Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees in Serbia: Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Cultural Difference among NGO Workers

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

The thesis deals with the ways in which cultural and gender stereotyping and discursive creation of the images of refugee women and men from the Middle East/Africa affects attitudes of people who work in NGOs providing support to migrants in Serbia. I focus on the ways in which NGO workers navigate their sense of belonging to collective identities and 'symbolic geographies,' and how it affects their work and communication with migrants and refugees. The research is based on the interviews and participant observation conducted with people who work with refugees, especially those who had the refugee or activist experience during Yugoslav wars.

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Contents

I - Introduction and Background

1.1. Solidarity with migrants and refugees: gender anxieties

When I started to think about my research, I reflected upon my own experience as an NGO worker in Serbia, especially struggles and challenges I had during my work with migrants and refugees[1] from the Middle East and Africa. I started to work for an NGO dealing with migration issues in 2015, during the 'refugee crisis' on the 'Western Balkan Route' and spent the next three years designing and organizing 'psychosocial support' activities in the asylum centers, as well as designing and organizing awareness-raising activities on the position of migrants in local communities where asylum centers are placed. In other words, my colleagues and I were trying to establish the communication with the beneficiaries of the Asylum centers and to offer them various kinds of support, as well as to establish communication between migrants and local population through public events, exhibitions and joint educational activities. The term 'culture' was always present and provoked anxiety among us. I sometimes felt caught between the wish to approach people without prejudices and my own assumptions about how people might react to our behavior or the activities we offer. Further, I was stuck between the wish not to offend someone or to make someone feel uncomfortable and the wish not to give up my own values and beliefs in the encounter with cultural differences, especially regarding gender relations. I spent a lot of time talking with my colleagues about these issues and trying to figure out where are the boundaries. I will illustrate this challenge with an example: a public event I organized in 2017 in one city in Serbia where Asylum centre is placed. The event was some sort of festival that lasted several days and included many joint activities with migrants and local population. The main part was an exhibition about our work in the centers with women and teenagers during previous year and included exhibits made during artistic workshops. We decided to organize workshops

[1] In scholarly literature and in the legislations on migration in Europe, the term migrant refers to a person who had consciously decided to leave their country due to the economic reasons or the lack of opportunities, while the term refugee refers to a person who is at the risk of persecution and who is forced to leave their country. While I am aware of this difference and of the different legal consequences of the distinction, my opinion is that an extreme poverty or extremely difficult life conditions can be considered a life-threatening situation. In that sense, I often use the terms interchangeably.

and film screenings during the exhibition in the same venue. My plan was to screen the documentary I had watched that year at the Festival of Documentary Film in Belgrade - a film about a young Afghan girl who lives in Iran and makes rap songs while her family is planning to sell her into marriage.[2] My first thought was that it was a good topic for discussion after the screening, since we often talked with women about marriage during workshops. However, the day before the screening I gave up this idea and decided not to screen the film. I suddenly felt like it would be inappropriate to screen the film during public event, in the presence of migrant women who might feel like my intention is to give them lectures about how they should live their life or to underestimate their ability to judge the oppression they experience. Several months later, one of my colleagues screened this film during daily activities in another Asylum centre to a group of women with whom she had worked for a long time. She informed me that the reception was good and the discussion was interesting. Nobody got offended. However, that was not a public event, but some sort of 'safe space' for women, and I was not sure what would have been the right decision in my case.

These kinds of situations made me think how people who work with migrants deal with gender and cultural stereotypes regarding 'others,' and how they navigate perceived and expressed differences in gender relations in practice. I decided to interview translators, psychologists, sociologists, and socially engaged artists who work for NGOs on the activities with migrants, since I assumed that we share similar goals and political beliefs. In that sense, I was interested in people who are not only professionally, but also personally motivated to work on a support to migrants and refugees, who feel solidarity, and who treat people as not only passive recipients of aid, but also as active and curageous individuals. Further, my assumption was that my informants and I share general leftist political attitudes, especially regarding the ideas of equal treatment and the acceptance of 'others,' as well as the requests for gender equality and equity. However, my main concern was how cultural stereotyping and discursive creation of the images of refugee women and men, and the narratives of assumed oppressive gender relations in the 'Muslim world,' which are widespread in media and public discourse in Serbia, but also generally in Europe, affect attitudes and behavior of people who work with refugees.

[2] Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami, *Sonita* (2015), https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5278928/

Therefore, my inquiry was focused on the ways in which the people who feel solidarity with migrants, advocate for peaceful coexistence of various groups of people, and argue for gender equity and equality, deal with ambiguous narratives and situations regarding gender relations. Further, I was interested in how communication with migrants/refugees affected their perception of gender relations and differences, their motivation for work, and their sense of belonging to collective identities and 'symbolic geographies.'[3] In addition, I have chosen to explore the activism of solidarity with migrants, because it usually differs from the official narratives and media representations of mass migrations and represents the alternative ways of the perception of migrations in Europe. My informants can be considered a political minority in Serbia since their work is often based on the ideas of tolerance, interculturality, and solidarity, which are in many ways opposed to the dominant nationalist discourses of post-Yugoslav societies. However, these attitudes are not simply *pro* and *contra*, but with the variety of ambiguities, since the post-Yugoslav/Balkan collective identities and societies are usually considered 'liminal'[4] in the geopolitical orders and 'symbolic geographies'[5] imaginary: not quite European, while being on the European continent.[6] During the Yugoslav wars[7] and the period of transition from socialism into capitalism, there was a constant attempt in the local pro-Western liberal discourses to prove that post-Yugoslavs are part of the 'Western civilization'/Europe.[8] These attempts could be either part of nationalist narratives or of anti-nationalist discourses. I am interested in how this 'Europeanness,' as well as the 'Balkanness' function within the perception of Islam as the 'other', especially regarding gender equality and gender difference.

During my research, my main questions were- How do NGO workers who work with migrants perceive and navigate differences in gender relations? How do they deal with gender and cultural stereotypes regarding the 'others'? What kind of differences they encounter in practice and how

[3] Milica Bakic-Hayden, and Robert M. Hayden. "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics." *Slavic Review*, no. 1 (1992): 1-15.
[4] Marko Živković. *Serbian Dreambook: National Imaginary in the Time of Milošević*. New Anthropologies of Europe. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011, 70.
[5] Bakic-Hayden, and Hayden. "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans,' 1-15.
[6] Vesna Goldsworthy, "Invention and in(ter)vention: The Rethoric of Balkanization," in *Balkan as Metaphor*, ed. Dušan I. Bijelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2002), 29.
[7] I use the term Yugoslav wars to describe the armed conflicts during the dissolution of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia; namely, the war in Croatia (1991-1995), the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), and the Kosovo war (1998-1999).
[8] Stef Jansen, "Who's afraid of white socks? Towards a critical understanding of post-Yugoslav urban self-perceptions." *Ethnologia Balkanica*, *9*, (2005): 151-167.

do they perceive these differences? Where do they position themselves within the narrative of East/West binary and how it affects their relations and communication with the beneficiaries? What motivates them: assumed cultural differences or similarities? Has the communication with migrants changed their sense of belonging to collective/cultural identities? Has this communication changed their perception of gender and cultural relations among the 'others'?

My main argument is that, while Europe, the Balkans, and the Orient exist as references in the narratives of my informants, NGO workers who work with migrants do not stand "in between" the binary Orient/Occident division, but rather go beyond this division and reveal multiple layers of narratives on race, civilization, progress, and modernity.

This thesis is divided into six sections. In second chapter, I present scholarly literature on Orientalism, Balkanism, race and gender, to set up a framework of my research. In third chapter, I explain the methods and design of my fieldwork and research conducted in Serbia in 2019. Fourth chapter is on political orientation and sense of belonging of my informants aimed to examine different narratives that shape NGO workers' self-positioning in the global geopolitical orders and 'symbolic geographies.'[9] In chapter 5, I analyze their communication with migrants and refugees to discover how NGO workers deal in practice with the gender and cultural differences and through which lenses they interpret the differences. In Conclusion, I summarize the findings of scholarly literature and compare them with my fieldwork findings.

1.2. Background

Identities in the Balkans were conceptualized and (self)narrated through various prisms over time: Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, liberation period and the formation of nation states, communist and Non-aligned movement experiences, as well as the experience of the Yugoslav wars, disintegration of Yugoslavia and the processes of transition from socialism into capitalism. All these legacies affected and still affect (self)positioning of the Balkans between "Orient" and

[9] Milica Bakic-Hayden, and Robert M. Hayden. "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans,'1-15.

"Western civilization," especially regarding the concepts of femininity and masculinity, women's rights and gender equality.

Over the last decade, the Balkans became one of the major routes for refugees and migrants from Middle East and Africa on their way to Western Europe. In 2015, so-called 'refugee crisis' emerged in Europe. The massive influx of refugees produced moral panic and evoked racist images of migrant's 'predatory sexuality', together with the narratives on Islam as inherently patriarchal and oppressive to women, and thus, the threat to state's security, on the one hand. On another, the human's rights narratives stressed the obligations on protecting rights of refugees and their acceptance. The legislation on security and protecting borders collided with the international human rights laws, producing wide debate within the states of EU on how migrations should be managed. In post-Yugoslav area, formation of the 'Western Balkans Route' recalled the memories of displacement from the Yugoslav wars, but with differently racialized bodies.[10] Catherine Baker draws attention to "the [media] spectacles of militarized border security, and of grassroots migrant solidarity." [11] The Balkans found themselves once again on the front pages of the newspapers, now not due to war atrocities, but due to their 'proper response' to the 'refugee crisis'. Serbian politicians were emphasising the hospitality of their nations, whose example should serve now to European states as a reminder of their own values. Significant to mention is the fact that the Serbian government consists the political parties who were far-right wing parties (and thus, "Euroskeptic") during Yugoslav wars or part of the Milošević's regime. After 2008, these parties declared the turn towards European integrations and suggested turn to "progress and future," instead of looking to "dark past." In that sense, the government's position on the crimes committed during Yugoslav wars remained unclear or ambiguous. However, government's emphasis on the acceptance of refugees and migrants was a cynical attempt to represent the Balkans for the first time as more 'European' than Western Europe. In addition, those claims neglected the fact that the Balkan states were not the destination states, and thus, not responsible for the acceptance of refugees, but only for their safe transfer. Moreover, since post-Yugoslav states lacked the capacities for dealing with mass migrations, much of the 'proper response' was provided by various local and international organizations, as well as by enthusiastic individuals and volunteers. Since the capacities of the

[10] Catherine Baker. *Race and the Yugoslav region,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). 157.
[11] Ibid., 155.

existing asylum centres were filled, temporary/'transitional' camps and unofficial spots for provision of aid were formed. Catherine Baker argues that the presence of migrants recalled the memories of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as the memories of the 1990s displacement, which caused relatively more welcoming attitudes than in other post-socialist EU members.[12] Yet, the post-Yugoslav official governments expressed ambivalence regarding migration: security and the 'War on Terror' narratives were employed together with the human rights narratives. Stuck between rising Islamophobia in Europe and the wish to show multicultural attitudes (as a signifier of 'Europeannes') through the compassion and solidarity with refugees, post-Yugoslav official narratives were not coherent. In that sense, post-Yugoslav identities became destabilized and challenged once again (after the wars and collapse of socialism) between shifting binaries: civilization-backwardness, cosmopolitism-nationalism, hostility-xenophobia, West-East. This challenge especially became clear in the public representation of migrant 'deviant sexuality', assumed oppressive gender relations, and the threats to public morality and health.[13]

[12] Ibid., 159.
[13] Example: "Serbia in fear of the prostitute infected by HIV." *Telegraf*. News article, 26 June 2018. https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/hronika/2969911-srbija-u-strahu-zbog-prostitutke-zarazene-hiv-om-jordanka-za-9-meseci-bila-sa-500-muskaraca

II - Literature Review and Theoretical framework

2.1. Orientalism, Balkanism, and race

The starting point of my inquiry is Said's *Orientalism*, which I use to understand the Orient-Occident distinction and the stereotypes about the Orient. According to Said, the Orient is a discursive formation[14] based on a distinction between unknown "them" and familiar "us."[15] Said argues that this arbitrary division has "only a fictional reality,"[16] based on the prejudices about exotic and mysterious,[17] but dangerous East.[18] This "reality," which is presented in Europe as the objective knowledge about the East, for Said is "a form of paranoia."[19] I am interested in how this 'paranoia' and fear of the unknown are internalized and how they function in the communication with unfamiliar 'them.' I find Said's *Orientalism* crucial for the understanding of cultural stereotypes regarding the "others" within the East-West binary. In addition, Said's work gives numerous examples of the use of the female body's images in the creation of orientalist discourse; however, Said never explicitly discusses feminist issues, nor offers an analysis of gender relations and identities. To examine how gender stereotypes function within the orientalist discourse, as well as, how the mainstream liberal thought in Europe uses the orientalist discourse for the construction of its gendered self-perception in the opposition to Orient, I focus on the work postcolonial feminist Zonana Joyce. According to Joyce, liberal feminist thought traditionally relies on the Orientalist images of inherently oppressive gender relations in the East.[20] Further, Joyce argues that liberal feminism makes the opposition between subordination of women in tyrannical East,[21] and gender equality and woman's freedom in rational West.[22] My analysis focuses on how this opposition functions in practice, in the encounter of liberal NGO workers with migrants/refugees. Further, I examine how the ambiguous position of Balkans and

[14] Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 49.
[15] Ibid, 54.
[16] Ibid, 54.
[17] Ibid, 52.
[18] Ibid, 62.
[19] Ibid, 71.
[20] Zonana Zonana Joyce, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of "Jane Eyre."" *Signs*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring 1993): 593-594.
[21] Ibid, 599.
[22] Ibid, 614.

its collective identities in the stereotypical East-West binary affects the NGO workers' perception of 'Eastern' gender relations and differences.

Regarding the ambiguities of the Balkans, I focus on the literature on Balkanism to examine the ways in which the binary Orient-Occident discourses shape the sense of belonging to collective identities in Serbia. Milica Bakić-Hayden introduced the concept of 'nesting orientalisms' within the Balkans to explain the shifting boundaries[23] and gradation of 'Orients.'[24] According to Bakić-Hayden, within the Balkans, the gradation starts with those who identify with Austro-Hungarian legacy/Catholic Christians and Occidentalize themselves in the comparison with neighbors who were under Ottoman rule/Orthodox Christians/Muslims. Further, Orthodox Christians oppose themselves to Muslims and Muslims to non-Europeans as the "ultimate Orientals,"[25] in some sort of competition, where 'civilized' Europe is the point of reference.[26] Regarding this concept, I analyze what happens in Serbia when 'civilized' Europe offers two opposed discourses as a signifier of Europeanness: neo-colonial racism and multiculturalism; and how it complicates the sense of 'backwardness' and 'progress.' Further, Maria Todorova introduced the concept of Balkanism[27] and described it as a Western portrayal of the Balkans as those who avoid the acceptance of "civilized world's" standards of behavior.[28] In addition, Todorova argues that the international public sphere pays attention to the Balkans only during wars, while ignores them during peace.[29] In addition, Todorova argues that the concept of Balkanism has an independent status from Orientalism,[30] since Orientalism is the opposition in binary, while Balkanism presents the ambiguity within the West.[31] To support her argument, Todorova stresses the non-colonial status, 'whiteness,' Christianity, and 'Europeanness' of the Balkans[32] as evidence that the concept does not belong into discussions on race and postcolonial critique.[33]

[23] Milica Bakić-Hayden. "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia." *Slavic Review*, no. 4 (1995), 917.
[24] Ibid, 918.
[25] Milica Bakić-Hayden. "Nesting Orientalisms." 922.
[26] Ibid, 930.
[27] Maria Todorova. "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention." *Slavic Review*, no. 2 (1994): 453-482.
[28] Maria Todorova. *Imagining the Balkans*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.
[29] Ibid., 184.
[30] Ibid, 20.
[31] Ibid, 17-18.
[32] Ibid, 20.
[33] Ibid, 19.

However, the since the early 2000s, scholars have begun to develop a critique of race in the context of Balkanism. Dušan Bijelić argues that the notion of "progress" shapes the "whiteness"/"blackness" opposition in the same manner as the construction of the Serb identity depends on the construction of Albanian,[34] or as European identity depends on the Balkans.[35] In this sense, according to Bijelić, the Balkans could switch between colonizer/colonized opposition.[36] Further, remaining unstable, Balkanism uses the colonial binary logic.[37] Moreover, Bijelić argues that Balkan serves to former colonizers as a way to purify and forget its own violence towards colonized, while imposing the same logic on them through the neocolonial 'humanitarian' military interventions.[38]

However, in their defense from racist accusations, the Balkans would use not only the argument of their colonial 'innocence,' but also the Yugoslav role in the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Konstantin Kilibarda analyzes the history of Yugoslav involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement, to reveal the racial implications of the post-Yugoslav states' shift towards Euro-Atlantic integrations.[39] His short history of the NAM shows the Yugoslav's politics ambiguities towards imperialism: while playing a role-model for the countries of the 'Third world' in presenting the anti-fascist struggle and revolution as a pattern for decolonization,[40] Yugoslavia had various connections with the Western (neo)imperialism, its capital and discourses.[41] After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Kilibarda argues, the 'European tendency' of post-Yugoslav countries adopted racialized 'civilisational' discourse and practices (restrictive immigration policies, participation in the military missions, and the neopatriarchy).[42] However, Kilibarda argues that the Balkan identities remained multiple, and that the transnational

[34] Dušan I. Bijelić. "Introduction: Blowing up the "Brigde"," in *Balkan as Metaphor*, ed. Dušan I. Bijelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2002), 2.
[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Ibid., 6.
[37] Ibid., 7.
[38] Ibid., 11.
[39] Konstantin Kilibarda. "Non-aligned geographies in the Balkans: space, race and image in the construction of new "European" foreign policies," in *Security Beyond the Discipline: Emerging Dialogues on Global Politics*, ed. Abhinava Kumar and Derek Maisonville (Toronto: York Centre for International and Security Studies, 2010), 27-57.
[40] Ibid., 2.
[41] Ibid., 38.
[42] Ibid., 45-46.

solidarity persisted in those identities 'from below' rather than from the official discourses of political elites.[43]

Nevertheless, Miglena S. Todorova offers evidence against the 'colonial innocence' of the Balkans. Todorova draws attention to the violent policies towards racialized women within socialist states in the Balkans: Muslim and Roma women, who were marked for emancipation.[44] According to Todorova, there is a need for questioning of the role of race in the constitution of socialist (white, European) woman.[45] She argues that during the "anti-racist" socialism the portrayal of Roma and Muslim people as inferior persisted.[46] Moreover, she draws attention to racist policies (forced sterilization, etc.) and the 'civilizing missions' of Bulgarian (white) women devoted to the emancipation of Muslims and Roma in order to eradicate Islam.[47] In addition, she argues that the post-socialist neoliberalization and "re-Europeanization" contributed to the revival of "racist imaginations."[48] This notion complicates Maria Todorova's claims that postcolonial theory cannot be connected to the balkanist narratives,[49] since the Balkans are predominantly white and Christian. However, she neglects the existence of non-white and non-Christian Balkans.

Finally, Catherine Baker places 'Balkanism' and the Yugoslav region within the global context of 'race' and the history of colonialism.[50] Baker argues that 'Balkanism' does not offer the solution for the ambiguity in (self)interpretation of the Balkans: while being constructed as the Other of 'Europe', the identification with (colonial, 'civilized') Europe is present through the myth of standing at the 'bulwark of Christianity' (*Antemurale* myth).[51] Further, Baker draws attention to the racialization and othering within the Balkans as the consequence of ideological and structural power of 'race', which has the ideas of modernity, civilization, binary oppositions, and essentialism in its core.[52] According to Baker, the Balkans still have the capacity of showing

[43] Ibid., 47.
[44] Miglena S. Todorova. "Race and Women of Color in Socialist/Postsocialist Transnational Feminisms in Central and Southeastern Europe." *Meridians* 16, no. 1 (2018): 114.
[45] Ibid., 136.
[46] Ibid., 120-121.
[47] Ibid., 123.
[48] Ibid., 132.
[49] Maria Todorova. *Imagining the Balkans*, 17.
[50] Catherine Baker. *Race and the Yugoslav region*
[51] Ibid., 19.
[52] Ibid., 28.

racist behaviors,[53] even without the imperialist history, and without the experience of mass immigration of those considered non-white,[54] and regardless of the "analogies drawn between 'Balkanness' and 'blackness' in imagined solidarity."[55] In addition, Baker argues that othering within the region reveals the "deeper history of colonialism" that "made whiteness available as an identification within east European national identities,"[56] and which made the exclusion of Roma and Albanians possible.[57] Moreover, Baker argues, the ambiguity of the Balkan identities became visible through the self-representation of the Balkans as linked to the Middle East through the post-Ottoman legacy,[58] while simultaneously indentifying themselves with the "white, secular, sexually liberated 'Europe,'" as opposed to Islam and 'blackness'.[59]

In my opinion, all of these ambiguous histories and logics became visible during the 2015 'migration crisis' on the 'Western Balkans Route.' Further, the rise of nationalism/racism in Europe also has its gender implications, which are deeply based in the European colonial discourse, where gender equality serves as a proof of modernity.

2.2. Women's rights as a marker of modernity and the European neopatriarchy

For the examination of gendered implications of nationalist/racist discourses, I use Sara R. Farris's concept of "femonationalism." According to Farris, the cooperation between feminism and nationalism/racism (femonationalism) reproduces the notion of European superiority over the 'backward' Muslims who are 'oppressive' towards women.[60] In that sense, women's rights and gender equality are a marker of civilizational progress.[61] Farris argues that "paradoxical

[53] Ibid., 4.
[54] Ibid., 1.
[55] Ibid., 2.
[56] Ibid., 14.
[57] Ibid., 21.
[58] Ibid., 161.
[59] Ibid., 23.
[60] Sarah R. Farris. *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 2-9.
[61] Ibid., 3.

intersections" of the right wing, feminist, and neoliberal narratives fuels Islamophobia.[62] Further, she emphasizes the oppressor/victim binary that was employed in colonial times, which stigmatize Muslim men and presents Muslim women as the ultimate victims of oppression.[63] I argue that Balkan identities are contested with this notion: while being 'othered' as patriarchal and violent during Yugoslav wars, they are now invited to participate in neopatriarchy "in the name of women's rights."[64]

For the examination of how the narratives of women's rights function in the Balkans, I find useful Elissa Helms's analysis of "nesting orientalisms" in Bosniak communities,[65] where women's rights and women's dress codes serve as a marker of modernity.[66] According to Helms, Bosniaks attempt to present themselves as "progressive," "not like Arabs,"[67] especially regarding gender equality.[68] Helms argues that "[e]ssentialized notions of gender equality"[69] in the West serve as a proof of Europeanness for Bosniaks. Having this in mind, I am interested in the ways in which the notions of gender equality and differences in gender relations function in the encounter with 'Arabs:' whether the NGO workers perceive the patriarchal oppression as something foreign or familiar, and to which extent Orientalism/Balkanism/'race' shapes that perception?

2.3. Balkanism and markers of modernity in Serbia

For placing Serbia within the balkanist narratives, I use the literature on Serbian society during the 1990s. Marko Živković argues that the Viennese and Turkish coffee serve as a marker of difference in European stereotyping, as a division line between Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian influence.[70] In that sense, "symbolic geographies" place Serbs "in between" even within the

[62] Ibid., 3.
[63] Ibid., 5.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Elissa Helms. "East and West Kiss: Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim-Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Slavic Review*, no. 1 (2008), 91.
[66] Ibid, 101.
[67] Ibid, 105.
[68] Ibid, 91-92.
[69] Ibid, 118.
[70] Marko Živković, *Serbian Dreambook*, 47.

Balkans.[71] Further, Živković argues that Serbs occupy "unprofitable position of those neither properly civilized nor sufficiently primitive."[72] According to Živković, Serbian narrarives aimed for European audience exploit this position during crisis and wars to "self-exoticize" barbarity as more "real" than "decadent" Europe.[73] However, otherings for the internal use are often division on the backward "highlanders" and the progressive "lowlanders."[74] This division goes almost in the line with the borders of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires.

Further, Eric Gordy's analysis of the ways in which Milošević's regime remained in power, regardless of the losing of military conflicts, producing refugees, and hyperinflation;[75] offers an argument that Milošević's politics was focused on the making cultural and political alternatives unavailable, while turning to rural, less educated, and older population.[76] Gordy argues that Milošević's "silent war"[77] against society relied on the social division made by incomplete transition from agrarian to modern economic model, where older/younger, urban/peasant, "open cosmopolitan" and "closed nationalist" orientations were available,[78] similarly as in the highlanders/lowlanders division. In this imagery, Belgrade was perceived as not Serbian, but Yugoslav, cosmopolitan, democratic; while rural Serbia and "southern railway" presented nationalist supporters of Milošević.[79] Within this division, according to Gordy, urban rock and roll youth oppossed wars, while the state promoted "kitsch" "turbofolk" for rural masses.[80] In this sense, musical taste reflected urban/peasant distinction, as well as the affiliation to nationalist regime.[81] In addition, Gordy argues that the war provided possibilities to disqualify opponents as unpatriotic and traitors "when unity is needed,"[82] and to mark international donor organizations as foreign intelligence agencies.[83]

[71] Ibid., 69.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 68-69.
[74] Ibid., 78.
[75] Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 1.
[76] Ibid., 2.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 6.
[79] Ibid., 14.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 105.
[82] Ibid., 24.
[83] Ibid., 12.

The urban/rural division is central to the narratives of Serbian collective identities commonly known as the First and the Other Serbia. Ana Russell-Omaljev describes this division as a part of "in between" narratives of East and West.[84] She describes the self-perception of the First Serbia as tolerant only towards "ours;" defeated in wars, but proud; a part of 'an Old Europe,' but not European enough to "loose identity" through Euro-integration, on one hand.[85] On another, the Other Serbia perceives Serbia as defeated country that hesitates to face the war crimes and pleads for joining Europe as the only chance for democratization and redemption.[86] However, Russell-Omaljev argues that the First/Other are ambivalent terms, with many overlaps, and individuals whose self-perception varies over time.[87] According to Russell-Omaljev, the last major switch of the binary happened in 2008, when the 'Progressives' (present government), who are former right-wing 'Radicals,' decided to support the EU accession, while the leftist actors now oppose Euro-integration due to anti-imperialist attitudes.[88]

In addition, for the analysis of the 'Progressives" turn to Europe, multiculturalism, and liberalism, I use Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism," since the 'Progressives' introduced the first lesbian Prime Minister in Serbian history (and the in Balkans, as well) Ana Brnabić in 2018. Therefore, Puar describes homonationalism in the U.S. context as an inclusion of queer identities into nationalist narratives through "the idealization of the United States as a properly multicultural heteronormative society but nevertheless gay friendly, tolerant, and sexually liberated society."[89] According to Puar, this practice has the racist/civilizational superiority meanings within the 'War on Terror' narratives, through presentation of the U.S. as "gay-safe" zone when compared to the Middle East.[90]

I use these concepts and binary division to analyze the political position of my NGO informants, who are often imagined as "traitors" by the First Serbia, or as urban, cosmopolitan, liberals by the Other. Further, I was interested how the political switches affect their political attitudes and self-positioning.

[84] Ana Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in 'First' and 'Other' Serbia* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2016), 1.
[85] Ibid., 3.
[86] Ibid., 3-4.
[87] Ibid., 87.
[88] Ibid., 5.
[89] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 39.
[90] Ibid., 42.

III - Methods and Research Design

3.1. Ethnographic Methods

I have chosen to apply feminist qualitative methods for my research. Feminist epistemology challenges the idea of 'objective' knowledge and embraces the idea that knowledge production is not neutral, but political.[91] According to Judith Stacey, "feminist research principles" are based on the rejection of the subject/object, thought/feeling, political/personal distinctions; contextualized, and grounded in the "lived experience."[92] In my research, I analyze the "lived experience" and "subjective" feelings, perceptions, and positions that are shaped through various political discourses and have real political impacts and consequences. Many authors stress the activist dimension of feminist research: the advocacy for social change.[93] I see my research as an attempt to contribute to a social change in the post-Yugoslav societies. My decision to study NGO workers and their solidarity with refugees has the aim to challenge dominant nationalist discourses, as well as the binary divisions of geopolitical orders. Nancy Naples argues that research questions should be "personally, politically and academically significant."[94] In the case of my research, my personal and political aims are to contribute to a change towards peaceful coexistence of various groups of people and towards gender equity in the post-Yugoslav societies, while my academic aim is to contribute to the debates on Orientalism, Balkanism, and race from a gender perspective and from the specific context. In other words, my aim is to challenge the stereotypes and examine how practical experience affects political and cultural standpoints. In addition, my aim is to problematize a common binary perception of Serbian society as divided between Balkan, nationalist, xenophobic, backward, rural, and uneducated lower classes and European, liberal, multicultural, progressive, urban, highly educated, middle classes.

[91] Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(1) (1988), 22.
[92] Ibid., 21.
[93] Davis and Craven, *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking Through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*. 115; Nencel, "Situating reflexivity: Voices, positionalities and representations in feminist ethnographic texts," 81; Naples, "Epistemology, Feminist Methodology, and the Politics of Method," 13.
[94] Nancy Naples, "Epistemology, Feminist Methodology, and the Politics of Method," in *Feminsim and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*, (2005), 13.

I conducted the participant observation in the asylum center and in public spaces in Sandžak during the 'psychosocial support' activities and in the offices of NGOs in Belgrade during the working days. I have chosen 'psychosocial support' activity because it is the least structured practice and it requires a relaxed and informal atmosphere, where the social relations of the workers and beneficiaries are visible. This strategy helped me to compare the answers of my informants with their behavior in the field. Further, I have chosen the offices of the NGOs to examine how the workers think about their activities and the relationships with the beneficiaries.

Regarding the interviewing strategies, I relied on oral history/testimony practices. I was focused on the position and agenda of the informant; what sub-texts and silences could reveal; the significance and meaning of the mentioned events; how cultural values shape the narrative: what is marked as important and in which order events are told[95] to collect the additional information beyond the narrative. Regarding the narrative, I tried to avoid rigidly structured interviews and give priority to what the person wishes to tell, instead of insisting on what I want to hear.[96] In that way, I collected information about the aspects of experiences that I neglected or that were unknown to me. However, the power relations are shifting, as the informants decide what to share and what not.[97] In that sense, it was crucial for me to gain trust and to establish meaningful relationships. My previous professional experience was helpful since I worked at the same job as my informants for several years. Further, since the NGO community in Serbia is relatively small, I already knew most of my informants and I had collaborated with many of them previously. I became close with some of them over the years and we had already had conversations about our doubts and anxieties regarding gender stereotypes and differences before. In that sense, people were willing to participate in my research and to talk with me openly. In that sense, mutual understanding, the vicinity of our positions and shared at least the basic political beliefs allowed me to practice "[i]ntersubjective knowledge production," namely the knowledge that is a product of social interaction.[98] However, there is a risk that those who will tell the whole story in the end-researchers could exploit and manipulate the trust, closeness, and understanding, even

[95] Joan Sangster, "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Oral History Reader*, eds., Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 7.
[96] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *OHR*, Chapter 3, 39.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., 14.

unintentionally. During my research and writing process, I was constantly aware of this risk and I applied several strategies to protect my informants.

3.2. Ethical standpoints

Davis and Craven list some of the basic feminist ethical concerns: welfare and the protection of informants, confidentiality regarding identity, informed consent,[99] and protection of sensitive data,[100] and I used these principles as a guide during my research. Therefore, my main concern was the protection of the identity of my informants, since most of them are well-known activists in the NGO and the wider community.

I changed all the names of my informants, even though most of them stated they are indifferent regarding anonymity. However, I decided to change all names to spare them the potential unpleasant situations in the future, since nobody insisted to remain under the real name in the narrative. Further, I changed some small personal details that cannot affect the interpretation, and I often do not reveal their profession or the position within the organization. In addition, I do not mention the names of the organizations for which my informants had worked or still work, since this would make them easily recognizable. Moreover, the narrative does not contain the exact year of birth, the place of residence (if it is not Belgrade), or for those who had a refugee experience, the name of the city or country they fled. I find important to mention that today in Serbia live people who experienced forceful displacement during Yugoslav wars, and who came from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo;[101] however, I do not specify the place of origin of my informants. Further, I do not reveal the name of the town in Sandžak where I conducted interviews and participant observation. However, I find important to mention that the Sandžak area is placed between Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a

[99] Davis and Craven, *Feminist Ethnography*, 100.
[100] Ibid., 108.
[101] The official term Serbian authorities use for the people who fled Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is refugee, while for the people who fled Kosovo authorities use the term internally displaced. This distinction has the political motivation regarding the disputed status of Kosovo and different legal consequences; however, I do not find this distinction relevant for my arguments, and I use the term refugee for all the people who were forcefully displaced during Yugoslav wars.

multicultural area, with predominantly Bosniak, Serb, and Montenegrin population. During the Yugoslav wars, Bosniak, Serb, and Roma refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo found the refuge in this area. In addition, I avoid descriptions of physical appearance or personal characteristics of my informants, although I am aware that these descriptions could contribute to the narrative and interpretation. However, I want to avoid any risk of people being recognized.

Moreover, I tried to avoid evocation of traumatic memories[102] as much as possible, since I am not trained in psychology, and thus, I cannot act properly in the situations of re-experiencing the trauma. In that sense, I did not insist on further explanations regarding refugee experience or regarding stressful and emotionally difficult situations during their work. Regarding the well-being of imformants, Davis and Craven propose the avoidance of overburdening of the informants and offer various suggestions for "giving back," among which are the offers for collaboration in the process or will to change the transcript if the informants disagree.[103] While I do agree that the participation and agency of the informants can contribute to the results of research, I would like to reflect upon the inherent ambivalence of these practices.

Several feminist authors stress the dangers of the egalitarian collaborative approach and 'intersubjectivity,' which could obscure the privilege of the researcher and lead to exploitation and abuse,[104] especially if there is a deep intimacy between the researcher and the informant.[105] Joan Sangster argues for the approach to informants as a professional, not as a friend,[106] whereas several other authors argue for the dialogic strategies, even in the analysis, small group conversations and friendship.[107] To avoid the harm, I approached the issues firstly as a professional. However, I do already perceive some of my informants as friends and I have close and honest relationships with them. In my opinion, already established relationships require special attention regarding trust and betrayal through a negotiation of the boundaries between personal and professional. In that sense, I paid special attention to avoiding deep intimacy during these interviews. A good strategy I developed together with my informants was to have a

[102] Davis and Craven, *Feminist Ethnography*, 113.
[103] Ibid., 114.
[104] Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" 22; Joey Sprague and Mary K. Zimmerman, "Quality and Quantity: Reconstructing Feminist Methodology," *The American Sociologist*, 20(1), 1989, 77; Sangster, "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," 11.
[105] Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" 24.
[106] Sangster, "Telling our Stories" 11.
[107] Naples, "Epistemology" 31.

conversation as if I was someone else. This was not difficult, since I was asking questions about our common experiences as if I knew nothing about it. Further, I had avoided commenting the events we experienced together. This 'role play' strategy allowed me to develop temporary professional distance; however, it did not affect the willingness of my informants to share their stories with me. On the other side, I tried to establish closer relationships with the informants with whom I did not develop personal relationship previously, by having an informal conversation before the interview and by conducting the interviews at the places where they feel comfortable. Further, I excluded the collaborative analysis as an option, since I decided to change the names of my informants, and thus, I did not have a solution for the acknowledgment of my informants' contribution to my analysis.[108] Further, regarding above-mentioned "giving back" through a will to change the transcript and leave out the data on the informant's request, my informants did not express the will to intervene on my transcripts.

To summarize, through addressing the ethical issues, I have analyzed the position of my informants and addressed the main issues regarding our communication. In addition, since communication is a reciprocal process, I will reflect upon the position of the person who is on the other side of the communication channel - me, as a researcher.

3.3. Positionality

I am an NGO worker and a colleague of my informants. For three years, I have been working on various activities related to migration, mostly on the 'psychosocial support.' In that sense, I am a part of the community, an insider; my knowledge is subjective and situated, and thus, has the limitations.[109] Further, since I share the strong affiliation with Yugoslav legacy and leftist political attitudes with some of my informants, I am aware that this orientation can affect my interpretation, and thus can be a limitation of the analysis. My motivation is professional and political, but personal as well, [110] since I am emotionally engaged with the work. In that sense, I

[108] Sprague and Zimmerman, "Quality and Quantity: Reconstructing Feminist Methodology," 78; Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" 23.
[109] Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" 22.
[110] Naples, "Epistemology," 32.

used the feminist practice of "self-doubt" to examine how my political beliefs shape the narrative and affect the ways my informants construct themselves.[111] Alessandro Portelli argues that the informants provide the information they believe the researcher wants to hear, and through it, they "reveal who they think the researcher is."[112] In my opinion, this argument is particularly valuable when the researcher and the informant have conflicted opinions and beliefs. In that case, the informant can shape the answers to fit the assumed desirable discourses. Therefore, analysis requires "reading between the lines." Yet, my informants and I share at least general cultural values and political beliefs. However, my new role as a researcher might affected their answers, since they were aware that I would critically analyze the information I get. For example, some of them had worried verbal and non-verbal reactions on the term stereotypes in my title. However, as I explained my aims, they were willing to analyze their own doubts and anxieties. In addition, my position as an insider means that I take many behaviors or elements of discourse for granted,[113] and it can affect my interpretation and understanding, as well as, the level of my self-reflection. In order to reveal my vulnerability, I attempted to be self-reflexive as much as possible, as a narrator, [114] and to examine and reflect upon my identities and histories that can be related to the research. [115] Finally, I have taken into account considerations on how my roles are related to power.[116] Predominantly, I do not differ in terms of class and education from my informants; however, I included people who differ from me in gender, age, and assigned ethnicity/race and I tried to examine how it affects relations and dynamics of the research. However, the most significant gap between us is my authorship and the privilege to narrate the story.

[111] Naomi van Stapele, "Intersubjectivity, self-reflexivity and agency: Narrating about 'self' and 'other' in feminist research," *Women's Studies International Forum* 43 (2014), 17.
[112] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" 39.
[113] Stapele, 16
[114] Nencel, "Situating reflexivity," 75.
[115] Ibid., 76.
[116] Davis and Craven, *Feminist Ethnography*, 110.

3.4. Research design

I conducted my research in Serbia during several weeks in April 2019. I spent most of my time in Belgrade, conducting interviews with people who work in different towns in Serbia where the asylum centers are placed and conducting participant observation in their offices during everyday activities. Further, I spent several days in a small town in Sandžak. I visited the asylum center, local school, and local NGO; observed the sport event organized for the teenage migrant beneficiaries of the asylum centre and local high-school youth; and had informal communication with the staff in the asylum centre, school professors, and local and migrant youth. In addition, two of my informants were present at the sport event.

I conducted 15 interviews in total, average length around one hour. All the interviews were conducted in Serbo-Croatian language, and the quotes presented in the next chapters are my translations. I conducted one interview via Skype (without major problems, since I know the informant for several years now), and all the others in person. I recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them in Serbo-Croatian. My informants are NGO workers and activists[117] based in Serbia. Regarding age, seven of my informants were born in 1960s and 1970s, while the other eight were born in the 1980s and early 1990s. Regarding gender, four of my informants are male and eleven female. All of them are highly educated and middle class. In addition, four of them had the refugee experience during Yugoslav wars.

I informed my informants about my topic and aim before the interview, discussed the issues of confidentiality with them, and asked for a permission to record the interview. All of them agreed. As I stated above, I tried to keep the style of a natural conversation without firm structure and to establish an informal atmosphere; however, I used the list of questions as a reminder of the topics I want to cover and as a guide for a direction in which I want to lead my informants. I never asked all of the questions, but rather tried to lead my informants towards certain topics. I submit the extensive list of questions that I used as a guide:

[117] I make a distinction between the term NGO worker and the term activist. In my narrative, when I use the term NGO worker, I refer to people who work for salaries or honorariums, while I use the term activist for people who work voluntarily. However, most of my informants are both: they have contracts with the NGOs; however, they work voluntarily whenever they find it necessary or act in solidarity during their spare time.

When did you start to work with migrants/refugees?

Which tasks do you perform in the work with migrants? With which category of migrants do you work (minors, adult, which gender) and from which countries?

What was your motivation to start to work?

Did you have some concerns about communication with beneficiaries or concerns about the reactions of people from your surroundings?

Can you describe your first experiences? How did you establish communication? (Optional): Can you compare it with your (work) experience during Yugoslav wars?

Did you have any sort of assumptions about people you are going to meet before you started? What were your expectations? Did it change during your work?

Did you have assumptions about the gender relations among migrant populations? What happened in practice?

How do you deal with differences in gender roles? Did it affect your communication with migrants? Did you change or adjust something in your behavior? How do you manage behaviors that are not acceptable from your point of view?

Do you talk with migrants about gender and cultural differences? Do you make educational workshops on these topics? Can you describe your approach?

Can you describe cultural and gender differences and similarities?

Where would you place our society within East/West binary? What does this binary mean to you? Do you perceive Serbia as a part of Europe? What do European values mean to you?

How do you assess gender equality in our society?

If there is solidarity with migrants in our society, where does it come from? If there is fear or hostility, where does it come from? In your opinion, which historical events or social changes affected the attitudes people have?

Do you feel any sort of belonging to collective identities? Did it change during Yugoslav wars or during your work with migrants from the Middle East and Africa?

How do you identify politically? What are your basic political values?

IV - NGO workers: political orientation and the sense of belonging to collective identities

4.1. Entering the field: In the name of Progress

I conducted my research during several weeks in Serbia in April 2019. I decided to travel from Budapest to Belgrade in a mini-van instead of the train I usually use, since the parts of the railroad in Serbia are closed due to the reconstruction, and the main railway station is removed from the city center due to the major government's architectural project Belgrade Waterfront.[118] This project and the reconstruction of a railway are only parts of the government's massive architectural changes conducted mainly in the capital city of Belgrade in the name of progress and modernization. Belgrade Waterfront project occupies the area in the heart of the city, which includes zones of the main bus and railway stations that were the main gathering spots for migrants and refugees during the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, as well as the spots for the provision of humanitarian aid and other services for refugees. Today, the whole area is a huge construction site, and the work is in progress.

My mini-van entered Belgrade on an early morning, and I was looking through the window to identify architectural changes. From the Gazela Bridge over Sava River, I saw the progress in the construction of new massive buildings aimed for shopping malls and luxury apartments. The size and the position of the buildings are frightening: massive buildings are placed on the edge of a riverside, giving an impression that the whole construction could collapse into the river. During my several weeks in Serbia, I have realized why I had this impression: for me, this project symbolizes neoliberal changes and current chaotic political situation, where various political actors compete over the usage of the terms such as progress and modernization, while obscuring growing inequalities in society. In that sense, I got an impression that current mainstream political narratives could collapse in the encounter with growing tensions. To explain the situation, I would like to mention several major events that occurred during my stay in Serbia:

[118] Aleem Datoo, "Drowning Belgrade: the Belgrade waterfront project in context," Mart 3, 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/drowning-belgrade-belgrade-waterfront-project-in-context/

anti-government protests, government's counter-demonstration, and the xenophobic/nationalist gathering in front of a bakery owned by ethnic Albanian in one of the Belgrade's suburban neighborhoods. Another event, which was not covered by the media, was a public debate on forceful evictions of indebted citizens, which I attended at the beginning of my stay.

The anti-government protests lasted for several months when I came back. The protestors are heterogeneous groups; however, some of the former leaders of the Democratic Party (and the members of previous governments) are perceived in public as the leaders of the protests. Formerly perceived as the exponents of the Other Serbia (*Druga Srbija*), these figures are now united with the far-right political party Dveri and their leader Boško Obradović. Their common demands during the protests are requests for the fair election process and for the freedom of media.[119] However, this group of politicians, now united under the name the Alliance for Serbia (*Savez za Srbiju*), does not address growing social inequalities, nor offer a coherent political platform. In addition, as a response to the government's Euroenthusiasm, some of the former "democrats" have turned to nationalist narratives in recent years. The government's response to the protests is a campaign called "The Future of Serbia," a tour throughout Serbia, with a major event in Belgrade, in front of the Parliament, that was held on April 19,[120] partly organized by the owner of TV Pink Željko Mitrović and broadcast live on his television.[121] During the 1990s, TV Pink was one of the main pillars of promotion of "turbofolk" music and lifestyle, which Eric Gordy describes as key to "the destruction of music alternatives."[122] According to Gordy, "turbofolk" in the 1990s represented the colonization of cultural spaces, where alternative rock dominated in the 1980s, by "peasants."[123] Gordy's urban rock informants emphasized the links between "turbofolk" and xenophobia, nationalism, and war mobilization.[124] As in the 1990s, the strong links between music and politics were displayed at "The Future of Serbia" event: the program was musical at the beginning, and then followed by the speeches of prominent political

[119] *European Western Balkans*, "Citizens from across Serbia gather in Belgrade, new demands for government announced," April, 15, 2019. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/04/15/citizens-across-serbia-gather-belgrade-new-demands-government-announced/
[120] *The Publics Radio*, "Thousands rally in Serbia to back populist leader Vucic," April 19, 2019. https://thepublicsradio.org/article/thousands-rally-in-serbia-to-back-populist-leader-vucic
[121] *Espreso*, " Željko Mitrović announces spectacle," April 19, 2019. https://www.espreso.rs/vesti/politika/377463/zeljko-mitrovic-najavljuje-spektakl-festu-ispred-skupstine-ce-snimati-vise-od-40-kamera-8-dronova-6-kranova
[122] Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, 24.
[123] Ibid., 114.
[124] Ibid., 116.

figures. The organizers (Serbian Progressive Party and TV Pink) played with the ambiguous meanings of First and Other Serbia.[125] For example, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić (famous for being the first openly lesbian politician in a highest-ranking position) stated that Serbia is one and united: the government would not allow further divisions in society, where people are divided into two groups and labeled as "sandwich-eaters and toothless" (*sendvičari i krezubi*) or as "so-called civic/urban elite" (*građanska elita*).[126] The Prime Minister was ironically referring to a common perception that the Other Serbia is a group of the middle class, educated, urban, liberal minority, while the First Serbia consists of uneducated, rural, nationalist, lower class/workers.[127] In that sense, "toothless" would refer to stereotypes about the hygiene habits of the lower classes (and perhaps their inability to pay dental services), and "sandwich-eaters" would refer to the rumors that The Progressive Party gives sandwiches to lower classes in exchange for support and their presence at public events. For the urban, lesbian, well-educated Prime Minister, the division between the First and Other Serbia is over, and the national unity is being achieved by the Progressive Party. The musical program reflected this symbolic unification, as well as its ambiguities: urban rock stars Oliver Mandić and Bora Đorđević, together with the "turbofolk" singer Aca Lukas. However, the ironic ambiguity is that the queer performer and musician Mandić and urban-rock singer Bora Đorđević, who were famous in the 1980s for their avant-garde art, became proponents of nationalist narratives during 1990s, while Aca Lukas carefully chooses not to have nationalist statements and often performs in Croatia.[128] Gordy notes that Đorđević and Mandić became supporters of the war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan during the 1990s and how that affected their status among rockers, who referred to them as "fake rockers."[129] In addition, Mandić was the first androgynous/queer superstar who performed on national television in 1981, before he turned to a masculine supporter of the war.[130] Since his queer era faded over time from public memory, Mandić presence in front of the Parliament was not used for the homonationalist purposes. Instead, Željko Mitrović instaled a DJ

[125] Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand*, 86.
[126] *Danas*, "Brnabić at the meeting: Serbia is not a divided country, the opposition does not have a program," April, 19, 2019. https://www.danas.rs/politika/brnabic-na-mitingu-srbija-nije-podeljena-zemlja/
[127] Jansen, "White Socks," 154.
[128] *Kurir*, "Aca Lukas's open letter to Croats," September 1, 2016. https://www.kurir.rs/stars/2423307/otvoreno-pismo-ace-lukasa-hrvatima-ja-sam-srbin-boli-me-kac-za-cetnike-i-ustase
[129] Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, 123.
[130] Stanko Crnobrnja, Belgrade at Night (*Beograd noću*), TV show, 1981 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKA5j3NHDD4

pult on a truck near the stage, decorated with an LGBT rainbow flag and the slogan "Stop violence, only love,"[131] while the figure of the lesbian Prime Minister (whose grandfather is also an ethnic Croat) served to prove the government's liberal and multicultural values. In that sense, the rest of the program suggested a kind of homonationalism:[132] a combination of the LGBT imagery with the nationalist narratives.

Therefore, Brnabić's male colleagues proved her wrong regarding the unification of the First and Other Serbia, between which the civic orientation opposed to the nationalist attitude is the main marker of difference,[133] since their speeches contained the usual First Serbia nationalist narratives. For example, President Vučić stated that ethno-national unity goes beyond the boundaries of the state of Serbia (reminiscence of his, now abandoned, idea of the Greater Serbia in the 1990s), while the special guest, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó, stated that Serbia is getting stronger because the leaders did not forget to protect "national interests."[134] Further, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia, Ivica Dačić added that Serbia wants peace, and that "only Serbian enemies" should remain in fear.[135] Therefore, the event did not show the reconciliation of the "two Serbias," but rather the ways in which the nationalist government incorporates various opposed discourses in order to keep political power. I find significant that the words of reconciliation came from the young female homosexual, while the male political figures who were active as nationalists in the 1990s, together with a member of Viktor Orban's right-wing government, were employing the "national interests" narrative. I argue that this First/Other Serbia division within the government serves not only as a homonationalist practice but also as a proof to their nationalist audience that liberal attitudes serve only for international public in the attempt to gain access to the EU, while the core framework remains nationalist.

On the day of this gathering, I was moving throughout the city to meet my informants. My residence was in the relative vicinity of the Parliament. I was unaware on which day the

[131] *Pink*, "Pink's truck spreads love: Stop violence, just love," April, 2019. http://pink.rs/vesti/127182/pinkov-kamion-siri-ljubav-stop-nasilju-samo-ljubav-krenuo-od-palate-srbija-ka-centru-beograda-foto-video
[132] Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 77.
[133] Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand*, 90.
[134] *Danas*, "The meeting of the Progressive Party finished," April 19, 2019. https://www.danas.rs/politika/program-mitinga-sns-u-beogradu-pocinje-u-16-casova/
[135] *Danas*, "The Progressive Party's meeting starts at 4PM," April 19, 2019. https://www.danas.rs/politika/program-mitinga-sns-u-beogradu-pocinje-u-16-casova/

gathering was until I reached the Boulevard of King Aleksandar, where I was planning to take a tram. Instead of moving trams, I found endless queues of parked buses, arranged in several rows across the Boulevard, and crowds of people equipped with the Serbian national flags moving towards the Parliament. I realized that I had to walk to my destination, in the same direction as the crowd. Firstly, I stopped to observe the situation and to take a few photographs. The buses had signs on the windshields: the names of various Serbian cities, the names of political parties (Progressive Party - SNS, Socialist Party - SPS), and the President's photographs printed on posters. This situation led me to the conclusion that every party in the government has a quota for gathering and transporting supporters from different cities to the event. The crowd was slow and occupied with chatting, so it was very difficult for me to walk fast. The people did not seem excited, but neither upset about being there (the media often writes how employees in public institutions are forced to attend events in order to keep their jobs).[136] I was walking in line with them, trying to figure out which alternative paths I could use. Some accidental passersby who were walking from the opposite direction started to shout at the crowd, "Sandwich-eaters! (*Sendvičari!*)." One young woman stopped and shouted at the crowd of government supporters, "I will leave this country because of you!" I was deeply upset and sad. I asked myself - is this a conflict between the "toothless" rural and "elitist" urban Serbia? Who am I in this conflict? I was unable to condemn the people who might be blackmailed or manipulated, on the one hand. On the other, I do condemn the nationalist, as well as the neoliberal politics. Further, I had the luck to be middle class, educated, and raised to be open towards 'others.' Does this make me an elitist? May I condemn the people who did not have that luck? However, I do believe that people can make certain personal and political decisions regardless of their level of education, class, or social environment. In that sense, I believe that the urban/rural or First/Other Serbia division is based mostly on stereotypes, as I will attempt to show with my research.

As I moved to find my way, I noticed many of the "progressive" changes: chopped off treetops in many streets, new business and luxury buildings, public squares closed due to reconstruction, and a general traffic collapse. Among the people on the streets, I spotted a young migrant family walking and one group of young migrant men looking at maps on their phones. They seemed calmer than the local people, and focused on their tasks, ignoring the chaos in the streets. Now,

[136] *Danas*, "Presence at the meeting of Progressive Party as a workplace duty," April, 19, 2019. https://www.danas.rs/politika/odlazak-na-miting-sns-kao-radna-obaveza/

as the 'migrant crisis' is ostensibly over, nobody in the public sphere talks or writes about their situation. Instead, nationalist tensions are in focus. Several days later, a nationalist "protest," actually an act of xenophobic violence occurred in the suburban Borča neighborhood in front of the bakery of Mon Gjuraj, an ethnic Albanian from Kosovo. The reason for the gathering was a photograph of the owner's cousin and employee showing a hand gesture that symbolizes the "Albanian Eagle" and the nationalist concept of the Greater Albania, a longstanding rival nationalism. However, the photograph made in Belgrade and posted on Instagram several years ago, remained unnoticed until one of the leaders of far-right movements found it and reposted it, which caused a nationalist outrage. The owner publicly distanced himself from the acts of his cousin and even fired him; however, that was not enough to avoid the abuse. The "protestors" gathered in front of the bakery, blocking the entrance, signing hateful nationalist songs, and left a pig's head on the owner's car, assuming that he is a Muslim. The police reported, "There were no incidents at the protest."[137] While the established politicians, from the government and from the opposition, competed in criticizing the "Albanian provocations," several leftist groups organized actions of support and solidarity with Mon Gjuraj, emphasizing his previous acts of solidarity with migrants and neighbors who were able to eat for free in his bakery if they had no money.[138] Those leftist groups organize actions of solidarity with migrants, with women who were sexually harassed at work in the public sector by a local government official,[139] as well as defense actions for the citizens under threat of being evicted from their houses by the police and public enforcement officers due to debt or unresolved legal ownership issues.[140]

During the first days of my stay, I visited the public debate organized by the United Action Roof Over One's Head, which gathers the members of various leftist movements around the idea of collective resistance to evictions and the defense of homes of the most vulnerable citizens.[141] The debate recapitulated the two years of the organization's activities, as well as the changes in the Tenancy Law and the Housing Policy that started in the 1990s, which firstly affected the Roma

[137] *Balkan Insight*, "Serbian nationalists target Albanian baker over cousins gesture," April, 29, 2019. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/29/serbian-nationalists-target-albanian-baker-over-cousins-gesture/
[138] *Al Jazzeera*, "Serbia introduces the pre-school program for children migrants and refugees," September 18, 2018, Video. http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/srbija-uvela-i-predskolski-program-za-djecu-migrante-i-izbjeglice
[139] *News Mavens*, "Mayor shuts down press after sexual harassment accusations," March 26, 2019. https://newsmavens.com/special-review/1098/mayor-shuts-down-press-after-sexual-harassment-accusations
[140] Iskra Krstić, "Housing Policy in Serbia – From Privatization to Eviction," *Mašina*, June 22, 2017. http://www.masina.rs/eng/housing-policy-serbia-privatization-eviction/
[141] United Action Roof Over One's Head's website, http://zakrovnadglavom.org/

population in the informal settlements, and later the other most vulnerable citizens, including the refugees from the Yugoslav wars in "temporary" settlements. The speakers presented their future advocacy strategies since the new Law on Enforcement is currently under preparation.[142] Later that night, I visited the benefit concert they organized in order to collect funds for the people who had already been evicted. I met many familiar faces at both events, young people and students who participated in the seminars on migrations and support activities in the asylum centers that I and my colleagues organized while I was working in Serbia. Meeting them, as well as meeting my informants, provided me a feeling that not everything is lost, and that the new political forces and the new forms of solidarity are emerging on this "periphery of capitalism."

4.2. We are all strangers

As I had a doubt regarding my own position during the government's event, I started to think about the political position of my informants. Who are they? All of them are highly educated, middle-class people. However, some of them are "highlanders"[143] and some came to Serbia as refugees, and thus had been the victims of the "urban balkanist distinction,"[144] which described them as "peasant newcomers."[145] Are they the typical proponents of the Other Serbia? Did their cosmopolitism and the solidarity with predominantly Muslim and rural migrants collide with their attitudes regarding gender equality? How do they deal with it? For a better understanding of the ways in which gender and cultural stereotypes about the Orient function in everyday communication with migrants and refugees, it is important to understand the political orientation of my informants and their sense of belonging to collective identities. As Russell-Omaljev writes, the main disagreement between the First and Other Serbia is the interpretation of the Yugoslav wars: First Serbia pleads for the victimization narrative, where Serbs are the ultimate victims of the wars, while the Other interprets Serbs as perpetrators during the wars and

[142] For more info: *Mašina*, "The Law on Enforcement still directed against the most vulnerable," May 24, 2019. http://www.masina.rs/eng/law-enforcement-still-directed-vulnerable/
[143] Živkovic, *Serbian Dreambook*, 78.
[144] Jansen, "White Socks," 151.
[145] Ibid.

condemns nationalist ideology.[146] Therefore, First Serbia describes the Other as the group of "anti-war profiteers," "foreign mercenaries," "anti-Serbs," and "traitors,"[147] in order to discredit their political agenda. On the other side, Russel-Omaljev argues, Other Serbians perceive Serbian national identity as problematic in the context of Yugoslav wars and thus have trouble to develop a sense of belonging to Serbia.[148] Russell-Omaljev further claims, "Other Serbians could not even bear to [call] themselves Serbs,"[149] since they share concerns for the victims, as well as the awareness of "the responsibility attributed to Serbians for the dissolution of Yugoslavia."[150] The author argues that both collective identities are based on exclusion, and defines this inability of the Other Serbia to belong as "self-othering."[151] I argue that, while the concept of "self-othering" could be a partial explanation for the inability to identify as a Serb, another part of the explanation can be that, since the national belonging in the post-Yugoslav area is almost exclusively affiliated with ethnicity, these people could want to express their refusal to submit to the concept of ethnicity. As Dubravka Žarkov argues, the notion of ethnicity has been produced during the Yugoslav wars through media and through the "ethnic war" narrative.[152] According to Žarkov, the Balkanist term "ethnic war" became popular and replaced the term civil war from the vocabulary in media.[153] She further argues that the "ethnic war" and media produced the ethnicity, together with the sexual norms and the notions of masculinity and femininity, as "the only mode of being."[154] Having this in mind, I argue that my informants rather choose to find other modes of being.

During my interviews, I noticed the feeling of unease of my informants to identify as Serbs (or as other "ethnic" groups), and most of them even did not. My initial question was do they identify with any collective identity, including national. Many of them assumed that I ask about ethno-national identity even when I did not ask that explicitly. Classified by age, people who were born in the 1960s and 1970s mostly identified as Yugoslavs, or expressed strong affiliation to the

[146] Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand*, 90-91.
[147] Ibid., 117.
[148] Ibid., 114.
[149] Ibid., 113.
[150] Ibid., 114.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.
[153] Ibid., 5.
[154] Ibid., 3.

Yugoslav legacy, while the people who were born in the 1980s and early 1990s mostly expressed no sense of belonging to collective identities. Classified by the refugee experience, some of my informants who did not move (forcibly) from their hometown feel belonging to their local community, while those who had refugee experience during Yugoslav wars either feel like members of Serbian people (*srpski narod*),[155] rather than just Serbs, or have no sense of belonging and feel like "strangers" in every community.

4.3. Yugoslavia is a state of mind

I was drinking Turkish coffee on a terrace of the NGO office with Milica, while she was trying to list all of her collective identities. She told me that she feels like a woman, psychologist, Belgradian. Her nationality is Serbian, but that is "on the 465th place by importance." After thinking for a while, she told me that she would rather identify as Yugoslav. In her opinion, Yugoslav identity means, "people should live normally, together, not to torture each other." However, she includes the possibility that her statement is partly a consequence of nostalgia since she was young and her life seemed fine during the 1980s in Yugoslavia. Yet, there were practical reasons, as well:

> While I was living in the U.S. [in the 1990s], I was saying to people that I am Yugoslav; otherwise, they would not understand, Serbia or Croatia meant nothing there. However, I do not identify as Yugoslav only because of others, but also because that was a good country, in contrast to this one.

My other informant, Natalija, who was born in the 1960s and spent several years abroad during the 1990s, as well, expressed similar feelings. She stated that she became "immune" to a feeling of belonging to collective identities, however:

> My husband usually says, "I still live in Yugoslavia. The country still exists; it is just temporarily occupied." I feel the same. Honestly, before the 1990s, I never had a thought about someone's

[155] Azra Hromadžić describes several meanings of the "narod:" 1. In former Yugoslavia - all people of Yugoslavia, and after 1964, different groups who live in the "Brotherhood and Unity," which was a slogan of Yugoslavia. 2. During and after Yugoslav wars - ethnic groups. 3. "People"/"a people (French, for example)" - expressed in everyday language for group experiences and sentiments. 4. "Ordinary people" (*obični ljudi*) - people who are not part of "immoral" political elites. In the case of my informants, the meanings under 2. and 3. can be employed. See: Azra Hromadžić, *Citizens of an Empty Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 109-112.

> nationality [meaning ethnicity] or religion. It was then when people started labeling someone as a Muslim, for example. I felt like someone is forcing me to accept the new artificial categories. I do not understand people who like to speak in the plural - "we." They feel proud of something they did not do.

One of those people "labeled as Muslims," is my informant Senad, from a small mountain town in the Sandžak area, where Bosniak[156] minority predominantly lives. He identifies as Bosniak, and Muslim, as well. He practices religion but considers religious beliefs a private matter. Questions about religious affiliations are intimate questions in his opinion, and thus, the fact that we know each other for several years is the reason why we can openly discuss religious matters. However, Senad is strongly affiliated with the Yugoslav legacy and leftist-socialist values. Whenever I call him on the phone, he greets me with, "Death to fascism!" and I respond, "Freedom to the people!" This greeting was the way Yugoslav Partisans saluted during the Second World War, and later became the slogan of the whole resistance movement. While, as in Milica's case, Senad's Yugoslavism can be interpreted as nostalgia, since he was born in the early 1970s, in my opinion, the meaning is exactly the same as what Milica described as "living together" in a multicultural community.

Jelena, an artist who was born in the late 1960s, and whose family moved to Belgrade from the Sandžak area before she was born, told me that during the 1990s she realized that religion suddenly has some significance. Raised as an atheist, she was unaware that given names imply someone's ethnicity/religion. It was then when she learned that her aunt is a Serb married to a Bosniak, that they suddenly have problems in their community, and finally that they are getting divorced because of it. She refused to accept the "new terms." She stated that today, she does not have any feeling of belonging to present Serbian society:

> I identify as Yugoslav; I said that on the census survey. That is a part of my identity. My holidays are 29 November [the Day of the Republic in Yugoslavia] and 1 May [International Workers Day]. However, I do not impose my identity on anyone. I congratulate these holidays to people for whom I know that share the same values as me, but I understand that there are new generations who were

[156] While some earlier writings describe the term Bosniak as nationalist, I use it as a neutral term. I do not consider it more nationalist than the terms Serb and Croat. I use the term to refer to Slavic Muslims who are not only (native) inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also of Serbia, Montenegro, and other post-Yugoslav states. The term Bosniak replaced the term Muslim during the Yugoslav wars, and today is in use as the official name of the group.

born later, or even the older generations, who do not identify with Yugoslav legacy, and I do not have a problem with that.

I understood her statement as an ironic reference to the imposition of national identity onto people during Yugoslav wars. However, Jelena finds all the collective identities problematic to some extent and states that even the Yugoslav identity is not something she feels to be like a national belonging. In her opinion, Yugoslav identity rather represents a system of values. She believes that people who still nourish Yugoslav identity are those who would not discriminate against anyone different (Middle Eastern migrants, Albanians, and so on, as she stated) since Yugoslav identity includes different cultures and existences. In addition, she stated that she uses the Serbo-Croatian language since she needs the words from both varieties. In her opinion, not only the Yugoslav area, but Balkan as well belongs to a similar cultural and linguistic area, with some elements that could be traced to Middle Eastern cultures.

To conclude on my informants identified as Yugoslavs, their sense of belonging to collective identities refers more to a set of values than onto belonging to a particular group of people. Therefore, their Yugoslavism serves as a signifier of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the openness 'the others.' However, this feeling could partly be a sentiment of "Yugonostalgia," since they have lived experience of Yugoslavia. An argument that supports this claim is the fact that other informants expressed some affiliation to the Yugoslav legacy; however, none of them was born in the 1990s. According to Maja Maksimović, Yugonostalgia can represent the desperate "refusal to embrace present" due to the "current difficulties,"[157] as well as the progressive activism for reconciliation in the region.[158] In addition, Maksimović argues that among the generations who experienced living in Yugoslavia, the feeling of "the lost home"[159] is widespread, together with the missing of "normal life" and "co-existance."[160] In my opinion, all of those features are present among my informants. While Jelena refuses to embrace the present Serbian society and Natalija still lives in "temporary occupied" Yugoslavia, all four of them worked on reconciliation programs and projects during the 1990s and early 2000s, before they started to work with migrants.

[157] Maja Maksimović, "Unattainable past, unsatisfying present – Yugonostalgia: an omen of a better future?" *Nationalities Papers*, 2017, Vol. 45, No. 6, 1067.
[158] Ibid., 1067.
[159] Ibid., 1068.
[160] Ibid., 1071.

4.4. To belong or not to belong?

Regarding the imposition of national/ethnic identity, another informant, Biljana, who was born in the mid-1970s and raised in a multicultural/multiethnic community, stated that she did not have any awareness of national belonging before the Yugoslav wars:

> Suddenly, we were forced to learn who is who, since we were in a life-threatening situation. The person who shoots at you knows who you are. I was supporting the anti-nationalist political party, but after the elections, I have realized that people do not think the same as me. My whole world collapsed. However, over time in Serbia, [she had a refugee experience] I learned to love Serbian people (*srpski narod*), and I was happy for being here. Actually, I had realized it when I moved to England. I wanted to see the world, and I enjoyed it, but I surprised myself with an urge to come back. Before moving to England, I did not know that geography matters to me. I have realized that I am not "unrooted," as I thought I was.

For Biljana, belonging means that she can go out to a market place and speak her own language. Unlike other informants, she decided to accept the imposed identity. However, my other informants who had a refugee experience stated that they do feel "unrooted." Three women born in the 1980s and early 1990s who fled their hometowns during the Yugoslav wars at an early age and went through the integration into Serbian society, all reflected upon the discrimination against refugees they experienced. Marija stated that she feels like a "stranger." She explained to me that she feels like she does not belong "here, nor there," where she lived before the Yugoslav wars. In her opinion, people who forcibly migrated often have the feeling of not belonging. She often talks with the beneficiaries of the asylum centers about that feeling. She told me that she had a conversation with a man from Syria who got the asylum in Serbia several years ago. They have similar emotions regarding refugee experience and a strong feeling of not belonging, which did not change over years.

Anja faced discrimination in school for speaking a different dialect, being dressed differently, and for her refugee status. She had lived in several cities in Serbia, and she told me that she does not feel like a part of any of those communities nor has the sense of belonging to any collective,

although she regrets the inability to develop that feeling. Her peer Sandra, who fled her hometown before the school age, told me that she feels belonging to her family, as well as to her country and her people (*narod*), without naming it. However, she claims that those ties are not very firm and that she could move to another country and change her "way of life." She reflected upon the different kinds of othering she experienced in Belgrade: complaints about people who moved to Belgrade, not only refugees but students and workers as well. She faced complaints about "newcomers" (*dođoši*) who had "destroyed Belgrade's way of life." Sandra stated that those complaints were never pointed directly against her, but she can hear that often in a public transportation or in conversations with people who do not know much about her. However, she said to me that those mean comments could not make her feel less welcome or less worthy since she feels she could belong anywhere. Further, she pointed out the comparisons and otherings between different groups:

> Belgraders complain about the refugees [from former Yugoslavia] and Montenegrins. Refugees from Croatia complain about the refugees from Kosovo. Everyone complains about the "new" refugees who receive different forms of aid, unlike the refugees from the 1990s. Perhaps, when people are occupied by their own struggles, they do not have an understanding of the situation of others.

Stef Jansen describes how the arrival of refugees during the 1990s caused resentment in Belgrade and Zagreb and how it was perceived as the arrival of "undesirable occupation force" (of the same ethno-nationality).[161] His urban informants complained about the "peasant newcomers" who destroyed "urban spirit of Belgrade,"[162] with "their primitive village mentality and way of life."[163]Interestingly, his informants were a part of non-nationalist parties and identified with the civic/urban opposition (*građanska opozicija*),[164] while accusing the nationalist governments and political elites for the "Balkan peasant primitivism."[165] However, when the victims of those same nationalist governments arrived, those "urban cosmopolits" expressed no solidarity with them. In

[161] Jansen, "White Socks," 152.
[162] Ibid., 151.
[163] Ibid. , 153.
[164] Jansen explains different meanings of the term *građanski*: it can mean civic/civil, but also it is derived from the word city (*grad*), and thus implies the urban character, as opposed to rural. (Jansen, "White Socks,"152.) I would add that the noun *građanin*, besides the civic and urban meanings, contains the meaning of citizen (as opposed to non-citizen) and the reminiscence to bourgeoisie, as opposed to the working class. In that sense, it can sometimes reflect anti-communist sentiments.
[165] Jansen, 158.

my opinion, this kind of othering could be one of the reasons why my informants did not develop a sense of belonging. In addition, neither nationalist goverments expressed the hospitable attitudes towards refugees,[166] regardless of the urban-nationalist celebration of a "peasent life as a pure expression of Serbdom," promoted by the nationalist writers based in Belgrade.[167] Further, Žarkov points out how the provision of aid for refugees was not the major concern of the governments during the Yugoslav wars, instead refugees were used for the "humanization" of a captured territory, which means "the practice of sending refugees back to unsafe areas, as well as the practice of forced resettlements."[168] In that sense, I am familiar with the several cases of refugees from Croatia, who were in the groups to whom was forbidden to enter Belgrade in 1995, and sent to Kosovo instead (to 'humanize' the area where the Albanians are majority), only to become refugees again in 1999, after Kosovo war. Having all this in mind, my question is - who are then liberal people open to accept others?

4.5. Beyond the First/Other Serbia distinction: a different type of Belgrader

Nađa, born in Belgrade in the early 1990s, stated that she would never identify as a Serb. Instead, she usually says that she is "from Serbia." Further, she explained that she never says that she is a Belgrader (the feminine version, *Beograđanka*), since she is trying to avoid urban/rural distinction, but also because it causes negative reactions:

> It is not popular to say that you are Belgrader; it causes ridicule. You sound like a snob when you say it. If you say that you are from Belgrade, people ask you where are your parents and grandparents from. It happened at the University, in a group of students from all over the country; one girl asked me, "Why do you hang out with us if you are from Belgrade?" I did not know what to reply; it felt like a slap on my face. I do not intend to play a victim, but there is a reverse or mutual othering.

[166] Example: Marija Janković, "A Third Decade of Refuge," August 23, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-45180427
[167] Jansen, "White Socks," 155.
[168] Žarkov, *The Body of War*, 108.

She told me that she was hurt because she did nothing to cause such comment since she never judged people on the basis of their origin. She is from Belgrade, as well as her parents, and she told me that for her, that is only a simple fact, not something anyone should be proud of, nor a marker of a certain type of personality or behavior. Further, she told me that her grandfather was born in the city in central Serbia, and that she always enjoyed visits to her relatives who live there. In her opinion, small communities are more interesting than the big cities. However, I am familiar with this type of "reverse othering." I was born and grew up in Niš, the city "on the southern railway," whose dialect Belgraders perceive as "peasant." Being raised by my Herzegovinian mother and Serbian father, I learned to speak a combination of Herzegovinian dialect and of a variant spoken generally in Serbia, which seemed to my peers in school as 'Belgradian' accent. Therefore, they decided to call me a Belgrader (*Beograđanka*). Nevertheless, they used this term as an insult, to describe a 'snob' who speaks in a 'posh accent.'

However, another Belgrader, Marko, offered another example of inclusive Belgradian identity. He was born in the 1980s and told me that he finds national collective identities repulsive, since he had always been aware that those identities bring "nothing good" in his local context. He stated that he had never developed the feeling of belonging to ethnicities given to him by birth (does not specify which ones). However, he told me that he believes in the constitution of small collective identities, and he is a founder of some artistic or activist collectives, some of which deal with Belgrade's architectural and urban planning, as well as with the alternative cultural and artistic scene in Belgrade. In his opinion, identities should be a choice, not given. The only given identity for him is a Belgrader, as he feels tied to the city. However, that includes a choice of being and staying in the city. In his opinion, everyone is welcome to stay in Belgrade.

However, Jelena does not perceive Belgrade as a hospitable city. She told me that she feels at home in the cities where different groups and cultures live together and quotes the motto of one of the NGO projects she participated in, "The best city for living is the city where the stranger feels at home." In her opinion, Belgrade is not this kind of city:

> When I was a child, I would be very excited when I traveled back to Belgrade from the countryside. I would feel like I am home when I see Avala [a mountain on the entrance of the city]. Now, I do not feel good when I am entering Belgrade. I did not feel good for years. […] I move through and socialize in the micro-worlds here in Belgrade for decades.

Eric Gordy describes how his informants stated that, since the public sphere was occupied by the nationalist "urban peasants" and "turbofolk" culture during Milošević's regime, the best option besides leaving the country was an escape into a private sphere.[169] Jelena remained in a private sphere and her perception of Belgrade changed, although she does not explain why this change occurred. However, I sensed that she expected that I understand the meaning of the change; yet, having in mind everything she said during the interview, I did not conclude that she blamed "urban peasants," unlike Gordy's informants. My other informant, Milica, who was born in the sixties as well, and identifies as a Belgrader explained the change. She was talking about her multicultural neighborhood in the 1980s:

> We had the people from Africa, Palestine, Libya in the neighborhood. I think they lived a normal life before the war. However, when the war in Yugoslavia started, all of them moved from Serbia. I would do that in their position. The year 1991 was a rupture, suddenly the environment became xenophobic- who is not the Serb here? All the strangers were perceived as enemies back then. Further, having a darker skin color became an additional problem.

From this statement and other similar remarks, I concluded that my informants do not think that nationalism came from the "backward peasants" who occupied urban geographies, but rather that people changed, regardless of their geographic position. As Senad stated:

> Before the war, people had more empathy. Then, in the 1990s, people changed through media manipulation. There was no genuine leftist who was not, at least a bit, manipulated by the nationalist news. […] I imagine that anyone who had the information only from the media at the time, could become a nationalist. It was a manipulation through the spread of fear. However, we were all together [Serbs and Bosniaks; refugees and locals] here [in Sandžak], we were exchanging information, and then nationalist shields collapsed through the magic of communication.

In addition, Dušan, who was born in the early 1990s in Belgrade, told me a story of how his "nationalist shield collapsed" in Belgrade. He stated that he was raised in a nationalist environment, and he was told that the Serbs are a "heavenly nation" (*nebeski narod*). He claimed that this was not hatred, but intolerance towards Croats and later Albanians. During his studies, he changed his opinions. He told me that he could change his opinions if someone offers convincing arguments. However, before the University, he never had an opportunity to hear the

[169] Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, 100.

arguments against nationalism. He told me that he believed that NGOs are "traitors" and "foreign mercenaries," and he could never guess that one day he would work for one. Finally, he changed his opinion about NGOs when he started to work and met "devoted and compassionate people." However, he told me that he feels like a patriot (*rodoljub*, literally translated- a kin-lover): he loves the country and the people (*ljudi*), but not the state. Further, as he is fully aware of the First/Other Serbia narratives (and obviously perceives me as the proponent of the Other Serbia); he emphasized that this love does not include hatred towards others, nor the victimization narrative and the denial of the crimes committed during Yugoslav wars.

4.6. Political orientation

Having in mind the First/Other Serbia distinction and a common perception that NGO workers are pro-western, urban, liberal rockers, I was interested in how do my informants fit into this perception. Again, there was a generation gap between those who had lived in Yugoslavia and those who were born later. In that sense, my older informants mostly explicitly stated that they are leftists, while younger generations mostly stated that they are "apolitical." This "apolitical" orientation is mostly motivated by a common perception in the post-Yugoslav area that political elites are criminal and corrupted. In addition, Helms emphasize how this perception is feminized through the phrase 'politics is a whore' (*politika je kurva*).[170] However, Helms argues that, while the political participation of women was guaranteed through quotas in the socialist system, after wars politics became "a male arena where women, especially respectable women, have no place."[171] Interestingly, my informants who identified as 'apolitical' are female. However, when I continued to ask them questions about political orientation, most of them emphasized the importance of the rule of law, independent institutions, gender equality, and non-discrimination (expressed mainly through a phrase 'to see people only as human beings'). On the other side, Yugoslav generation expressed leftist attitudes and affiliation to socialist legacy; however, they expressed critical reflection, as well. For example, Sanja told me that she was a member of a

[170] Elissa Helms, "'Politics is a Whore': Women, Morality and Victimhood in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina," in The New Bosnian Mosaic, ed. Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Ger Duijzings (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 236.
[171] Ibid., 236.

Communist Party in the 1980s, and she stated that she still believes that people have to be engaged, active citizens. However, she reflected upon a lack of freedoms in the socialist system, but added that it was still better than in today's capitalist system, where the state lets people to fall into extreme poverty and become homeless. Nevertheless, as their younger colleagues, most of them expressed the importance of institutions. Senad stated:

> I am a child of Tito's era. He had might be a dictator, but the society had the institutions, police, courts, legislation that treated everyone equally. We were equal citizens, civilians. There was much more solidarity in that society.

Further, all of my leftist informants stated that they plead for gender equality, availability of public resources (free education and health care, for example), and acceptance of migrants, while they stress as the most urgent problem of society the increasing gaps "between rich and poor that started in Milošević's era," as Nenad stated. In that sense, all of them emphasized the necessity of being politically active for the confrontation to harmful politics.

Regarding Europe, my informants expressed ambiguous feelings, and especially reflected upon the rise of nationalism and xenophobia. Marko stated:

> Europe is trying not to let down its own values publicly, but to become closed and isolated, as much as possible by keeping the routs dangerous and uncomfortable enough for migrants. By doing it, they are trying to discourage people to come to Europe.

He further added that all changes in Europe soon affect the situation in Serbia. He gave me an example of Subotica, a multicultural city on the north, near the border with Hungary. In his opinion, Subotica was an example of cooperation of different ethnic groups in previous years, while with the rise of nationalism in Europe, local politics started to plead for the isolation of ethnic groups.

In addition, when I asked about their opinion on Serbian government's 'European path' and the acceptance of migrants, most of my informants were satisfied how the government handled the 'migrant crisis;' however, they were suspicious about the government's motivation. Nenad stated:

> I do not think that Serbian government pleads for multiculturalism. They are European far right, and their best friends are European right-wing politicians. During the crisis, they have played a

> game that was gainful for them. They wanted to gain some political benefits, probably from Germany, if they treat migrants properly, but in reality, they cooperate with Orban who has completely different approach.

In addition, the 'European' orientation of my informants is ambiguous as well. While they perceive Serbia as a part of Europe, regardless of all the balkanist ambiguities, they expressed criticism regarding European neocolonialism that affects Serbia, as well. Jelena stated:

> At the beginning, I liked the idea of united Europe. It seemed nice. Today, I am not against joining the European Union, but that western colonial attitude offends me: someone superior has to allow me entrance. For example, I sometimes feel that when someone from the West comes to visit and starts to spend a lot of money, since everything is cheap here, without any consideration of the social context. It sometimes seems to me that they believe them worth more, since they have more money. Nobody said that, of course, but sometimes I feel that invisible hierarchy. On the other side, I am wondering whether we [NGO workers] treat the refugees from the Middle East in the same way, even unintentionally. Similarly, I am afraid that, when we work in some small communities in Serbia, we behave as the bearers of some superior knowledge since we are coming from Belgrade. […] I found myself surprised by the creativity and progressive attitudes of rural children in Serbia. When you are surprised, it is clear that you have stereotypes, in this case, about urban/rural division.

In this quote, I find critical reflection upon not only European 'othering' regarding the Balkans, but also of internalized nesting Orientalisms, as well as of the critique of the First/Other Serbia stereotypes. During my fieldwork in Sandžak, I noticed that people are aware of this various otherings and that they are trying to confront stereotypes: about Muslims/rural Serbs as oppressive towards women, about 'highlanders' as nationalists and worshipers of 'turbofolk' culture, etc.

Senad picked me up with his car on the morning of the sport event for migrant and local teenagers. He was in his Converse all star sneakers (a marker of urban punk culture) and he was listening to Metallica in his car, just like a stereotypical NGO urban Belgrader, only difference is that he is a Muslim, and a 'highlander.' Firstly, we visited school before the event. Sport teams were preparing, and their professors emphasized the importance of gender equality in the school. Namely, they encourage girls to participate in traditionally male sports, among other things.

However, this was the case of use gender equality as the marker of modernity; however, without 'othering' of Middle Eastern people as the "ultimate Orientals."[172] Later that evening, local youth invited migrant youth to their party at the school. In this sense, I was interested how my informants perceive gender equality in Serbia.

4.7. Gender equality in Serbia and East/West division

Most of my informants stated that they perceive Serbia as a patriarchal society today. However, regarding gender relations and women's rights, they place Serbia closer to Europe than to the 'Orient.' However, most of them can find similarities between Serbia and the Middle Eastern societies. Moreover, most of them stressed various ambiguities regarding gender relations and East/West division. Again, Yugoslav-socialist informants stated that gender equality existed to some extent in Yugoslavia, while today's society is going towards conservatism. However, several younger informants stressed as well the importance of Yugoslav legacy in the terms of gender equality.

Senad stated that the socialist regime promoted equality and solidarity in all fields, not only in gender relations:

> My mother was a director of the local library in the 1980s. She was a president of the local office of The Women's Societies in Yugoslavia (Konferencija za društvenu aktivnost žena), that was the name of the Women's Antifascist Front (Antifašišticki front žena) after the war [Second World War]. She was a feminist. She had been organizing activities for women from villages. It was possible to achieve something as a woman. I think everything is different today.

In addition, Biljana and Natalija stated that they never felt the discrimination as women and added that they were raised as equal. Natalija stated:

> We were taught [during socialism] that we are all equal, especially regarding gender equality. I do not understand, how people of my generation became patriarchal, we were raised in the same manner. I understand that we do not have gender equality in our society. We have many sorts of

[172] Milica Bakić-Hayden. "Nesting Orientalisms." 922.

> discrimination, towards women, children, poor man who did not manage to be "successful." These are some new values; we did not have that before in our society.

However, their younger colleague, Anđela expressed a doubt regarding gender equality in socialism:

> When people talk about socialism, they have idealized picture, especially regarding women's rights. However, it is true that public policies were progressive regarding women's rights and their rights as workers, but I wonder how much effect did it have on everyday lives, when you see how easy it fell apart with the rise of nationalism.

In addition, Marko stated that some parts of the narratives of women's rights in socialism are not idealizations, but facts. In his opinion, women had had more rights during socialism and the progressive policies were more efficient than in the West, regardless of what citizens thought about that. In that sense, he stated that today there are still remains of those policies; however, society is leaning towards patriarchy.

Therefore, Milica told me how women from the Middle East on the workshops compared women's rights in their countries with European, where they placed Sweden, Switzerland, and Serbia as countries with gender equality, unlike their countries. Milica disagreed:

> We have one woman in a camp that had a stillbirth. Her family thinks it is her fault. When I was pregnant, I met in the hospital women who had stillbirths or miscarriages previously. All of their male relatives thought it is their fault, their mistake. That happened in Serbia. At the first glance, everything is fine here, nobody beats their wives, and then you read about the femicid every week in the newspapers. Of course, we do not know what is happening in Swedish homes, but we know that divorced women have better support than here.

However, in Barbara Franz's findings, I found the evidence that these attitudes are not something new in the post-Yugoslav societies. Namely, Franz argues that for her Bosnian refugee informants, the women's emancipation was less important than she assumed.[173] Further, she argues that while the official rhetoric about gender equality in Yugoslavia was widespread in the public sphere, patriarchal traditions persisted in the private sphere (beating wives, household

[173] Barbara Franz, "Bosnian refugee women in (re)settlement:gender relations and social mobility," Feminist Review, no. 73, (2003), 87.

work, a birth of a daughter perceived as a tragedy and blaming the mother for it).[174] In that sense, several of my informants reflected upon this "double standard of sexual morality"[175] and compared it with a situation in Iran and Afghanistan. For example, Anja stated that patriarchy persisted during socialism, and that the situation is not getting better, which is visible in villages and small communities where the support mechanisms are not accessible. Further, Nađa stated that people publicly plead for women's rights, but that the statistics on domestic violence and femicid are telling the opposite. Moreover, Sandra emphasized public/private double standards as the main difference between Serbia and Middle Eastern societies:

> I cannot generalize, there are many differences between Iran and Afghanistan, but some people openly talk about physical punishment of women and children. In our society, nobody would say that publicly, but they would do that in private.

Further, Anđela as well compared Serbia with Iran and Afghanistan:

> There are similarities. Of course, woman can wear make-up, trousers, does not have to wear hijab, but it is patriarchal, especially in the small communities. I am from a small community. When I work with women in the centers, I sometimes feel like I look into my mother, "I cook, that is natural. Ask your dad. I live to devote myself to others. My worth is being useful to someone else," and so on. The patriarchy is like a universal connection, in a negative sense.

In this sense, Barbara Franz argues that Bosnian refugee women rejected Western feminist values and chosen instead "self-sacrifice for the family, rather than emancipation."[176] In addition, Franz stresses how these women remembered their Yugoslav experience during which the emancipation efforts ended up in double burden: at work and at home.[177] However, Franz offers an orientalist argument for this rejection of emancipation. According to Franz, these women came from a culture where family is central.[178] I argue that in most cultures family is central, if people decide to have a family. Further, in my opinion, double exploitation of women is an issue in many western capitalist societies, as well. Regarding these comparisons of different cultures,

[174] Franz, "Bosnian refugee women," 88.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 100.
[177] Ibid., 98.
[178] Ibid., 100.

most of my informants stated that some western countries have better and more efficient legal frameworks and protection mechanisms, but that patriarchy still exists everywhere.

Nevertheless, some of my informants reflected upon the ambiguities of 'cultural interpretation' of gender (in)equality in the 'Orient.' For example, Dragana told me that she met a woman who is in arranged marriage and who had quarrels with her husband. The woman complained to her and his parents and they acted to resolve the problems:

> It turns out that she has the family as the protection mechanism. It is their responsibility since they arranged the marriage. I do not want to generalize, but in this case, it was a useful mechanism. I am trying to imagine- who would protect me? Police? Social services? The existence of institutions does not make me feel safer, nor it is a guarantee that everything is going to be fine.

In addition, Sanja explained to me her vision of gender (in)equality in the Middle East:

> They are patriarchal, but that does not mean that woman does not have free will or independence, especially in Iran. There are women who are religious, but who are educated, work in high-ranking positions, drive cars. Their freedom is limited, but they use everything they can. It seems to me that I did not use enough of my freedoms, and I had more than they did. On the other side, Europe as well does not have a history of women in high-ranking positions or equal rights. Things are not black and white. In Iran, 70 percent of University students are women. […] Somebody once commented how Islam is a religion made for women - you can cover that nobody can see you, when you get divorced, you leave your children at their father and you can start a new life.

In addition, several other informants emphasized the dangers of essentialist views on gender (in)equality in the East and West, especially having in mind the rise of neopatriarchy in Europe. Moreover, Nenad stated that even though he perceives the Middle Eastern societies as extremely patriarchal, that should not be a reason for the rejection of acceptance of migrants. He described the attitudes that I detect as the cases of femonationalism:[179]

> I have heard, in Slovenia and in Serbia, comments about the oppression of women in the Muslim world and some asked why we should help them if they are bringing gender inequality. I have no dilemma about that. If you are a doctor, you are not going to question morality of your patients you

[179] Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*

> will help them anyway. I think that integration can be a challenge, but if you decide to exclude people, it can be only worse.

In this sense, regardless of their positions regarding gender equality, all of my informants acted in solidarity with migrants, and I was interested what their motivation was.

4.8. Solidarity and motivation

My informants who worked with refugees in the 1990s stated that they felt like it is "natural" to participate when refugees started coming. Further, most of my informants worked with vulnerable groups, especially Roma. They stated that the wish to fight against inequalities and for social justice motivates them. In addition, my informants who are psychologists stated that they felt an urge to help, to work with vulnerable groups, with people who are marginalized, instead of working with middle class clients or as HRs in the companies. On the other side, my informants who had refugee experience themselves, stated that they wanted to use that experience and offer a support they did not have when they needed. Therefore, many of them started to work voluntarily, especially during the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, when the central areas in Belgrade became unofficial spots for provision of humanitarian aid.

Regarding the fight for social justice, Dragana told me that she started to think about engagement when she heard about the protests against migrants in towns where the asylum centers are placed:

> I always feel an urge to protect someone who is molested, who is treated badly. The protests reminded me of complaints about the refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia. The same arguments were used: they are backward, dirty, they do not want to integrate, but to change our way of life. When I hear something like that, I want to act, to fight against injustice, like Yugoslav partisans.

Further, my informants stated that there were many of self-organized solidarity groups in 2015. However, when I asked them do they think that the remembrance of the displacement during 1990s was a motivation for widespread solidarity actions, they replied negative. Marko told me:

> Refugees from Yugoslav wars were not welcome during 1990s. I do not believe that remembrance of those times motivates anyone. The support was minimal, and people were not compassionate. In 2015, there was some solidarity, by individuals and by the state. It was easy enough to help them, since they are not staying here. In addition, the images were disturbing: people sleep in the streets. The state started to take care in the situation where there were thousands of people in the city center in the bad conditions. That is a problem for everyone, only then international organizations started to offer wider support.

In addition, Milica as well stated that she does not believe that the remembrance of the 1990s provokes the solidarity. She told me that solidarity was not widespread, that the NGOs were marked as traitors, and that the only people who acted in solidarity were those whose relatives were refugees. Moreover, Anja, who had the refugee experience, confirmed that there was no solidarity in the 1990s, but she stated that today is even worse, since twenty years passed, and nothing changed. In her opinion, the only difference is that now there are more organizations, which are better coordinated than in the 1990s. Regarding personal refugee experience, Marija stated that she remembers her refugee experience, the processes of integration and adjustment, and she finds that experience helpful for her work. In that sense, her rule is to approach people with empathy and compassion, but not with pity and sorrow, and to give them support she lacked during that time.

However, Senad was supportive towards refugees during the 1990s. Firstly, he worked on the provision of basic supplies, and later he became a dance instructor for refugees who stayed in his community. He stated that humans do not need only food and shelter, but also they need to dance. Today, he assists refugees whenever they need something: when they need a translator in a store, or if they are too shy to buy tampons. Further, he told me how once police invited him for an interrogation because he let one refugee boy to use his bank account to receive money from his relative. Police was interested whether this was a case of human smuggling.

In that sense, another informant, Nenad told me his definition of solidarity:

> Solidarity is not just giving basic supplies to someone. The act of solidarity is when you give up something in order to help, when you put yourself at risk. Solidarity is if you decide to help, regardless of possible bad consequences for yourself. For example, Women in Black [an NGO active from the beginning of the 1990s, a group of peace activists, usually marked as the symbol of

> 'treason,' *Žene u crnom*] rented the apartment for migrants to shower, to stay there for a while. They risked to be prosecuted for smuggling, if the police stop them in a car while driving there.

Further, he emphasized tolerance as the virtue of people who let refugees in their apartments. He told me that he noticed that the same people who were active as peace activists during the 1990s, today work with migrants, "today, you can see them work with migrants; you can meet them at the protests."

However, many of my informants complained about the lack of solidarity in the society (especially those who remember Yugoslavia), but some stated that the remembrance of transnational solidarity and the Non-Aligned Movement still exists. Jelena claimed that her generation still remembers solidarity with the 'Third world,' but that there are some new political forces, as well:

> I find interesting that today exists the new generation of young leftists who do not remember Yugoslavia and who did not have the opportunity to learn in school about that. However, they organize and read leftist literature. Still, I am afraid that they are minority. I have noticed that schoolchildren are now more conservative than my generation.

In this sense, Maja Maksimović argues that there are two types of Yugonostalgia among youth in the post-Yugoslav area: an ironic use of the Yugoslav symbols as urban trend and political activism that emerges from difficult life conditions or from the values of their parents.[180] I argue that this second type of Yugonostalgia among youth serves as a fuel for solidarity with migrants in Serbia, as well.

Regarding Serbian youth, some of my informants stated that they were motivated not only to support migrants, but also to work on the education of local children on migration issues. For example, Nenad, an artist who was an antiwar activist during 1990s, started to make illustrations of the stories migrant people told him about their life and journey. His idea was to make educational materials for schools, since he discovered a high level of xenophobia when he worked with schoolchildren. Further, Senad stated that he has a high motivation to work with children to combat xenophobia. He stated that the presence of migrants is a "vaccine" against xenophobia for children in his community.

[180] Maja Maksimović, "Unattainable past, unsatisfying present," 1077.

From this chapter, I can conclude that my informants do not fit into the First/Other Serbia, the Orient/Europe, or balkanist nesting orientalisms binary divisions, but rather than they combine multiple layers of Yugoslav, European, and Ottoman legacies. However, exactly these multiple narratives produce different levels of gender anxieties, on which I will reflect upon in the next chapter.

V - Gender stereotypes and the perception of cultural difference: communication with migrants and refugees

Most of my informants stated that they tried not to have any assumptions about people they are going to meet or about cultural differences before they started to work with migrants. Most of them told me that they were informed about the Middle East and Africa through media, films, and literature, but they did not want to apply that 'knowledge.' Several others had visited Iran or Syria before the war from touristic or personal reasons. For most of them, the main concern before they started to work was whether they would be able to deal emotionally with human suffering and unfortunate position. However, cultural and gender issues emerged during the work. Most of my informants stated that they had adjusted their behavior over time, as well as that they noticed that migrants/refugees (mostly from Iran and Afghanistan) changed their behavior. When I was asking questions about gender and cultural differences in practice, Europe became the point of reference much more than during the conversations about their political attitudes and orientation. In that sense, I noticed that my informants perceive Serbia as integral part of Europe, regardless of their ambiguous attitudes towards European politics and of their comparisons of Serbia with Middle Eastern societies.

5.1. Refugee men and NGO women

Several of my informants were active in Belgrade in 2015 during the 'refugee crisis.' At this time, an informal spot for the provision of aid was established in the park near the main bus station. The situation was chaotic, with crowds of people coming and going, waiting for the next bus and trying to get basic survival supplies. During these several months, the borders were 'open' and most of the people tried to get to Hungary as soon as possible. In the middle of the chaos, three women came to the park and started to unpack artistic equipment: papers, colors, brushes, and textile. Natalija was one of them. People gathered around them, as she related:

> Three women in the park, in a crowd of men from the East [these men were from Syria], where women have a different position - you become a magnet for communication!

Natalija is cheerful and communicative. She told me that she did not want to think about cultural differences or relations between people because that would make her lose her spontaneity. She stated that she believes that there are some basic human values regardless of culture and she tried to rely on that:

> I tried not to think whether something is offensive or inappropriate, but I did not insist on anything if people were not willing to do it. However, in the emergency and chaotic situation it the park, I think men were interested to get what they need and go further. In that sense, I think they did not insist on their rules. I assume that did not treat us as they would treat women from their society [Syria] since in their society women do not make a moving circus in a park. I think they perceived us as a group of people who is willing to help.

Several other informants stated as well that, during chaotic situation in 2015 there was no time for practicing anyone's cultural habits, and it that sense, they told me they think migrants perceived them as "genderless" and different, but willing to help. However, Natalija's assumption about the treatment of women came from the situation she perceived as unacceptable: when some organization prepared lunch in the nearby venue and even separated the space for women and children with a curtain, men did not allow women to go there to eat, as she stated. She told me that she heard that women were not allowed to move or be alone, neither to eat in the same room with other men. For Natalia, that kind of behavior is completely unacceptable, regardless of any cultural habits. However, she did not feel like she could make any change in that chaotic situation. Her group was focused on the assistance to people, providing information and on the artistic activities. Anđela reported as well similar situation during distribution of menstrual pads in the park. She told me that women were not allowed to move, and men did not want to pick it up. She told me that she feels angry when she notices "patriarchal oppression," as she stated. Further, she gave me another example of Afghan father in the asylum center who forbad his daughter to play a guitar since he believes it is a sin (*haram*) for a girl to play an instrument. However, she told me that she avoids confrontation, but rather tries to argue in a polite way. Further, she reported that she had normalized patriarchal behaviors towards her, for example, when men speak only to male colleague in her presence or when men perceive her as sexually

'available' if she talks to them in a friendly way. In that sense, Anđela told me that over time she got used to these behaviors, although she does not think this is good, nor she would let people from her personal surrounding to treat her in the same way.

On the other side, Sanja reported that she developed friendships with Afghan and Pashtu men, for whom people usually think that they are "unapproachable." Sanja and Jelena told me that some colleagues warned them how their way of dressing could cause refugee men perceive them as "sexually available," however, they never experienced inappropriate behavior. Sanja told me:

> Women who work in camps sometimes wear short skirts, décolletage. Do Afgan men perceive them as available? Maybe. However, they would never act in inappropriate manner. My project manager insisted that workers do not wear uniforms. I agree with that.

However, Sandra said to me that some Iranian men thought "everything is allowed" since they are in Europe, "a land of freedom," as they told her, and thus made inappropriate comments about NGO women and their appearance. She told me that she have warned them in those situations, "Not everything is allowed in Europe."

However, Nađa told me that she believes that the perceptions about Muslim "deviant sexuality" are racist:

> My friend lives near the park [where aid was organized in 2015]. She was afraid of male migrants. She told me that one man followed her when she was walking home. She believed that this man would rape her if she did not enter the building quickly. I understand that fear and perhaps she was in danger. That fear is always present when women walk alone in the streets. I have that fear, as well. However, you would never say, "white men followed me." Usually migrant or Roma men are marked as suspicious, as rapists or robbers.

From this passage, I can conclude that race play a significant role in perception of migrants, regardless of Serbian "colonial innocence." However, Nađa reported that she was afraid when her group reported domestic violence in the camp. Social services and police separated the couple, and took a woman to a 'safe house,' while a man stayed in the camp. Nađa was afraid of him being violent towards the workers, because he knew they reported violence; however, nothing happened. In that sense, most of my informants stressed that there are official procedures for protection in case of any danger, and that having fear is normal; however, they stressed that

most of the fears are irrational, and thus could lead to discriminative behavior towards refugees if people do not analyze their fears and concerns.

5.2. Stereotypes

However, several of my informants explaind the ways in which they dealt with their own stereotypes. Anđela told me she noticed how she had already labeled people before communication; for example, she labeled one man from Afganistan as patriarchal only because he comes from a rural area, and then she was surprised when she met his wife who has a tatoo and does not wear hijab. Several other informants reported that they discovered their own stereotypes by being positively surprised in some situations. Dušan stated that he did have prejudices that men are more aggressive, in communication and towards women, but that changed during work. Further, Biljana told me how she discovered her stereotypes about rural Afghanistan, as well. She had a group of young people in the English class and she asked them about their education and profession to start a conversation. Two girls in the group who were wearing hijabs started to talk: one graduated architecture, and another was a driving instructor. Biljana told me how she discovered her own stereotypes about rural Afghan women as uneducated and non-drivers.

Further, several informants reported differences in their perception what is masculine and what is feminine behavior. Natalia's group was surprised that not only children, but also grown up men were interested in the artistic activities. Natalia was surprised when "very serious masculine men" started to draw beautiful flowers, which she perceived as feminine. Biljana, who was also in that group, told me that she was surprised by the behavior of men she did not perceive as typically masculine:

> You hear the stories about the patriarchy and masculinity in the Arab world, and then you meet men who hug each other or hold hands in a way I perceive as feminine. Firstly, we thought that we have some gay couples there, but then we realized that it is a way of showing friendship.

Biljana remembers as well drawings of the hearts and flowers young boys and men made, which reminded her of high-school girl's diaries. She told me how she learned that there is a difference in the perception of what is masculine and what is feminine. Dragana reported as well that young men who were interested in embroidery at her workshops surprised her. In that sense, they reported how they had internalized stereotypes about masculinity in Serbian society; namely, that men do not show emotions or affection in public, that physical contact between men is perceived as homosexual behavior, and finally, that men are not interested in art and aesthetics.

5.3. Patriarchy: Who is the "savior" of Muslim women?

My male informants told me that they had seldom opportunities to communicate with women, and that they did not insist on communication. However, Marko, an activist who started to volunteer in 2015 with a group of friends by making food for refugees in the park, claimed that people change when they enter the asylum centre. For him the situation is like in prison, where people became aware that someone else is making the rules. In that sense, he was not able to communicate with women in park, while in the centers he participated in workshops with women. However, he told me that he was aware that he was not welcome to communicate with women in the centers and he did not want to insist or to make them uncomfortable. Regarding the situations when he participated in the workshops with women together with female artists, he claimed that he did not feel like migrant women perceived him as a man, but more like that women perceive the whole group of artists as the 'other.' He never tried to change this because he does not feel the urge to engage in women's rights in the 'Muslim world.' He believes that men and women should have equal rights everywhere, but that the Western engagement in the issues of women's rights in the Muslim world is hypocritical and pointless:

> I never wanted to apply Western identity politics to 'poor backward Muslims' or to make critiques from a moral perspective. Muslim women can deal with it. The change should come from the inside.

On the other side, an attempt to make a change 'from the inside,' came from my other male informant - Senad. I say 'from the inside' because my informant identifies as a Bosniak Muslim

(and as a leftist-communist and feminist, as well). In the situation where the father of three Afghan girls did not allow his daughters to attend the local high school, Senad went to the asylum centre to meet the father:

> I asked him - Are you a Muslim? He said - Yes. I asked - Do you know what the first word of Quran is? He said - Read (*Iqra'*). I said - Are you going to forbid something that God wants?! They came to school the next day. You might say now that my behavior was in the right-wing manner, I know.

When I asked him why he thinks his move was in the right-wing manner, he told me that the conversation between two men about what should be allowed for the girls from a religious perspective is patriarchal and potentially oppressive. However, he decided to use his privilege for a feminist purpose. He told me that those girls loved the school and that they perceived the school as something 'modern.' They wore hijabs in the beginning, but later decided to remove or to put it around a neck. He seemed happy about it, since he stated earlier that religious practices are private matters and his political attitudes are secular. In addition, even after the 'religious revival' that came after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, most of the Bosniak women do not wear any sort of veils, even if they are religious. Therefore, Senad was very devoted to making teenagers from the centre attend the school, especially the girls.

However, my other male informants noticed patriarchal behavior they disagree with, but did not attempt to complain. Nenad, an artist who started to work in the centers in 2014 realized, that the division between men and women is strict and decided to invite two female artists to join him in his work, to communicate with women and children. The division did not surprise him and he did not try to change it. In his opinion, patriarchy is a characteristic of Muslim societies, but of post-Yugoslav societies as well. As I mentioned previously, Nenad was making illustrations in a comic book form intended for educational purposes. I remember that people were willing to share their life and journey stories with him and to become characters in his comics. He told me a story about an Afghan man whom he interviewed with the assistance of his friend Sohrab, an artist and curator from Los Angeles, who speaks Persian. Nenad told me that this is a story of a man who was a victim of patriarchy in his opinion. As Nenad stated, the man lived with his wife and two daughters in Iran, but they were aware that as Afghanis in Iran, it would be difficult to get citizenship and they decided to move to Europe through illegal channels. The man was a

worker who had worked hard since he was fourteen and perceived himself as the provider of the family. He sold their house, they traveled during the time when the borders were 'open', and the trip was relatively easy and they came to Austria and entered asylum procedure. The process was good and easy - the children started to attend school, he and his wife started to attend a language course, they even had a monthly amount of money for living expenses and an apartment. The man told him that after several months he started to feel like he would not be able to integrate. Nenad was firstly surprised by that claim, but later interpreted it through a patriarchal lens. In Nenad's opinion, this man felt useless, since this was the first time in his life that he was unemployed. His wife and daughters felt good and ready for the process of integration, but he did not:

> He told me that after two months he decided to go back. I could not believe what he said. His wife and daughters tried to stop him, but he told us that in his culture the man always makes decisions. I was looking at him, I could not believe. I told to my colleague in Serbian - if I was his wife, I would kill him.

When he came back to Kabul, the man realized that he made a mistake. Soon they started the journey again, but this time the trip was difficult. Nenad met them in one of the Centers in Serbia. For Nenad, this example is the illustration of the patriarchal model of Arab countries. However, Nenad's conclusion is that this man changed through this difficult journey, that the journey was a process of emancipation for him:

> When we met him, he did not seem like the boss in the house. He was gentle and respected his wife. I did not try to tell him anything, he was completely aware what kind of mistake he had made.

Further, Jelena stated about the same man that he was the only one interested in the NGO activities in the camp, while other men were passive, usually watching TV or just chatting with each other. In addition, she mentioned this couple as an example of gender equality in marriage.

Regarding male passivity, Milica, my informant who worked with refugees during Yugoslav wars and who now works daily in one of the centers in Serbia, shares Nenad's opinion about the patriarchy and the behavior of men in Arab countries and in the post-Yugoslav area, she told me:

> It is the same pattern. It was the same during Yugoslav wars and now. The men had the job, the car, and the house in their country and they lost it when they became refugees. In that situation, they do

> not have those possessions that define them. Women deal with that easier. Women can start from the beginning several times. The usual picture in the Asylum centers is that women engage in many activities, and men sit, drink beer and fantasize about the job, the car and the house.

Stef Jansen writes about "systematically gendered coping patterns in migration"[181] in the case of Bosnian refugees. He argues that women were more able to start a new life from the economic bottom,[182] while men had difficulties with their multiple losses, epecially loss of the social status.[183] Nenad's story confirms Jansen's argument that refugee man experience "destabilization of their self-image as household heads."[184] However, while Jansen gives examples of alcoholism and abuse as a consequence of this destabilization,[185] Nenad's story and Jelena's remark about the same man show a positive attitude towards destabilization. Further, Franz argues that Bosnian men were focused "on their lost belongings and properties,"[186] in a similar way as Milica describes behavior of Middle Eastern, as well as Yugoslav, male refugees. Moreover, Franz describes how Bosnian men were more interested in political situation and history of the conflict than women, who were focused on building social relationships.[187] In that sense, Franz argues that men showed more hostility towards other Yugoslav ethnic groups.[188] Similarly, Milica and other informants reported how women did not like when men participate in workshops since they were explaining politics, compete with each other, and complained about other ethnic groups. Several informants reported that women were interested in talking about their lives, growing up, or family relations, instead of politics. While these similarities between Bosnian and Middle Eastern refugees can be interpreted as cultural similarities in terms of patriarchy, I argue that these coping mechanisms are much more a result of global gender inequalities than of a cultural differences or similarities. However, some other behaviors are a result of cultural differences, and in that sense, my informants reported the cases of self-censorship in dealing with differences.

[181] Stef Jansen, "Misplaced masculinities: Status loss and the location of gendered subjectivities amongst 'non-transnational,'" *Anthropological Theory* 8(2) (2008), 181.
[182] Ibid., 186.
[183] Ibid., 182.
[184] Ibid., 187.
[185] Ibid., 187.
[186] Franz, "Bosnian refugee women," 97.
[187] Barbara Franz, "Transplanted or Uprooted? Integration Efforts of Bosnian Refugees Based Upon Gender, Class and Ethnic Differences in New York City and Vienna," *The European Journal of Women's Studies* Vol. 10(2 (2003), 148.
[188] Ibid.

5.4. Self-censorship

Milica works with women on a daily basis. She told me about the difficulties when she is planning the workshops. She said that all of her assumptions fell apart in practice. She leads psychological workshops. When she organized the workshops on identity, her question was - Why is it good to be me? Women told her that it is not good to be a woman and how they were treated badly from an early age. Milica said that she tries not to give them lectures, but to make a friendly situation where everyone can speak and where people can learn from each other. She thinks of herself only as a part of the group. She told me she had similar concerns as me regarding the choice of films. Her practice is to develop the conversation about a certain topic, even if the topic is difficult or painful and to see where it leads. Then, she can decide what kind of films to screen. Her basic assumption was that people are smart and strong and that they do not get easily upset; however, she claimed that it is difficult to balance. Her team assumed that people would get offended if they screen the films containing any sort of explicit scenes. They usually choose something in Arabic language or 'some infantile film.' She told me that one of the colleagues once brought 250 notebooks with various illustrations between the pages. One of the illustrations was a photo of half-naked young male models. They decided to tear out those pages:

> We planned to give those notebooks to children. We were in the office, tearing those pages with good-looking guys, repeating it 250 times, while two women were staring at us through the window and shouting: don't tear it! Give it to us! We are adults!

In this sense, Anđela told me that women usually react better than they expect. She oferred them modern ballet lessons and screened the performances that include male and female naked bodies. She told me that she has anxieties in these situations, but that she tries anyway to do what she planned, and then she waits for reactions. The reception of modern ballet was succesfull. However, they are using self-censorship and trying not to provoke uncomfortable situations, even when they do not have negative feedback or proof of what can be perceived as offensive or inappropriate. Other people who work with Milica stated that they learned to adjust their behavior according to cultural differences: for example, some women started to avoid shaking hands with men. Marija stated that many people adjusted and changed their behavior over time, workers, as well as refugees. However, she told me that she thinks that is important to pay

attention to small cultural differences, such as shaking hands. She stopped to offer her hand when a man from Syria felt confused when she offered him a hand. He accepted, but she sensed that he feel uncomfortable. However, my informants reported that they react when they encounter something they disagree with in a polite way. Several informants stated that if they try to talk about differences in gender relations and gender equality, they try not to suggest what appropriate behavior is, but rather make comparisons of differences without giving value statements. The reasoning behind this approach is that they do not want to behave as the bearers of 'ultimate truths' or to underestimate people's ability to judge oppression or patriarchy.

However, they act in many situations. Sanja reported that she acted when a woman was in danger and needed a surgery, while her family wanted to travel further. The woman was willing to respect the wish of her family; however, Sanja spoke to them an explained the dangers. She told me that she always acts in potentially dangerous situations. Marija told me that she had trouble to deal with traditional patriarchal families. However, she never suggested that they must change their behavior, but rather explained how the things that are normal to them are problematic somewhere else, especially domestic violence. Dušan stated as well that he had trouble with firm traditional gender roles. In that sense, he told me that he tried whenever he could to talk with women in private, to tell them that they should be equal with their husbands, to make decisions. However, he tried not to give them lessons explicitly, but rather to ask them questions, such as - Do you think this is good for you?

5.5. Veiling practices and make-up

However, many of my informants stated that they do not perceive every difference in gender relations as oppressive. In that sense, some situations make them question their own values and thinking about power relations between genders. They follow the official procedures in the cases of domestic violence; however, they do not try to teach women what violence is. In addition, Marija told me that gender relations are different in different families, she cannot generalize, but when she develops a closer relationship with some families, she stated that men often become relaxed and state that their wives are "the bosses." Franz argues that patriarchal gender relations

often turn to "criptomatriarchy" when people experience refuge since women have better coping strategies.[189] Further, Franz describes Bosnian patriarchal traditions as "dominated by the female in household issues and decisions."[190] However, I argue that power relations have different layers and that the same practices can be interpreted as oppressive or progressive depending on a context. For example, veiling and make-up.

Dragana told me that when she first met refugee women in the center in 2014, she tried carefully to ask questions to check where the boundaries of appropriate behavior are. She met three Muslim young women from Eritrea, Cameroon and Somalia. They were shy, but she asked questions, and their smiles were a sign that she can proceed. She asked them do they need underwear, bras, pads, and they said that nobody asked them that before. They were very grateful, and they asked could they get hair dye and make up, as well.

> It turned out that many girls from the Muslim world are make-up artists, their hair is covered, but their nails are painted, make up, they dye hair. Probably they can express their creativity through it. I learned something from them about body care. I was always focused on intellectual success, my place in society, diplomas, awards; I was not interested in body care. They taught me how to treat my body with respect, to enjoy.

Dragana told me that she started to question her opinions about oppression in the encounter with Muslim women, especially about make-up as potentially oppressive in some contexts, and potentially rebellious in others. Regarding veiling practices, Anja told me that all Iranian and Afghan women who lived in the camp at the time I interviewed her decided to take off hijabs, and, as she stated, men did not complain about it. However, several of my informants told me that they perceive wearing hijabs as a habit or folklore more than as oppression. Jelena told me:

> Regarding veiling, you know, when I started to work with Roma Muslims, and later with people from the Middle East, I felt strange surrounded by women who all wear hijabs. I mean, it is impossible not to notice, you can see only their faces. However, after second or third time I stopped noticing. It became normal to me. I think it is normal to them in the same way. It does not seem to me that they feel it as a burden, but as something ordinary.

[189] Franz, "Bosnian refugee women," 100.
[190] Ibid.

However, I argue that veiling practices can be rebellious as well, especially in the context of European neocolonial patriarchy. I will illustrate this claim with the case study by Joan Scott on the debate and policies of veiling practices in French schools from the late 1980s until the early 2000s.[191] Scott describes several cases of the girls who were expelled from public schools for wearing veils and the public debates that followed the events.[192] The debate contained the notions that veils challenge the secular republic's principles and that they are "dangerously political" and necessary associated with Islamism and terrorism.[193] According to Scott, the acts could be the "adolescent rebellion" or the wish "to challenge mainstream society;" however, the motives of individuals were not examined since the interest was focused on the symbolic positions.[194] In this sense, I argue that many of gendered practices can have ambiguous meanings in different contexts and that my informants offered different examples of trespassing the borders of binary gendered interpretations, where the practices are "good" or "bad," or European/Oriental.

[191] Joan Scott, "Chapter 1: The Headscarf Controversies," in *Politics of the Veil* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 21.
[192] Ibid., 22.
[193] Ibid. 22.
[194] Ibid., 32.

VII - Conclusion

In the thesis, I presented various binary discourses that shape the assumed positions of NGO workers, global and local. However, all of these discourses rely on the European colonial narratives on race, progress, and civilization. I traced these narratives from the global orientalist perspectives to local nesting orientalisms to show that these multiple narratives depend on the same binaries that make racist narratives possible: Europe/Orient, East/West, civilization/backwardness, urban/rural, gender equality/oppression of women. In that sense, I argue that the division of the First and the Other Serbia depends on these global narratives that allow stereotypical vision of NGO workers as urban, European, cosmopolite individuals who plead for gender equality, who are perceived as "traitors" by those stereotypically envisioned as nationalist, patriarchal, backward, "peasants." Further, I argue that this stereotypical vision enables various otherings in Serbian society, where (self)perception of the Other Serbia as the "bearers of civilization" produces negative reactions of those who are "marked for emancipation," but who might not fit into the binary. In other words, I can compare the reactions of "southern railway" on Belgradian "posh accent," to rejection of various minorities in Europe or people in the "Third World" to be emancipated by the "Western saviors." In that sense, these rejections are not necessarily nationalist, traditionalist, patriarchal, or backward.

Through my research, I had discovered that my informants do not fit into those binaries, but rather challenge them. Having in mind the ambiguous position of the Balkans as the "grey zone" or "in-betweenness" in the global narratives on race, I argue that NGO workers who work with migrants do not stand "in between" the binary Orient/Occident, but rather go beyond this division and reveal multiple layers of narratives on race, civilization, progress, and gender equality. In addition, while Europe, the Balkans, and the Orient exist as references in the narratives of my informants, these categories serve rather to question the binaries than to reproduce them.

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