the real, activist world. The next chapter takes the first step in doing so and investigates the local community outreach in Belgrade as well as homonormative approaches to this outreach.

Chapter 3: Resonating with the Tides: Homonormative Approaches to LGBTQ Activism in Belgrade

In this chapter, I investigate how activists position themselves to local populations, and, drawing from discussions of homonormativity, I argue that on the local level LGBTQ activists use a "we are like you" strategy to their work in the hopes of supporting tolerance toward LGBTQ Serbians. The first sections focus on broad trends I observed during my fieldwork, followed by an analysis of an example of this local branding, the 2014 Belgrade Pride Parade. I then tease out the reasons behind these homonormative frameworks in the local setting before moving on to international organizations' work in relation to LGBTQ activism in Serbia in the next chapter.

3.1 Gaging Local Community Outreach in Belgrade

I set out on my fieldwork to study how Serbian LGBTQ activists engage with people in their local communities. I define communities here as the local populations in Belgrade who do not consider themselves activists, identifying as LGBTQ or not. I expected LGBTQ activists to have specific strategies towards bringing about more awareness of their work and also to involve people in their work. Spending time with these activists, I came to realize that my initial research project would not be what I had imagined. Instead of seeing these community outreach projects, I began to see a lack of them. This became clear both through my own observations at organization events as well as through my interviews. Informants were not shy to admit that community engagement is not something they necessarily focus on. When I asked about how her organization worked with the community, one informant told me that they had a soccer team for people to join. Another informant told me "we just don't do community

engagement well. It's something we need to work on." In saying this he meant how the organization he worked for did not approach neither LGBTQ nor non-LGBTQ community members individuals. He then went on to talk about limited resources and argued that the resources his organization had needed to be carefully used. This meant that some programs such as community outreach were put on the backburner for other higher prioritized projects. This discussion of resources sprang up repeatedly in conversations about community engagement. Activists must make choices about what is more important, either focus on community outreach that is often not supported by their funders or create programs that would be funded.

In discussing women's rights NGOs in post-socialist and post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, Elissa Helms reports "Dependence on donor funds created discentives to making contact with the grassroots—that is, members of local communities—except as beneficiaries of services" (Helms 2014, 37). Danković and Pickering note that in the context of provincial Serbian women's organizations, NGOs often focus on abstract notions of democratization that donors supported instead of promoting issues that resonate with local populations (n.d.). I observed similar situations in Serbia where organizations only included local community members as those who needed to be protected by the Serbian government or as those who needed their assistance in some other way (legal help, psychological counseling, and the like). Indeed, another informant, Nenad, told me that the need for funding constrains what projects his organization is allowed to do. The organization Nenad works for runs an SOS hotline and hosts several support groups for LGBTQ people throughout the week. During one of our conversations, he half-heartedly joked that if he went to a funder to ask for a certain

amount of printed copies of pamphlets it would be easier to get than to try to get funds to support and sustain a support group. Something he feels is needed much more. Donors, he told me, would fund more quantifiable programs or projects. By this, Nenad implies that he perceives support groups being more helpful than pamphlets since the support group would create affective ties to people and hopefully encourage those that participate. As in many of the organizations I went to, the pamphlets almost always are kept in the offices, away from the public. These often pertained to LGBTQ health topics, legal assistance, or information about the organization, and they were mostly in Serbian with a few also have English-language copies for foreign visitors to the organizations. The pamphlets and other publications were available only during organization sponsored events that were often not well publicized.

Resources have to be carefully allocated for these organizations, which often have no steady funding streams. They rely on international nongovernmental organizations, foreign governments, and supranational organizations for funding, since often the LGBTQ organizations lack a productive relationship with the Serbian government. Julie Hemment discusses this reliance in her fieldwork in Russia during the 1990s, suggesting that support for activists NGOs came with "strings attached" (2014, 124). Serbian LGBTQ NGOs were then often cognizant of the requirements for their funding and what foreign donors required them to continue doing in order to sustain such funds.

Further, in concentrating so much on maintaining the funding sources, these activists "professionalize," learning the skills necessary to secure such funding in order to create projects to benefit their objectives. Nicole Butterfield, for instance, explains that through the professionaliziation of LGBTQ activism in Croatia, local community

engagement among activists had decreased (2013). This leads to activists emphasizing lobbying for legal rights as opposed to community activism on the grassroots level. In doing so, a small amount of activist elites emerge. It is this movement toward lobbying and advocacy for anti-discrimination laws, and the specificity that emerges to work on these strategies that constrain an understanding of human rights and citizenship because of the focus on legislation and government relationships (ibid., 4). The lack of accountability to local community members then distances the activists from the population they supposedly represent, which Danković and Pickering similarly found women's NGO workers in rural Serbia and the local populations (n.d.). Because of this distance between the activists and the local community, local community members may not be fully aware of the activists' work, the resources they promote, or even how many LGBTQ groups were in Belgrade. I often heard several non-activists speak of LGBTQ groups in a negative way. It seemed local community members did not understand what activists did or what sort of work they undertook.

These non-activists also highlighted one aspect of LGBTQ activism that I did see: Many activists with whom I spoke had open conflicts with other LGBTQ activist groups. Butterfield observed a similar phenomenon in her work with Croatian LGBTQ NGOs, arguing that the conflicts also harm the relationship with the LGBTQ population as a whole, "This lack of cooperation among organizations and the larger [LGBTQ] community, I believe, limits activists' ability to "know" and address the specific needs of the diverse communities which could potentially re-shape existing lobbying and advocacy struggles" (2013, p. 235). Hadley Renkin (2014) also observes issues among Hungarian LGBTQ activists and the LGBTQ population. He argues that within the

LGBTQ movement in Hungary, conflicts arise that do not just include disagreements between LGBTQ groups and anti-LGBTQ groups, but also among activists and the LGBTQ population. Hungarian activists tended to focus on their work on the organizational level, more so than focusing on the movement as a whole, which contributes to the disconnect between the activists and non-activists. This was apparent in Serbia as well. When evaluating community level engagement, Belgrade LGBTQ activists often focused on actors within the movement, international actors, and Serbian state actors. The community level often became an afterthought in most of my conversations with activists as well as what I observed. This situation resulted in reinforcing ideas from non-activists that LGBTQ activists were not interested in the everyday lives of non-activists, instead, activists were seen as doing their work only for personal gain.

In informal conversations with non-activists during my fieldwork a common theme was something along the lines of "activists only want to get rich, they want to be famous." In conversations with non-activists LGBTQ-identifying people, some of the perceptions echoed ideas about the lucrativeness of activism, similar to how Elissa Helms describes the perception of NGO workers in post-socialist Bosnia (2014) and Jessica Greenberg has discussed student activists in post-socialist Serbia (2014). Both of these scholars emphasized the negative perceptions of NGO workers and activists, where the activists were understood as doing their job for selfish reasons. Within scholarly work on LGBTQ rights in the region, Čarna Brković suggests that LGBTQ activists in Montenegro "often overlook opportunities to articulate continually sensitive techniques and concepts of their struggle" in context of the "short history and tenuous position of the

'civil sector' in all former Yugoslav states, and the specificities of post-socialist apparatuses" (2014, 175). Non-activists also often brought up those activists visible in the media as examples of activists that Brković describes, implying those activists who have a strong media presence do not understand the realities of the LGBTQ population in Serbia. When I asked non-activists about activists they knew personally or organizations of which they were aware, they were never able to say a name besides those in the media. Some non-activists perceived activist community engagement as needing to be 'less political,' meaning that activists should have more investment in non-political events. Ideas of too 'extreme' visibility of LGBTQ identities were seen as risky in the political climate if they actually wanted real, sustainable social change. Indeed, Serbian LGBTQ activists seem to promote an orientation towards implementation of LGBTQ rights promotion very often similar to the "Western" world. As such, activists are seen as not conceptualizing the realities of the civil society in the country either. Bilić and Stubbs (forthcoming) argue that this was evident in the organization of the first Serbian Pride Parade in 2001, claiming that Labris misjudged the post-Miloševic civil society.

However, this line between mediating concerns of the population and maintaining projects activists believe to be beneficial for the LGBTQ population puts activists on shaky ground. Jessica Greenberg describes a similarly precarious situation for Serbian activists who must work within the system of both political and social institutions: "Social actors must frame interventions in socially resonant and historically meaningful ways while simultaneously trying to change the terms of politics" (Greenberg 2014, 7). In discussing rural NGOs, Danković and Pickering suggest that for these groups to work towards a mass social movement "[they] would need to focus on locally resonant norms

and associated socio-economically oriented priority concerns of citizens that are plainly communicated to ordinary people" (n.d., 23). In my work with LGBTQ activists, this often appeared to be a difficult task. If the majority of the population disagrees with LGBTQ rights promotion and does not understand it, then how can their work resonate with the their fellow Serbians?

The disconnects between activist and non-activist, LGBTQ people and non-LGBTQ people, complicate activist initiatives because they create a precarious situation for the activists themselves. In my observations, activists tend to keep the same circles amongst themselves. The non-activists may find it difficult to enter such spaces. For instance, The September 2014 conference mentioned above was largely only for activists. Though branded as a discussion of LGBTQ rights in Serbia, the event was not entirely open and space was limited, with most space saved for activists from LGBTQ organizations in Serbia and countries around the region.

As discussed above, LGBTQ activists in Belgrade have a complicated relationship with local communities. At times, activists are understood to be part of an "elite" in the city because of the opportunities to travel abroad due to their activist work and their involvement in the media. However, when activists do focus on local communities, approaches tend to fall within a homonormative framework. In the next section, I want to explore a specific example of homonormativity in activism, arguing that taking this approach allows activists to avoid confrontations relating to gender identity and gender fluidity. Instead, activists attempt to reinforce normative gender performances in order to be accepted.

3.2 Homonormativity and LGBTQ Activism In Serbia

I sat in a café in Vračar, a neighborhood of Belgrade, in late February 2015. I was there to interview two young gay activists in their early 20s, Šasa and Andrej, whom I had met over the summer at the conference. After briefly catching up since the last time we had seen each other, I took my recorder out and started asking them about their experiences with LGBTQ rights activism in the city. Both of these men could be perceived as having a feminine demeanor and were unabashedly out of the closet to most, if not all, people they knew. In all intents and purposes, their gender performances and personas could be classified as stereotypically gay. I assumed their responses to my questions about LGBTQ activism to be politically and fashionably "queer." By this use of queer, I refer to the popular sentiment among many activists of rejecting normative gender performances to something that lies outside of such norms, thus queering gender and sexuality. What I found instead was what I would call, a conservative and homonormative approach to LGBTQ activism.

Saša and Andrej, in their assessment of activism rested in a sense of belonging to the majority group. In this case that refers to heterosexual and cisgender Serbians. Both Saša and Andrej criticized more leftist activism, calling it 'radical.' They made the analogy to so-called "radical feminism" and how such extremism alienates many to the issues of women's and LGBTQ rights. Both of these men understood LGBTQ activism in Serbia as having to take a 'straight face.' That is, an activist had to talk, dress, and behave like a heterosexual, cisgender person to "get things done." Šasa and Andrej believed that appearing to "belong" to the dominate group would allow activists to achieve better protections for LGBTQ people and better polices for them. They told me that in order to make gains this is how you do it. Ironically, they even saw their own marginalization

through this support of gender and sexuality norms. These young men said that they understood their demeanors were "obviously gay" but that if you wanted to work with people who were anti-LGBTQ, then you had to fit in with them to reach a sort of middle-ground. I found this to be the case in other conversations with activists. Goran, a prominent LGBTQ activist, indicated that he wore a suit in most media appearances in order to show youth that "you can be successful *and* gay." Though his intention was to note how he wanted to be perceived by LGBTQ-identifying youth, his remarks also reinforced the 'appropriate' way to look like a gay man and a gay activist.

When I pressed Saša and Andrej, asking them how fitting in with the dominate group would accomplish an acceptance of differences, they were persistent in saying that this is what you had to do, and maybe later you could become more radical…when some of your goals were achieved. Thus, they understood activism in a temporal mindset that activists may have to deny and sacrifice their own true identities in order to obtain a safer future. This temporal thinking relies on a concept of "getting better," even though many activists with whom I spoke were often pessimistic about the future of LGBTQ rights in Serbia, referring to the nationalism they saw in politics.

I want to mention that Saša's and Andrej's focus on such homonormative approaches to activism was not consistent with the approaches of all activists I interviewed. However, it is still a very prominent stance in many of these interviews and how these activists engage with local groups. In fact, several of the most visible LGBTQ activists in Serbia take such an approach. For instance, one informant, from the Centre for Queer Studies in Belgrade told me how his organization attempted to work on a project with another LGBTQ group, only for the group to reject such a collaboration

since the organization the informant came from was known for supporting "queer politics" and had queer in its name. The activist implied that 'queer' and 'radical' were synonymous with some activists, with these activists not wanting to be part of either. This indicates that there is an uneasiness with some activists of being seen collaborating with other activists and organizations that may approve of working to destabilize Serbian gender logics.

It is thus important to interrogate the reasoning behind such prevalent homonormative thinking in LGBTQ activism in Belgrade. I take Duggan's and others' work on homonormativity in order to augment or even problematize it. I suggest that homonormativity can be understood as a more complex concept and that activists use such homonormative strategies as a coping mechanism against a largely anti-LGBTQ society where deviance from heteronormative behavior or appearances is often met with violent reaction.

In implementing strategies that attempt to build an affective bridge to non-LGBTQ Serbians, activists focus on how to seem relatable to their audience. Homonormative strategies are then used as an avenue to creating this relationship. As Duggan (2002) describes a "gay culture" rooted in commercialization and neoliberal mentalities, can this also be said of Serbia? The United States LGBTQ movement has existed for decades, going all the way back to the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Serbia on the other hand has had a more sporadic LGBTQ movement, being reduced because of anti-LGBTQ policies under state socialism, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent wars in the region.

Similar to how Hadley Renkin (2009) argues that LGBTQ activist in Hungary seek to "belong" to the Hungarian nation, I claim that this sense is the same for many LGBTQ activists in Serbia (if not in most countries). Activists did not reject their Serbian identify outright, instead they rejected their connection to Serbian nationalism. For instance, during the 1990s, many LGBTQ activists, predominantly lesbian, were involved in anti-war initiatives. Further, the activists involved in my research often commented that they were seeking to help their fellow Serbian citizens. The implementation of homonormative strategies seeks to create sympathy and empathy of the Serbian LGBTQ population, creating a more comfortable and tolerant (if not accepting) Serbian society. Though these strategies result in reinforcing gender essentialisms by promoting women as feminine mothers and men as masculine breadwinners and sportsmen, activists use them for reasons that are worth understanding and examining.

The rest of this chapter continues to explore how homonormative strategies are used in Serbian LGBTQ rights activism. I follow this discussion with examining the Belgrade Pride 2014 promotional video and how this clip can stand as a very visible representation of homonormative activist strategies. The fourth section of this chapter then assesses the affective nature of homonormative strategies, with a focus emotions of "belonging." I conclude this chapter with a discussion on the importance of studying homonormative contexts and the realities of why such activist formulations are used.

3.3 Performing Hetero, Cis: Gender Performances in Belgrade Pride 2014 Promotional Video

I now turn to a very public example of such homonormative activist strategies discussed above. The Belgrade Pride organization released a promotional video several months before the planned Belgrade Pride 2014. It was available on loop on the Belgrade

Pride website (www.parada.rs). The Pride promotion video that I analyze, I believe, shows this homonormative approach. Belgrade Pride itself is heavily criticized itself by many LGBTQ activists. One informant told me that the organization was not transparent to the local community. This motif was found in many conversations with activists, both in my interviews and in more informal situations. I thus do not want to ignore this critique, nor ignore the fact that LGBTQ activism is not a homogenous movement, but different organizations possessing varying ideas of what Pride should be and what LGBTQ activism should be. However I use the Belgrade Pride 2014 video as an artifact that is very public and accessible material, which is accessible to the Serbian population. As the writing of this thesis, I have been unable to speak to the creators of the video about the video itself.[9] Thus, the analysis that follows comes from an examination of the video itself.

The video opens with a young woman wearing bright red lipstick standing on her balcony. She looks out to Belgrade and while doing so, she takes a picture of herself (a 'selfie') with her mobile phone. What is presumably her voice says *"ponosna na svaki novi dan"* (proud of each new day). The next section shows a woman at her computer working. Before we see her face, the scene cuts to an image of her pink high heels. The clip then shows her holding a book and taking a selfie while her voiceover says *"ponosna na svoje znanje"* (proud of my knowledge). The third section shows a man holding a medal (with a rainbow lanyard). While holding his medal, he takes his selfie and we hear "*ponosan na svoj uspeh*" (proud of my success). The next scene cuts to children playing and a woman's voice saying "*ponosna na svoje dete*" (proud of my child). The audience

[9] After emailing one of the heads of Belgrade Pride, he referred me to another activist, one who consistently denied my requests for interviews and also ignored my messages relating to the video.

is then shown a woman, presumably the mother, taking a selfie with a child, in their living room. The fifth scene focuses on the widely known LGBTQ activist Boban Stojanović, one of the organizers of Pride. He sits at a table by himself, taking a selfie, while he says "*ponosan na nedeljni rucak sa roditeljima*" (proud of Sunday dinner with my parents). The final scene depicts what appears to be another mother and child, spinning a globe. The daughter this time takes the selfie of herself and her mother. The mother's voice says "ponosna na ljubav oko sebe" (proud of the love around me). The video then cuts to a pink background where the information for Belgrade Pride 2014 is given.

Gender essentialisms and traditional gender performances abound in this promotion and a focus on the domestic, private sphere permeates the promotion. West and Zimmerman describe "doing" gender as "an outcome and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society (1987, 126). Further, within the social construction of gender differences, the "'essentialness' of gender" is "[reinforced]" by society (ibid, 137). In my discussion of gender performances I also draw from Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble* (1990) where she notes that gender in most societies is constructed as intimately connected to biological sex. She goes on to elaborate on the performative aspect of gender:

> In other words, acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on* the *surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that

> they otherwise purpose to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and through discursive means (ibid, 185)

This becomes solidified within the subject as a "belief" within the "mundane" social world (ibid, 192). Gender is thus constructed through social institutions and is promulgated as natural. Serbian LGBTQ activists thus use gender performances that are in line with a traditional mentality and belief, one that marks masculinity with men and femininity with women. The promotional video adds to this conceptualization of traditional gender norms by not questioning the very gender performances considered as what is natural.

The women and men who appear in this promotional video are most likely cisgender, since we are not given alternatives and their gender performances fall within the gender binary. The women are depicted with heavy makeup and looking very feminine with their body languages and also their depictions as with their children, while the men are seen in a masculine performance understanding "success" as winning a sports medal and being at the head of the table. Two of the four women are with children, one voicing her pride in her child, reinforcing the troupe of all women as mothers, or in the very least with motherly instincts caring for children. This serves almost as a reminder that though these women may possibly be homosexual or bisexual, they are still women and thus mothers and nurturers. The point appears to be that "even" lesbian and gay identifying women can still be parents, and more importantly "proud" ones. This invites the audience to possibly identify with their own parental pride. The second segment shows a woman working at her computer. Before the audience sees her face, we

are shown her hands, doing the work, but then the scene cuts to her shoes: bright pink high-heels. Her femininity is obviously emphasized with this cut. The messages seems clear that yes, she might be "proud of her knowledge" but the focus is, again, on her gender and her femininity. The women are constantly juxtaposed with femininity and traditional feminine gender performances. The first woman to appear has accentuated lips due to her lipstick, the second shows off her shoes, and the other two women are positioned alongside motherhood. However, it is not just the women who are shown within this homonormative framework of "just like you."

The men in the video are seen with masculine gender performances. The man with the sports medal demonstrates that the stereotype of gay men being bad at sports is untrue. He proudly shows off his "success." That is, his success seems rooted in physical activity and competition, masculine motifs. His masculinity is also shown with the only rainbow themed item in the entire Pride video: the rainbow lanyard that holds the medal. Stonjanović is then seen alone at the dinner table. He sits at the head of the table, being the head of the family, and he looks like he is waiting to be served. Moreover, both men are positioned with in masculine performances by no obvious feminine behavior and with the troupes of sportsmen and family men. Their clothes also reflect this masculinity. The sportsman has his haired gelled back in a way that many young Serbian guys do, and is wearing a white T-shirt with jeans. Stonjanović wears a blue polo shirt and jeans.

The entire video falls into reinforcing gender norms instead of a focused attempt to show alternatives. As discussed earlier in this paper, this is the characteristic of homonormativity: the focus on appearing "normal." There is no trans* flag, no masculine behaving woman, nor feminine men. Indeed, we aren't even sure these individuals are

LGBTQ identifying Serbians. They are positioned to be like the majority, non-LGBTQ group. The message of the video is clear: We are proud, but we are proud for "normal" things, things that push the audience to understand that LGBTQ identifying Serbians are "just like them."

In fact, during a workshop that part of this research was presented at, one activist pointed out that the slogan for Belgrade Pride 2014 was *Prajd-normalno* (pride-normally or pride-of course). The very campaign of Pride in 2014 was centered on the idea of normality and how LGBTQ identifying individuals are normal. What we see through this video is that the organizers of Belgrade Pride 2014 have created a medium in which people who watch the video can understand that Pride is not about appearing "queer." The organizers wanted to emphasize that Pride is not the negative stereotypes associated with it, namely sexual promiscuity and anti-religiousness but also as "showing off" their sexual and gender identities. Instead they provide the audience with straight looking and straight acting performances. One attendee at the above mentioned workshop suggested that it looks like one of the Family Marches that take place in opposition to Pride. For the past few years, protests have occurred the day before and during Belgrade Pride, where families come to the main parts of Belgrade to show opposition to Pride. The idea of family permeates the entire video. The women are paired with children underscoring their importance to raising the next generation of the Serbian nation, while Stojanović awaits a dinner with his parents. The video shows the importance of family and implies that family is not just a heterosexual institution, but has many variations. This echoes the parental pride mentioned above.

I suggest that this focuses on an affective use of homonormative strategy attempting to create an emotional link of belonging to non-LGBTQ Serbians. Thus, homonormativity is used as an activist strategy to argue for a sense of community with fellow Serbians. Activists use strategic essentialisms of gender in order to create this sense of community, masking more subversive gender performances to emphasize Serbian gender logics.

3.4 Understanding the Homonormative: Homonormativity and Conceptualizing Safety in Serbian LGBTQ Activism

After presenting part of this chapter at a workshop in Budapest, Hungary, Lepa Mledjenović, one of the most visible and active feminist, lesbian, and anti-war activists in Serbia, responded to my presentation by reiterating the fears which these two violent Pride events created for LGBTQ activists in Serbia and other parts of the region. These events had serious consequences for how LGBTQ activists approached their work. As Mledjenović explained, activists adopted what I described as a homornormative approach because of these fears. It makes more sense for them, and possibly makes their lives and work easier, if they do not publically question current gender norms in Serbia. To do so would stoke a backlash that might have grave consequences for LGBTQ activists and also result in violence similar to 2000 and 2010.

In interviews with activists, many informants told me of the fear they faced within Serbian society for identifying as LGBTQ. One informant, Marko, a young man in his late 20s, told me that he has been physically assaulted in the streets before for appearing "too gay." Others expressed profound disappointment and pain over the situation for LGBTQ people in Serbia and their own experiences of violence and threats, so much so that some activists seek asylum in the "West." So much so, that it makes pragmatic sense

to the activists to position their work as non-confrontational as possible within Serbian society.

I am not making a case against activist using these homonormative strategies, as mentioned earlier, activists may see this as a key way to create more sympathy towards LGBTQ people. Indeed, my goal is to provide an examination for why this sort of strategy is implemented. Activists position themselves and their work in traditional gender performances in order to adapt to the voices and arguments coming from a masculine, heterosexist society, wanting this same society to "accept" them, or at least not threaten or hurt them. What is promoted is a tolerance that does not seek to have the audience become pro-LGBTQ, but something of the so-called middle ground where at least most of the population are not discriminating LGBTQ people.

Of course, positioning homonormativity as the paramount goal does not question the structural hierarchies of what are deemed acceptable gender expressions and what is understood as acceptable sexuality and reinforces LGBTQ Serbians as productive, respectable citizens. By using this homonormative strategy, activists keep their pleas in the realm of the known. In the video, the organizers of Belgrade Pride 2014 do not create a possible crisis of morality for the watcher, but only subtle motions towards acceptance.

It is these types of experiences that push activists to adopt homonormative strategies in hopes of affecting the Serbian population. These are approaches to activism that deserve more than just a critique for not challenging traditional expressions of gender and sexuality. In the face of such obstacles as Serbian LGBTQ activists encounter, there are sound reasons that activists seek to "belong" to the rest of Serbian society. Since activists already are positioned in a precarious situation just by doing their work,

receiving death threats and assumed to be only in activism for the money, they do not want to rock the boat further by becoming only understood within the a queer politics that would potentially create uncertain and uncomfortable backlashes from anti-LGBTQ Serbians who also are invested in heteropatriarchal binaries.

Following Margaret Wetherell's (2012) discussion on affect in the social sciences, I use affect in describing bodily transfers of emotions and feelings within the social world. I claim that homonormative activist strategies in Serbia seek to create affective assemblages between activists and non-activist, LGBTQ identifying person and non-LGBTQ identifying person. When it comes to community engagement in Serbia, this way of affective connections becomes paramount in creating more acceptance. If activists already believe that most of society disagrees with their work, then taking this homonormative approach is a pragmatic way to work with that society.

In the video the audience is provided with normative performing individuals who elicit a certain performance to evoke "fraternal" notions with the Serbian population (echoing the fraternal nature of [heterosexist] nationalisms, Anderson 1991), a common thought expressed during my fieldwork. In doing so, the activists supporting the video and those who support homonormative LGBTQ activist strategies attempt to de-radicalize the conceptualization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Serbians (again, the audience is never given alternatives to these sexuality categories, though Pride is marketed as also trans* inclusive, there is never an overt references to trans* identifying people). In my observations of LGBTQ activist organizations, gender essentialisms were often reinforced and emphasized with men at the heads of organizations and by informants detailing the sexism and transphobia that they experienced working with

various other organizations. Most LGBTQ organizations in Serbia are run by men, who take on a very "businessman" like performance when addressing the public media or who are meeting with political figures. The exceptions to this is Labris, one of the most prolific organizations working in LGBTQ rights activism which focuses mostly on women's and lesbian rights, and IDAHO-Belgrade (IDAHO being an acronym for the International Day Against Homophobia). However, gender essentialisms are still used in public events. The leading public figures from Labris are often seen as very womanly and feminine when making these appearances with political elites in Serbia. The "public faces" of Labris and other organizations are consistently women and men who perform a traditional gender performance.

Many informants especially focused on the work of the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), and critiques on their homonormative approach to LGBTQ rights. Several informants told me that this organization often ignored gender identities that were not cisgender. These informants said that the organization consistently positioned their work within the realms of sexual orientation with no acknowledgement of gender identities. GSA was criticized by informants for supposedly silencing anything queer or trans* related. Activists from some organizations were also criticized for being too radical or not appearing straight enough in public by other informants. Pedrag Azdejković, the editor of the gay-male focused magazine *Echo* and organizer of the queer film festival Merlinka in Belgrade was discussed as not "behaving" well in public. For some informants his gender performance was too feminine to be taken seriously by the Serbian public. Tensions within activism run through not only the planning of Pride and other events, but also revolve around the question of how much 'queer' is acceptable.

Some activists seemed sincerely concerned by the way Azdejković and others behaved toward the media that had nothing to do with gender performances. Conversations about Azdejković tended to concentrate on his lack of tact when addressing public issues, but the conversation always went toward activists' criticisms of his gender performance, almost in a way that added insult to injury. One informant, Mina, gave the analogy of a professor of hers. The professor did not receive much interest in her classes because she dressed and acted in manner not reflective of the broader society. Mina stressed that even though judgment on appearance shouldn't be accepted, it was just a fact. For her, to be an effective activist, one must assimilate to how the dominate group is seen and understood.

Both Andrej and Saša told me that activists need to behave like politicians—i.e., straight. It was within this critique that Azdejković was brought up with them and with one other informant. A separate informant who worked at one of the most prominent activist organizations told me that when they met with politicians, they had to position themselves "like" the politicians. There is only one politician who openly identifies as homosexual: Boris Milicević, a controversial LGBTQ activist and member of the Socialist Party. The Serbian government is understood to work with only activists who perform in traditional gender norms. Positioned this way, the activists again never show a side other than traditional gender norms and performances because it may jeopardize possible progress on LGBTQ rights.

In my discussion with Saša and Andrej, at one point Andrej simply told me "We want to show that we're Serbs too." The tone of his voice was exasperated. The marginalization experienced by LGBTQ Serbians is of course taxing and harmful. When

Andrej told me this he seemed to put into place why some activists use homonormative strategies in order to end this discrimination. They use affect within their promotions and even in their ideas of how activism should be reflect the desire to be accepted and to belong. Forming these ideas are rooted in the navigation of the anti-LGBTQ violence in the country.

3.5 Emotions in Local Community Engagement

Affect and homonormativity have not been conceptually interrogated, but the relationship between the two is hard to ignore. As I have argued, homonormativity is but one of many tools in activists' repertoires. The implementation of homonormative approaches to activism stands to create affective ties of belonging to non-LGBTQ population who may have anti-LGBTQ attitudes. The criticisms of homonormativity should not be ignored, but, as I suggest in this chapter, critiquing this in terms of an activist tool is more complex. To cast the idea of homonormativity as inherently negative, ignores the reasons of such implementation in certain situations and certain contexts. The activists in Belgrade use homonormativity strategies in order to try to build affective connections to possible non-allies in the Serbian LGBTQ movement (see Jasper 1998 and Bensimon 2012 for discussions on emotions and social movements). I use affect to mean the workings of emotions for some purpose, in this case activism, and to focus on this transference of emotion from an activist to a non-activist. So, activists use affective strategies in order to use emotion for their desired social change, to *affect* change.

Ideas of belonging and acceptance permeate activist thought and strategy, and activists implement these notions not by resisting the gender logics within Serbia, but by following these gender logics in hopes that their realities of discrimination and

persecution will be understood by Serbian society. Citing Sara Ahmed (2004), Nick Fox (2015) argues that emotions should be understood as merely a part of complex assemblages that create our social world. Thus, they must be understood within our cultural contexts (Belli, Harré and Iniguez 2010). The use of homonormative activist strategies in Serbia serve to maneuver emotional connections from negative (fear, anger, disgust, etc.) toward emotional responses to LGBTQ identifying people that are positive (possibly even apathetic). In line with Ahmed's discussion of emotion (2004), we see the activists' use of senses of belonging, drawing on sympathy and empathy from their target audiences and hoping to break down the fear of the unknown by showing Serbian people familiar aspects of gender performances of LGBTQ people rather than hope for acceptance of other subversive performances.

In this attempt to convert negative emotions tied to traditional, conservative notions of sexuality and gender identity into positive ones, there is focus on the emergence of a "good queer citizen." According to Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira, homonormativity becomes an attempt to assimilate into "a larger promise project that offers to some the tenuous promise of mobility, freedom, and equality" (2008, 124). They problematically state that homonormativity creates complicity with the dominant group, which they understand a sacrifice in order to belong (ibid.). Again, an attempt to belong is synonymous with a type of betrayal toward the LGBTQ population.

Referring back to the Belgrade Pride 2014 promotional video, activists attempt to create these affective ties. What emerges from the video is conceptualization of respectability. As Erin Rand has observed in the affective history of the HIV/AIDS organization ACT UP in the United States, "respectability was defined…on a disavowal

of [LGBTQ] sexual practices and cultures" (2012, 76). The video highlights that the organizers are proud for other things than just being LGBTQ, things that could enable non-LGBTQ people to relate: motherhood, sports, and family. Further, Rand (ibid.) points out that while respectability politics serves to present an air of pride, negative feelings like fear and isolation existed at the same time in the form of shame. This conceptualization of respectability seeks to de-escalate a moral shock that could be understood within Serbian society by overt queer politics. Activists are 'shamed' in a way that prevents them from publically questioning Serbian gender logics. Instead, a formulation of homonormativity is used as an affective mechanism that seeks to show LGBTQ identifying Serbians as not threatening to the social order. Essentially this attempts to show that LGBTQ people are safe people. There is nothing dangerous about them, in fact, as some activists position their work, they are similar to other Serbians.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined local community engagement in Belgrade, exploring how homonormativity is used as a type of local engagement with local groups. I found in my fieldwork that community engagement practices are lacking in LGBTQ activism in Serbia, but that when activists do attempt to promote their work within the local population, they use a homonormative framing that emphasizes the similarities of LGBTQ people and non-LGBTQ people. Activists perceive better chances of success by working through international organizations and groups where LGBTQ rights promotion is seen as important and legitimate, than with a local population that may not understand their work. In the next chapter, I turn to these international groups and how Serbian LGBTQ activists work with them to promote sexuality rights in Serbia.

Chapter 4:

Reaching the Nation by Looking Outside It: Homonationalism, Transnational Networks, and Serbian LGBTQ Activism

> "I am in favor of everybody's constitutional right to express their diversity, but it is my right not to go there. We shouldn't go to the other extreme and ingratiate ourselves with everybody. What am I supposed to do now, become gay, so that everything's pro-European." — Ivica Dačić, Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2013

> "The protection of LGBT people seems to be a bad tasting medicine for Serbia in order to get into a health[y] EU" – Dragona, Serbian LGBTQ activist, 2014

The above quotes underscore the complex relationship among Serbian LGBTQ activists and international and domestic actors. The first quote, taken in 2013, shows how domestic political elites conflate the EU with LGBTQ rights, while the second, taken during my fieldwork in 2014, highlights the friendly ties that activists seek to make with international actors against a perceived anti-LGBTQ Serbia. In this chapter I explore the relationships between Serbian LGBTQ activists in Belgrade and international actors, suggesting that activists engage international actors in order to receive material and political support to continue their work. Having turbulent relationships with various Serbian political institutions and government ministries, LGBTQ activists mistrust the Serbian government so much so that they willingly seek assistance outside of their

country through transnational networks. Further, I argue that international actors take homonationalist approaches to domestic LGBTQ rights issues that activists receptive to due to the needed assistance international actors provide.

I first detail "The Future Belongs to Us" conference as a way to understand why and how activists pursue collaboration with international actors. I then move discuss the reasoning activists give for this partnership, suggesting that this lack of support for LGBTQ rights by the Serbian state forces LGBTQ activists to begin seeking assistance abroad. Next, I bring the concept of homonationalism together with theories on transnational advocacy networks to discuss how these international actors work in Serbia and how activists use their help to further their activism. I suggest that through taking components of homonationalism, we come to understand why these actors are so present in Serbia and, using the models of the boomerang, spiral, and ricochet, how activists may use these groups to their benefit.

4.1 The Future Belongs to Us

"The Future Belongs to Us" conference had representatives from countries outside of Serbia join in the conversation about LGBT rights in the region. Its aim was to allow a transnational flow of ideas and strategies to help combat the similar prejudices and discrimination found in the Balkans and parts of Europe. Conference panels dealt with topics outside of the standard discussion of EU integration. The panel topics ranged from homophobia in sports, transphobia in the health system, how discrimination causes economic losses, to many various issues. When I was not responding to conference-related questions from participants, I wrote down all that I was observing in my notebook.

Unfortunately, the second day was not as easy as the first. When I arrived late to the conference that next day, I was informed that a German participant had been attacked and was in the hospital with severe head injuries. Walking into the hotel, I could feel the sorrow and grief over what had happened. Everyone seemed defeated. The organizers were on the phone the entire time trying to keep up to date about the condition of the attack victim, labeled DH by the conference organizers to protect his anonymity. Around 10:30 AM of the second conference day, the organizers gathered the conference participants to announce what had happened and the steps that were going to be taken. A press conference was planned for an hour later with a protest march afterward to march in solidarity with DH and protest the violence.

Jovana and a German representative briefed the audience on what had occurred. The attack seemed to have been motivated by xenophobia, according to conference heads some football hooligans had overhead DH speaking in both German and English. After the briefing, a government representative made a statement. He asked that the protest march be called a "solidarity march." Participants and conference organizers immediately denied his request. Once he finished his statement, Labris organizers announced the "protest" march would go forward as planned. The meeting was adjourned to start the press conference.

An hour later, we were outside protesting the violence against DH. The march went from the hotel to Belgrade's City Hall. We were flanked by police on all sides — a common sight for LGBT activists in the region since rioters have been known to attack LGBT marchers in the past (Barlovać 2014, Bilić and Stubbs forthcoming). Following a thankfully peaceful march, there was still a need to channel the rage and sadness

surrounding the attack into something useful, so the organizers decided to have a special panel and draft a resolution calling out the many faces of discrimination seen in Serbia. I served as moderator for the panel, which consisted of activists and politicians from Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, and Montenegro. I asked the panelists, "How do we move on?" The consensus was that "we just do."

After the conference formally ended, Labris and several organizations decided to draft a letter of protest against the attack. Participants entered the main conference room of the hotel. I was asked to assist in writing the letter, in English, so the international participants could also be included. I sat in the front of the room on a laptop with the letter projected so everyone could see. For an hour Jovana and Dragana asked the audience what they wanted to include in the letter. At one moment during this session, an audience member spoke out, ""You don't have to be gay to be attacked in Serbia." After there were no more additions to the letter by the audience, I sat with a German activist and sent the letter to several civil society organizations (CSOs). We then parted ways as Jovana went to check on DH at the hospital, and the other participants went back to their hotel. We agreed to meet up later that night for a relaxing evening and to try to move past what had happened.

DH was not attacked for being a part of the conference or for being gay, but nonetheless, his attack highlights the dangers faced by many activists in the country. Conference participants immediately assumed that DH was attacked because of his sexual orientation. When it was declared to be a xenophobic attack, several activists told me how it was good that the attackers did not know DH was gay, because if they had, it would have only been worse for him. Though the conference unfortunately ended quite

abruptly due to the attack on DH, it showed the complex layers of LGBTQ activism in Serbia and the challenges that activists face. Often faced with violence, activists must use these situations in some way. For example, the conference attack was understood by many of my informants as the reason that Belgrade Pride 2014 went on as planned.

4.2 Beograd Pajd Is Probably Not Serbian Pride

As previously discussed, Belgrade Pride 2014 was a significant event both international and national LGBTQ rights promotion. It was international because informants suggested that without the international support and media, the Pride would not have been allowed to occur yet again. It is national because informants often remarked how important Pride was to the visibility to the LGBTQ rights movement in the country. Mikus (2011) observed this international focus at the 2010 Serbian Pride, where flags from all of Europe joined the rainbow flags being waved by participants, yet no Serbian flag was present.

Mona, an activist with Gayten-LGBT, had mixed feelings toward Pride. She remarked that while she did not approve of the politics of Pride or some of the organizers spearheading it, she knew the visibility of the event was vital in bringing attention to the issues that LGBTQ-identifying Serbians face. Thus, activists understand that their work must be both local and international in the way that their most valued resources and partners often exist outside the borders of Serbia. However, they need for their work to resonate with local populations is still vital for grassroots support (Greenberg 2006, Danković and Pickering n.d., and see Chapter 3 of this thesis). In the words of an activist from Gayten, "we must make [LGBTQ] activism our own." Her comments emphasized that there must be a domestic component to their work.

Several of my informants told me that activists must "own" their activism, meaning that although they must work with international actors to support their work, activism on LGBTQ rights must still be understood as "Serbian." It must come organically from within Serbian LGBTQ-identifying people. Goran, an activist working for an international human rights group as well as one of the leaders of Belgrade Pride, repeated this, saying that there is a need for LGBTQ-identifying Serbians to be visible and openly working with the government on initiatives. Nemanja, who works for an LGBTQ organization criticized by many of my informants heavily for not supporting trans* rights or queer identities, emphasized that activists have to work with the state. His organization headed the planning of the 2010 Belgrade Pride, where he said he worked often with government representatives. His critiqued the new Belgrade Pride organization that it does not do enough to work with the Serbian state. During his tenure heading Pride, he mentioned that he was able to meet with members of various political parties, and that his organization received the support from the several ministries as well, including the Ministry of Justice.

Many activists had different visions of how Pride and LGBTQ organizing should be handled and done. In several interviews informants spoke that Serbia never had a "Stonewall," referring to the 1969 protests that have been hailed as starting the U.S. LGBTQ movement. In saying this, these activists indicate both the lack of opportunity for such protests and, further, the waiting for a moment in which such a protest that could catalyze, in the words of one activist, "a change toward LGBTQ rights politics." It is because of this that Pride is important to activists. And because of this importance, it often solicits contrasting opinions about its planning.

Lazara, an activist with a group that is not organized as an NGO but as a collective, held a poor opinion of the Pride Organizers. She discussed how Pride was not transparent. She gave an example that during one meeting with activists not on the official Pride organizing group, several activists sent Belgrade Pride (the organization) a list of questions. She told me that the activists heard nothing back from the organization for weeks, until they finally emailed back about the questions. She thought the responses to these questions were problematic and did not adequately address the concerns of the emails writers. Many informants shared similar sentiments. In another instance, Marko, an off and on activist who has been involved with LGBTQ and feminist activism in Serbia for over a decade, told me that Pride takes too much of the activists time. He found it problematic that activists focused so much on Pride and its usual failure. "There's an entire week of stuff before Pride, and *nothing* goes wrong." He understood that by ignoring the successes that LGBTQ activists in Serbia have, they do a disservice to their own work.

However, this focus on the perceived failure of organizing Pride seems inevitable when there are constant obstacles in the way of LGBTQ organizing.[10] The "Future Belongs to Us" international conference was not removed from the violence in Serbia. Though DH was not attacked for being gay, he was attacked nonetheless. As a xenophobic episode, it is symbolic of the hostility against foreign actors. This violence is

[10] Bilić and Stubbs write "largely [NGO-ized] [LGBTQ] activist communities do not seem to have *sufficiently reflected upon their own engagement* and the potential of Pride parades to substantially advance the LGBTQ cause under the current socio-economic circumstances as *they keep insisting on a highly polarising manifestation*" (forthcoming, 13, emphasis add). I find describing the activists as not reflective and on "insisting" on organizing Pride to be problematic. Bilić and Stubbs do not interrogate the consequences of not organizing Pride and do not discuss the successful LGBTQ events that are not "polarising manifestation[s]," the very ones that Marko insists should be understood as successes (ibid.)

consistently in the back of activists' minds (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the perception of violence in activism).

To protect themselves and to create policy changes, LGBTQ rights activists reach out to the international community. A coalition of LGBTQ organizations with the assistance of the EU pushed for the passage of an anti-discrimination law in 2009. The law was passed, yet in interviews my informants repeatedly told me that the law is not being implemented. What the law appears to be, they told me, is something just to appease EU accession goals. This cynicism towards the Serbian government stands in contrast with individuals'/organizations' work with the government. Activists heavily rely on the state to create anti-discrimination laws and to (hopefully) enforce them. The state becomes a perceived paternalistic entity that is thought to be a social change maker in that the state is understood to be the creator of anti-discrimination laws and also the enforcer of such laws. Though Serbian LGBTQ activists often do not elicit support from most of the Serbian population, and there is a heavy reliance on the EU and other international and supranational organizations to pressure the Serbian government, it is still that focus on Serbian institutions that is the concentration of most activist initiatives. Through the use of transnational actors, activists are able to reinforce their support abroad to what Serbia is internationally bound to from treaties and conventions (Pearce and Cooper 2013).

4.3 Homonationalism and International Actors in Serbia

What we see in the emphasis on international organizations working with Serbian activists on LGBTQ rights promotion is a degree of what Jasbir Puar has called homonationalism (2007). Concentrating on the Middle East, both Puar and Joseph

Massad argue that these discourses of "saving" non-Western queer bodies force identities onto local subjects. Though activists and non-activists do adopt Westernized approaches to LGBTQ rights activism, ignoring that individuals do identify as gay and lesbian devalues these individuals' own agency and experiences.

I do not question the validity of Puar's concept of homonationalism. Indeed, as indicated by the above references to international actors' ideas of LGBTQ rights in Serbia as well as activists themselves, this idea of a more moral and just Western Europe permeates many discussions of LGBTQ rights promotion in the country. As Zanghellini notes in his discussion of homonationalism, many scholars working on homonationalism and Massad "resort to an imagery of invasion and displacement, organized around conceptual binaries" (2012, 8). Further, he reemphasizes the issue of Massad ignoring how local organizing may take up LGBTQ rights frameworks in order to achieve desired goals and objectives. He critiques Massad further writing, "To maintain the integrity of the narrative, his only choice is to dismiss those native queers as metropolitan and upper or middle class" (Zanghellini 2012, 9 citing Massad 2002, 372). What Zanghellini explains is that thinking about the Gay International or homonationalism can render the agency and experiences of actual individuals as "unintelligible" (2012, 9). This does not mean that homonationalism does not exist. In the context of Serbia, international actors do use these sorts of discourses to attempt to promote LGBTQ rights in the country.

In the Eastern European context, this has been brought up by Robert Kulpa, where he argues that homonationalist assumptions should be interrogated more fiercely since Eastern Europe's political history is very different from the West (2011), conceptualizing it into leveraged pedagogy (2013) because of the differences between Eastern Europe and

the Middle East. Kulpa defines leveraged pedagogy as "a condemnation, and also a promise of redemption, because of the geographical location and proximity to the self-proclaimed universality of West/Europe" (2013, 432). Further, in using Puar's concept of homonationalism and Kulpa's thinking on leveraged pedagogy, Katja Kahlina argues that homonationalist pressure from the EU has actually created more hostility toward LGBTQ rights in the Croatia and Serbia (2014).

Kulpa, Kahlina, and Nicole Butterfield (2013) critique these teachings of LGBTQ rights activists from "the West", while Kevin Moss (2014) argues that just because the mentality of superiority is present, there is still liberating values in connecting with the global LGBTQ movement. I find Moss's work on homonationalism in Croatia superficial, though I agree with his argument that such homonationalist instances should be contextualized in the way in which activists use them. However, I would argue that his critique of Butterfield's and Kulpa's work shows he does not have an actual grasp of how activists are affected by these homonationalist approaches by the EU. Instead, his assessment ignores the complexities in activism both domestic and international.

Activists do use the support granted through these homonationalist instances to their advantage; however, to ignore the problematic nature of foreign organizations taking a superior position within the LGBTQ movements in the region is misguided. Serbian LGBTQ activists use the resources available to them. If this means embracing homonationalist discourses from organizations in the West, then they will do it if it provides support for their work. In Serbia this often means using transnational networks to obtain this assistance from organizations that use homonationalist approaches to Eastern European LGBTQ rights.

4.4 Transnational Networks in Serbia

Activists in the post-Yugoslav space are using models that can be considered the boomerang, spiral, and ricochet to their advantage by not only soliciting help from international bodies with legal authority but also with those bodies with research knowledge needed for these organizations' domestic programming. As Tarrow writes, "through the use of both domestic and international resources and opportunities, domestic-based activists — citizens and others — move outward to form a spectrum of 'rooted cosmopolitans' who engage in regular transnational practices" (2005, 35). The activists "move outward" seeking the information and assistance that these concepts supply in order to go after the opportunities they seek to support their causes (ibid.) Further, "international contacts can amplify the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and then echo back these demands into the domestic arena" (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 13).

Keck and Sikkink argue that transnational networks "generate attention to new issues and help to set agendas when they provoke media attention, debates, hearings and meetings on issues that previously had not been a matter of public debate" (1998, 98). Sometimes, however, state pressure is not the only resistance available to these activists and their goals. The continued violations thus create the spiral pattern adopted from the boomerang. Repetitive boomerangs are thrown in order to gain more support. Ronald Holzhacker also takes the boomerang and adds a segment of what he calls "the ricochet" (2013). The ricochet is "a powerful transborder, transinsitutional circulation of information and argumentation between institutions and civil society that may lead to concrete changes" (Holzhacker 2013, 2). It "creates synergies in words and actions

among European organizations, the NGOs, and CSOs [civil society organizations] to counter the discriminatory actions of national governments that violate human rights by placing pressure on states to respect their international human rights commitments" (2013, 3). The transmission of information is sent to various domestic organizations as well as the international organizations supposedly monitoring human rights in the region. Holzhacker claims that the ricochet allows LGBTQ organizations to achieve goals and objectives that they would not achieve without this circulation of information (2013, 3). Thus, the resources available to them are increased significantly, both in material goods as well as political support.

I claim that through international frameworks, actors from outside Serbia, mainly in Western Europe, work to pressure the Serbian government to adopt LGBTQ-friendly legislation, echoing Keck and Sikkink's (1998) theorizing of the boomerang effect, Risse and Sikkink's spiral model (1999), and Holzhacker's ricochet (2013). But these international groups may at times go past pure pressure into actual policy changes. I argue that supranational organizations like the EU and the Council of Europe (CoE) act as foreign intervention agencies, pushing for Serbia to better protect LGBTQ Serbians. Discussing post-war BiH, Stef Jansen (2007) refers to "foreign intervention agencies" as being more appropriate terminology than "the international community." In BiH the United Nations directly intervened in the country's sovereignty, most notably by creating the Office of the High Representative in the country, which in the years following the war in BiH, had sweeping powers including firing elected politicians deemed to be a threat to the country's stability. I use the term here in highlighting the fact that organizations such as the EU and even the CoE have caused Serbia's government to change policies: These

organizations have intervened in the instance of the LGBTQ rights of the country. In order to become a member of the EU, for instance, Serbia must provide protections to LGBTQ citizens under the Copenhagen Criteria, thus we see the creation of anti-discrimination laws. These were policies created by the direct intervention of the EU.

Further, foreign intervention agencies are not the only international actors in Serbia working in LGBTQ rights promotion. There are various foreign governments and international NGOs that are providing resources and support that Serbian LGBTQ use in their work but that do not have the influence on policy like the EU possesses. These foreign intervention agencies and international groups posit a homonationalist framing that seeks to "save" LGBTQ people in Serbia. In turn, their savior complex is turned around on them by local activists in how use their work pragmatically to accomplish their goals. The organizations tend to use the language of "Serbia becoming part of Europe" ignoring that Serbia is in fact already European, but not EU-ropean.

I emphasis that there are imperialist tendencies rendering "European" actors as superior to local activist and their ideas. In examining how local activists and international actors cooperate, we must scrutinize the reasons for international actors to forge such relationships as well as why local activists are willing to work with them. To argue that homonationalist policies from supranational groups and international organizations arrive on the local scene without critique from the activists themselves, would be as misguided as ignoring the impact homonationalism has on promoting human rights. Instead, we must acknowledge that activists are actually (and obviously) legitimate actors in LGBTQ rights in Serbia and elsewhere.

Along the road to reaching their goals, activists seek help through transnational channels to secure resources and political opportunities. The rainbow, often used to represent the LGBTQ community, crosses borders in these transnational networks because information is continuously spread from one activist or organization to another. Resources available to these transnational networks include support from abroad including the EU, UN, Council of Europe, and OSCE. Most of these local LGBTQ NGOs rely heavily on international funding to operate. What results is resource mobilization that greatly increases LGBTQ organizations' leverage in movements. Even going to an LGBTQ organization's website will show a large list of international funders—it should be noted that government bodies in the home country are almost never listed as a funder.

Activists in Serbia frame the issue of LGBTQ rights around a humanist approach to human rights. Transnational networks allow LGBTQ activists the opportunities to apply pressure to their states and societies because of the various human rights treaties and conventions that Serbia has signed (Pearce and Cooper 2013). Activists find allies in these international organizations and foreign intervention agencies because their work aligns with the international groups' mandates on human rights promotion. These opportunities along with the threat of violence and continued persecution in the local context mobilize Serbian LGBTQ activists to attempt social change for LGBTQ inclusion and acceptance by seeking out a transnational approach to domestic activism. By this, I mean activists will seek assistance from outside Serbia in order to further domestic LGBTQ rights. This can be seen in the discourses around Belgrade Pride where Pride is understood as a litmus test for EU integration in that the violations of the freedom of

expression and assembly must be honored. The violence at "The Future Belongs to US" conference was also a catalyst for even allowing Pride to occur in 2014.

This strategy carries risks, however, as it is the threat of these international groups to the perceived Serbian norms that create counter movements in the form of religious and nationalist counter protests and attacks (Kahlina 2015, Brković 2014, Pearce and Cooper 2013).

4.5 Where Transnational Networks and Homonationalism Hit

As indicated throughout this thesis, Serbian LGBTQ activists understand their work within Serbia as more fruitful when they work with international actors than on the local level. I suggest that international actors often work within a homonationalist approach towards LGBTQ rights in Serbia, but activists use these transnational connections to continue their work regardless. As Brković describes for Montenegro, LGBT rights are not seen as legitimate political concerns (2014). This is true in Serbia where there is hardly any positive discussion of LGBT rights from politicians. If a Serbian politician discusses LGBTQ issues, then it is mostly in the form of a tolerance discourse. By this, I mean that these individuals will expound about the necessity to protect Serbian LGBTQ citizens, but will frame it so as to avoid any assumptions that they themselves are supportive of LGBTQ rights. For example, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić was quoted leading up to Belgrade Pride 2014 explaining his stance on attending the march in that he supported the assembly of the participants but had not intention on showing up:

> I really cannot march, I have other things to do instead of marching…Even, if I didn't have things to do, I wouldn't march. That is

> my choice. It is my choice if I go out with my kids on Sunday, or to go... to work…My obligation is to guarantee safety to my people. However it is my democratic choice not to take part in the Parade and it doesn't come to my mind to go there.[11]

A rare instance where a politician actually supported LGBTQ rights openly occurred at "The Future Belongs to Us" conference where Member of Parliament and President of the Human Rights and Gender Equality Committee, Meho Omerović, spoke in support of the conference. During his speech, he spoke about the need to uphold Serbia's commitments to the LGBTQ population, while mentioning EU policy harmonization frequently. At one point in this speech he told the crowd, "It is more troubling for people to see colorful balloons and flags, but they have no issue with fascist symbols being worn down the street." Though his speech was pro-LGBTQ, after he went to sit down, Dragana, MC-ing the session, bluntly responded to his speech that "[he] should do more to get his fellow ministers to support [LGBTQ] rights." She also told the audience that there were only a few government representatives present, mostly from the committee on gender equality who were also involved with LGBTQ activism. During the conference, activists often reiterated the fact that the Serbian government did not actively seek to be involved with the event nor did they try to get involve with any significant part of LGBTQ activism in Serbia. Though Dragana did say she appreciated the MP's involvement, her comment still showed that Dragana and the other activists saw one politician as not enough.

[11] http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vucic-says-no-to-belgrade-pride-march . Accessed June 2, 2015.

Informants brought this lack of support up in many conversations. One informant told me, "most meetings with the [Serbian] government are senseless." While organizing "The Future Belongs to US" conference, Labris ran into issues with City Hall. As part of the first day of the event, we were to go to City Hall for a film screening for the documentary *My Child,*[12] a Turkish film about parents of LGBTQ-identifying youth accepting their children's sexual orientations and gender identities. The activists were excited to have the event at the City Hall explaining to me that it was the first LGBTQ-related event to be held there. However, several days prior to the conference, Labris was notified by City Hall that there would not be formal representatives at the event. Jovana was visibly frustrated at the perceived insult of not having a person from City Hall at the event. She said that she was not completely surprised, but she had hoped for something different. The day of the conference, however, the workers at City Hall had an apparent change of heart and a representative was present to greet the guests.

On another occasion, Jovana from Labris explained the response she received after meeting with Serbia's Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Ivica Dačić, about his comments about LGBTQ persons.[13] As we sat in a café catching up while on a second fieldwork stint in February 2015, we caught up on some initiatives that were going on since I had left Belgrade the previous September. She told me, "I received some surprising negative feedback from meeting with [Dačić]. [Another activist] told me not to meet with him, that we [Labris] shouldn't meet with him at all." She had insisted that she

[12] For information on the documentary see http://www.mychilddocumentary.com/film.aspx. Accessed on June 2, 2015.
[13] See http://labris.org.rs/en/serbian-foreign-minister-ivica-dacic-apologized-to-labris-lesbian-human-rights-organization-for-discriminatory-statements-about-lgbt-persons/. Accessed May 20, 2015.

had to meet with him. For her, it was a political move to have him say something positive about LGBTQ rights, and to make sure it was in the media for people to see.

As Keck and Sikkink claim, governments are at the same the "violators" and the "guarantors" of human rights (1998, 12). Jovana understood the position of the Serbian government and that most likely Dačić was just paying lip service to LGBTQ rights, but, as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the government is still a large focus of LGBTQ rights activism in Serbia. Ryan Thoreson notes that "[LGBTQ] rights not only call into question governments' authority to regulate morality for a purported social good, but challenge beliefs and norms that are deeply rooted in a wider social fabric" (2014, 93). Though international actors can pressure Serbia to adopt certain policies, the Serbian state remains the responsible party to enact such changes. However, as Thoreson points out (ibid.), LGBTQ rights themselves, just by entering into the public conversation, may seek to challenge rooted norms, something that is not lost on activists. Jovana's stance on being open to government dialogue was repeated in other informants' discussion on gaining local legitimacy for LGBTQ rights.

LGBTQ activists understand that working with domestic Serbian political actors can only take their work so far in an environment that is predominantly anti-LGBTQ. It is because of this that these activists adopt homonormative approaches to activism and why they work with organizations that may hold negative views of their capacities in line with homonationalist ideas of "progressiveness." By delving into the literature on transnational advocacy, we see that these moves are strategic and may prove fruitful to activists' work. I do not mean that these activists' work is transnational. I use the literature on transnational networks to show that LGBTQ activists in Serbia will use these

networks to affect domestic LGBTQ politics. Because of the low levels of cooperation between LGBTQ activists and the Serbian state, international actors become catalyzers of LGBTQ policies and work to sustain LGBTQ rights NGOs.

"The Future Belongs to US" conference mentioned previously had representatives from countries outside of Serbia join in the conversation about LGBT rights in the region. The conference's aim was to allow a transnational flow of ideas and strategies to help combat the similar prejudices and discrimination found in the Balkans and parts of Europe, in line with the boomerang, spiral, and ricochet models described in Chapter 2. Conference panels dealt with topics outside of the standard discussion of EU integration, but the international community's presence was continuously reinforced. The conference was an intersection of this transnational advocacy that not only attempted to bring activists from the region together, but to show the Serbian government the political capital that the conference possessed.

The conference title, "The Future Belongs to Us: LGBTQ Rights on the Road to the European Union," speaks volumes about the situation of LGBTQ activism in Serbia and many activists' EU aspirations. The conference's main project was to bring Serbian activists together, but it was envisioned as international as well, working to create transnational partnerships between activists from different countries and possibly attract donor support. The conference showcased the array of international support. Ambassadors and representatives from the United States, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands attended and spoke at the event. Representatives from the Organization for the Security and Cooperation of Europe, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the European Union also participated. However, there was no representation from the

higher echelons of the Serbian government; not even the Ombudsmen for Human Rights attended the event. One Member of Parliament spoke, while several members of a gender equality commission attended, some of who are LGBTQ activists themselves. The organizers at Labris had tried several times to reach out to Serbian officials but to no avail. I was told that many Serbian government ministries offered to send a "representative" instead of a minister.

The speaker lineup at the conference shows how integral international actors are to LGBTQ activism in Serbia. It emphasizes the issues this creates when it comes to community engagement and involvement. The LGBTQ organizations become accountable to people in foreign countries, not to local populations. Thus, we see more of a focus on relationships with international groups than on concrete relationships with local populations or other rights groups.[14]

International actors have specific mandates to work within human rights, including LGBTQ rights promotion. As Kulpa has shown, these mandates implement the leveraged pedagogy that he champions (2013). Nico Beger notes the EU and the Council of Europe (CoE) are supranational organizations that work on issues that at times relate to sexuality rights in Europe (2004, 1). He claims that the EU has begun to prioritize sexuality rights in the conceptualization of the EU citizen: "Therefore, Europe [the EU] – as an institution and idea – has become one of the major stages on which the fight for rights is played out by those alleging discrimination and social exclusion" (Beger 2004, 1). In his discussion of how the EU has passed a legal framework to promote LGBTQ

[14] Only one organization whose activists I spoke with that focused on community engagement and community initiatives – workshops for local people, film screenings, and film festivals—was not funded. Instead, they drew their support from local businesses and connections through their day jobs working in the marketing sector. Since they could not obtain funds, the work they did was from their own volunteered time. Their activism was not constrained by foreign intervention agencies like other organizations.

rights in the European Parliament, he cites Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 which states that the EU "may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial, or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation."[15] Founded in 1949, the CoE's purpose is to protect human rights and sustain rule of law in its member states. It houses the European Court of Human Rights, which has seen various cases brought to it on sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. This includes the promotion of LGBTQ rights.[16]

Moreover, rights groups I encountered during my fieldwork argue that the Serbian state must adhere to Articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights:

> Article 16
> Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.
>
> Article 17
> 1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
> 2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.[17]
>
> Article 8
>
> 1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
> 2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.[18]

[15] For a summary of Article 13 see: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/amsterdam_treaty/a10000_en.htm. Accessed May 30, 2015.
[16] See http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/lgbt/CoELGBTIssues/LGBTIssuesCourt_EN.asp for more on the various ways the CoE's work on LGBTQ issues. Accessed: April 29, 2015.
[17] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.1966, http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx. Accessed: January 15, 2015
[18] European Convention on Human Rights. 1994, http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf. Accessed: January 15, 2015

A more recent hate crime report from the Organization for the Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE) lays clear that Serbia lacks any real reporting on instances of hate crimes related to LGBTQ identifying people. Serbia is one of the countries that in fact does not report data on such crimes. Labris was the only organization in 2013 to report to OSCE a hate crime against sexual minorities: a physical attack on two gay men.[19] These organizations rely heavily on Serbian LGBTQ activists to report issues of discrimination to them, and to work with them to promote their agendas in Serbia. Activists repeatedly told me that it was due to the EU's assistance that the first anti-discrimination law on the basis of sexual orientation was passed in Serbia in 2009.

The EU and other foreign intervention agencies support the activists by attending and funding workshops and trainings in support of the activists' work. These foreign organizations also pay for activists to attend sponsored trainings abroad. The newly-trained activists are then sent back to their respective home countries and NGOs in an attempt to not only gain support of their own activities, but the international groups' goals as well. Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal deftly state that "NGOs are simultaneously local and transnational, and ambiguously located in relation to states. NGOs may collaborate with, compete with, and sometimes act in place of states" (2014, 301). The paradoxical position of activist LGBTQ NGOs in Serbia means that not only do these groups have to take up the mantle of doing what the Serbian state appears unwilling to do; it is to provide the mechanisms that the EU requires Serbia to have in place. This causes issues on the local level, where many Serbian citizens feel the EU is violating Serbia's sovereignty.

[19] OSCE. Hate Crime Reporting. 2013. http://hatecrime.osce.org/serbia. Accessed: January 15, 2015

Connor O'Dwyer argues that this Europeanization has created backlash against EU conditionality instead of creating new norms that are inclusive of LGBTQ rights (2012) which has cased many Serbians to be against LGBTQ rights as they are against the EU's mandates. Greenberg (2014) and Slootmaekers (n.d.) both describe that normative frameworks of larger supranational institutions come to have deeper and more political meanings, resulting in differences in perception and reception on the local level. Greenberg goes on to suggest that this may cause more tension than prevent it (2014, 45) and may turn many Serbians (even LGBTQ identifying Serbians) off from supporting EU accession (2010, 54). For instance, leading up to the banned 2013 Pride Parade in Belgrade, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ivica Dačić, was quoted saying, "I am in favor of everybody's constitutional right to express their diversity, but it is my right not to go there. We shouldn't go to the other extreme and ingratiate ourselves with everybody. What am I supposed to do now, become gay, so that everything's pro-European." Dačić links "[becoming] gay" to being European, that is, a part of the EU. LGBT topics are consistently linked to the EU and Serbia's accession process.

For Serbian nationalists this means another reason to be skeptical of the EU since it may appear to be an attack on Serbia's sovereignty. The September conference itself sought to position Serbia's path toward the EU as a way to implement better protection for LGBTQ people. Indeed, the conference to an extent allowed for the first Pride Parade in Belgrade since 2010, a week after the conference. The international actors present in this conversations about Serbia's LGBTQ rights do create change, and many times this is positive. With no state support, working with international actors makes pragmatic sense.

Labris organized the conference with the help of the Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung Foundation and the Civil Rights Defenders, both international organizations working on LGBTQ rights globally. Two of the three keynote speeches were foreigners. Terry Reintke, a German member of the European Parliament and Christoph Strässer, the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid in Germany. The first Plenary Session of the conference was all foreigners, under the Plenary head, "LGBT people in Europe: Opportunities and Challenges for the Balkans. The description of the panel read:

> The aim of this panel is to discuss the opportunities and challenges for LGBT people in Europe. The EU, Council of Europe and a number of national governments over the past decade or so have demonstrated its ability to play a pivotal role in promoting LGBT human rights and the work of civil society more generally, however the question is are countries in the region doing enough to meet European standards…the panelists will speak about…what are some of the key challenges and what national and international institutions and organizations can do to help overcome these challenges (Labris, 6).[20]

We still see the immense authority that these international actors have on the LGBTQ activist scene in Serbia.

During my time assisting with the conference, Labris maintained communication with the Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung Foundation over every decision. The day before the conference started, I met with Jovana and some volunteers to set up the venue. Labris and

[20] Conference Program from "The Future Belongs to Us: LGBT Rights on the Road to the European Union." September 12-13, 2014.

their Belgrade-based activists had organized the majority of conference, including contacting potential speakers, figuring out plane tickets for those speakers, as well as accommodation for them. During the morning of the conference two representatives from the German foundation arrived on the scene in full force. Their demeanor was as if they had been the ones organizing the entire conference. I was curious as to why these two individuals, who did not appear to have much knowledge about Serbian LGBTQ rights activism, were suddenly prodding into the decision making process. They only bankrolled the conference's organization, yet these two individuals began taking charge of an event that Labris had headed for months.

I saw no real protest from Jovana and Dina, another lead Labris organizer, who both seemed to not concede any of their work to the German individuals, but I still was perplexed by their immediate inclusion into all decisions, even complaining here and there about setups of rooms and organization of name-tags for registration. It seemed that merely due to these individuals being from an international organization, they were deemed to be capable of merging with the group.

I saw this myself in my conference volunteering. At times, some activists gave me assignments for logistical work, commenting "You know how to do this, you're an American." These comments were sincere and were not sarcastic or joking. My position as foreigner from "the West" was held with the assumption I had a wealth of skills that included being a native English speaker, "expertise" on NGOs, and a solid professional attitude.

Foreigner's skills was continuously believed to be "superior" than that the Serbian LGBTQ activists. This was further indicated in a training session I attended in which the

Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a U.S.-based LGBTQ group promoting political participation of LGBTQ people held a week long training before the conference. A Spanish national working in the U.S. lead the program of both Serbians and other young LGBTQ-identifying people from the region. In another instance I went to a meeting between LGBTQ activists and another U.S.-funded international organization. The meeting focused on an online platform that was to be used to report instances of discrimination. Though the meeting was lead by Serbian individuals, it was housed in the organizations' office with its representatives running it. Though these representatives worked with LGBTQ rights activists, they still perceived themselves as apparently leading this initiative as civil society activists. One representative told me that the organizational capacity of the activists were not enough to sufficiently run a movement, implying that the activists themselves were not competent enough to begin a social movement.

4.6 Conclusion

Activists actively pursue these organizations due to the lack of support found in domestic spheres outside civil society and the third sector. LGBTQ activists thus navigate the complexities of reaching outside of the nation to work within the nation. Through these transnational networks, activists are able to bring 'home' needed resources and support to continue working on LGBTQ rights in the country. As Jelisaveta Blagojević writes:

> In Serbia, the idea of EU integration has the logic of a normative discourse. The unquestionable nature of this '*we must be part of the European Union'* attitude has its performative effects and serves as an

> argument which is to repeated and citied whenever decision-makers in Serbia become unwilling to actually confront the majority and so-called 'traditional values' (2010, 34, emphasis in original).

By using discourses of integration, activists are able to apply needed pressure to the Serbian state. This of course comes with various backlashes that might be due to this pressure (Pearce and Cooper 2013). But placed between a backlash from citizens while still receiving better protections against not using the international instruments present, LGBTQ activists use whatever way they have to protect the rights of LGBTQ Serbians. In this chapter I have explored the relationships between the international actors and local LGBTQ activists, arguing that through the transnational networks, homonationalist approaches seep into the discourses and on the ground assistance from these groups.

Chapter 5:

Towards the Future

After "The Future Belongs to Us" conference and the situation earlier in the day, I went to a party with about 15 fellow attendees to a popular queer-friendly hangout space in Dorčol, a neighborhood of Belgrade. I had never been, but it seemed like something the activists and I needed. We had intense conversations about activism but also less complicated ones, ranging from who knew more American pop songs to me teaching them the lyrics to Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" to a few activists. The next weekend I had the chance to return to Belgrade after my first week of courses for Belgrade Pride 2014.

Belgrade Pride 2014 was the first large-scale Pride in Belgrade that had gone off without a violent incident. The security for the event was tight. The police cordoned the surrounding streets of the parade route. There were so many police units that people posting on social media were referring to the Pride as the "Police Pride." The bus I regularly took to the city center was rerouted. I ended up frantically attempting to enter the parade area at several points in the city so I could reach the start. After trying to speak to the police and being ignored by them multiple times, I finally was told where one of the few security checkpoints was located. Arguing that I was there to take part in the Parade, I finally was allowed to pass the checkpoint.

I soon met up with a friend who was also walking to the starting point where we discussed the eerie, empty roads around the march. All one could see were police. No cars were on the road. The only vehicles were the armored trucks that looked like variations of a tank. The only people were the onlookers from apartment balconies, probably investigating if anything similar to the last Pride was happening. Coming into

the starting area, in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the rubble that was once the Ministry of Defense before the NATO bombings of 1999, several hundred people came to participate. With rainbow flags waving and music blaring from speakers, we stood and talked amongst ourselves before marching toward City Hall and the Parliament building. It took a total of 15 or so minutes for the parade to reach the front of the Parliament building where a line of speakers, both Serbian and foreign, spoke of Pride symbolizing Serbia's move to EU, where the EU and Europe were conflated together once again.

A few hours after Pride, I met with my friend Nikola at the Kalamegdan Fortress, which overlooks the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers. Though he did not attend the Pride, he was shocked about the atmosphere of Belgrade:

> It's like nothing happened today. Everything feels normal. This has never been like this. I expected something tense, something…anything but this. I don't understand it. Last time, the entire city was in chaos and everything seemed like it was on fire. But now…I just don't know.

I told him that I was grateful that it seemed like there was some change in how people think of the LGBTQ community, a good change. He scoffed and rebuked me, "Do you know why nothing bad happened? It's Vučić who controls the thugs."

Rory Archer echoes those claims that the peaceful 2014 Pride was due not to shifting ideas in favor of LGBTQ equality and protection but "probably have more to do with murky networks of power and cooperation between Serbian Prime Minister Vučić's government and Serbia's many far right groups than a creeping acceptance of LGBTQ rights among Serbian citizens" (2014). As both Archer and Nikola argue, it was the

absence of violent groups that strengthened commonly held beliefs that the Prime Minister has deep influence over these groups. LGBTQ activism in Serbia is no easy job for activists. Achieving victory for having been able to have a successful Pride Parade after over a decade of violence and cancellations, Archer and Nikola point that there is even still more issues at hand.

My experiences with these activists, volunteering with Labris, having interviews over coffee, and being able to attend Belgrade Pride 2014 allowed me to better understand LGBTQ activist strategies in Belgrade Alliances were split among focusing on the EU, transnational organizing, and the Serbian government. The precarious situation of LGBTQ activism in the country is easily seen. By teasing out some examples and observations of LGBTQ activism in Serbia, the various forces pulling at the strands of this activism can be observed. Activists groups have varied opinions about the state and the future of LGBTQ rights and activism in the country, and I have wished to explore and understand the wider context this activism. The activists face a harsh reality on the ground. Right now, several of my activist informants are applying to leave the country due to the constant threat of violence and unhappiness that marginalizes LGBTQ activism and even other human rights activisms.

This thesis explored why such controversial approaches involving homonormativity and homonationalism are used in Belgrade LGBTQ activism. By arguing that these are pragmatic uses that should be carefully understood by researchers, I have contributed to these discussions. For activists, they do not focus so much on the abstract ideals that seem to be behind much of the criticism against homonormativity and homonationalism. In the pragmatic sense, activists will do whatever they need to do to

make sure LGBTQ Serbians are protected—homonormative, homonationalist, or otherwise.

This of course does not shy away from the real implications such approaches to activism have. As I have noted, at times, gender norms are not examined or critiqued and international actors may deem local activists as incapable of making strides to better LGBTQ rights in Serbia. Further research should continue to assess these approaches, but should include a focus on the agency of the activists themselves and more attention to the reasons they choose such stances. Scholarship should also seek to explore the relationships between activists and non-activists. As I discussed at various point in this thesis, many non-activists do not feel that LGBTQ activists are truly on their side, nor do they understand the work activists do. There must be more studies on how activism resonates with local populations, in order to assist in the improvement of the community engagement of activists.

Serbia can be hostile towards LGBTQ people and the activists take a great deal of chance to be involved. Thus, I suggest we use a more empathetic approach to studying activism to respect this choice of high-risk activism. In my continued conversations and interviews with activists, I continue to ask them how they are able to continue their inspiring work in the country. Their responses always echo each other and like at the confernece: They just move on. They just do.

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