The Rise and Fall of Migration Solidarity in Belgrade

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Abstract: This article discusses the experience of migrant self-organised spaces and migration solidarity groups in Serbia (particularly Belgrade) over the last four years. It first looks at how »solidarities in transit« emerged in the country between 2015 and 2018 and analyses the heterogeneous community of actors that came together in order to provide assistance to people on the move and to support migrants' self-organised living spaces. The article then examines the gradual marginalisation of migrant presence and migration solidarity in Belgrade. It explores how the Serbian authorities, thanks to vast amounts of European Union funding, established an institutionalised, official, camp-based, and heavily regulated refugee aid field from which political subversive actors and practices have been excluded. One of the consequences of the institutionalisation of the field is that the prescribed identity for refugee aid groups has become a purely humanitarian, non-political one. Ultimately, this article proposes an analysis of the further integration of Serbia into the EU border control regime since 2015 from the perspective of refugees' experiences and solidarity practices.

Keywords: Balkan route, solidarity, grassroots refugee support, migration governance, NGO-isation

This paper discusses the experience of migrant self-organised spaces and migration solidarity groups in Belgrade between 2015 and 2018.[1] Its primary concern is to analyse the processes and practices through which the Serbian authorities marginalised both migrants and solidarity presence in public spaces in the city. While migration solidarity has not been fully criminalised in Serbia, this paper argues that the authorities circumscribed refugee assistance to a heavily controlled and camp-based field of operation sustained by European Union (EU) funding. Within this field, regulatory

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mechanisms work to discipline aid actors and to neutralise politicised practices, essentially reducing refugee support to a purely humanitarian matter. The paper thus focuses on events in Belgrade in order to propose an analysis of the integration of Serbia within the EU border regime from the perspective of its effects on refugees' experiences and solidarity practices. The paper also considers how this marginalising process is connected to the imposition of a neoliberal regime of valuation that gives primacy to the commercial use of urban space in ways that excludes certain social groups from a number of sites. As argued by Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik (2018) and detailed by research participants, migrants thus find themselves at the intersection of racialised logics of migration governance and neoliberal processes of exclusion, which reinforce each other to further marginalise migrant and solidarity presence.[2]

The paper takes as its starting point the moment in spring and summer of 2015, when mass mobilities pushed their way through national and European borders along the so-called Balkan route, in what was immediately labelled by the media, governments, and associated authorities ›Europe's migrant (or refugee) crisis‹. The labelling of a crisis went together with calls by and for governments and European agencies to restore normality. At first, this translated into a range of (often violent) strategies aiming at stopping, reverting, and containing people's movement. This resulted in a series of struggles between mobilities and bordering tactics. As people became immobilised at various points of fixation, their collective efforts to continue their journey would confront the various manifestations of border control regimes (in the shape of police and military forces, fences, non-lethal weapons, among others). In early September 2015, thousands of people who had been immobilised in Hungary by national authorities decided to walk to the Austrian border in an evocatively named »March of Hope« (Kasparek/Speer 2015). Simultaneously, Chancellor Merkel announced the suspension of the Dublin regulation for Syrians, essentially alleging that all Syrians arriving in Germany would be allowed to claim asylum in the country, no matter which other countries they may have crossed on their way. With the notable exception of Hungary who closed parts of its Western and Southern borders through militarised fences in mid-September and mid-October 2015 respectively, the Balkan route ceased being an illegalised pathway into Europe and instead became a formalised corridor.

The »Balkan corridor« was opened as a quasi-legal passageway into the EU along which states facilitated and accelerated people's transit across their territory against all regulations making up the EU border regime—in particular the Dublin Regulation

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2 | See also Cantat/Rajaram (2018) for a similar analysis in the Hungarian context.

that requires people to claim asylum in their first country of entry. The corridor was however an ambivalent development (e.g. Santer/Wriedt 2016; Beznec/Speer/Stojić Mitrović 2016). On the one hand, it was an unprecedented admission on the part of governments who stopped attempting to stop movements along the route. On the other hand, the formalisation of the route represented the first step towards the reassertion of state control (see e.g. Kasparek 2016). In November 2015, states restrained movement along the corridor through the exclusion of some travellers on the basis of nationality (only Afghanis, Syrians, and Iraqis were able to travel). In February 2016, people from Afghanistan were also excluded from free movement. Eventually, on 8 March 2016, it was announced that the Balkan corridor would be fully closed: this would be achieved through the implementation of the infamous EU-Turkey deal, an agreement aiming at preventing departures from Turkish coasts, and the official closure of borders along the route. This marked a return to a situation of closure, mass illegalisation and push-backs, and violence for people along the route. Migratory movement did not stop as people continued entering (and exiting) Greece. But journeys were made more difficult, dangerous, slower, and people became stranded in various localities along the route. A growing number of people became stranded in Serbia, wishing, but unable, to continue their journeys—a number that reached over 7,000 by the spring 2017.[3]

Contextualising migration and solidarity in Belgrade in a critical analysis of the naming, opening, and transformation of the Balkan route is important. Its name is underpinned by specific geographical and symbolic imaginations. It relies on an imagined geography that constructs the Balkans as external to Europe on the basis of a distinction between Europe as a space of coherence and civilisation on the one hand, and its threatening, unruly, and chaotic neighbourhood (Rajaram 2016) on the other. It also reactivates stigmas inherited from the 1990s wars and before, which regard the Balkans as always potentially being prone to criminality and backward nationalism (Bjelić/Savić 2002). This depiction of the Balkans as Europe's threatening outside leaves unscrutinised the varying relationships that the EU entertains with the states that came out of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and that constitute the territories refugees cross when they travel along the route (see El-Shaarawi/Razsa 2018: 5; see also Peović Vuković 2018 for a particular focus on Croatia). These range from full membership to the EU, the Schengen Area, and the Eurozone for Slovenia, over countries (such as Serbia) engaged in long and implausible acces-

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3 | Although hundreds of thousands of people have passed through Serbia on the way to Western Europe, the UNHCR estimated the number of refugees in Serbia in May 2017 at 7,219 (UNHCR 2017).

sion processes to others whose very statehood still goes unrecognised by the EU (e.g. Kosovo) (see El-Shaarawi/Razsa 2018: 19). These newly-formed states have themselves been involved in aggressive bordering practices not only as part of processes of state-formation but also due to their integration within an EU border regime premised on outsourcing its most brutal aspects to peripheral countries as this paper will further reflect on.

The first section of the paper operates as a framing section in which I provide a brief overview of the choice and methods of fieldwork and the key concepts mobilised in the paper. The paper then looks at how »solidarities in transit« (Kallius 2019)[4] emerged in Belgrade over 2015 and 2016 and analyses the heterogeneous community of actors that came together in order to provide assistance to people on the move and to support refugees' self-organised living spaces. The third section examines the gradual marginalisation of refugee presence and solidarity in Belgrade. It shows how Serbian authorities—thanks to vast amounts of EU funding—established an official, camp-based, and heavily regulated refugee aid field from which political subversive actors and practices have been excluded. Within this field, NGOs find themselves subjected to particular forms of disciplining governmentality. The final section argues that this process must be understood in the context of the particular political economy of migrant governance that emerged in Serbia in relation to EU efforts to more firmly inscribe the country into its border regime.

STUDYING MIGRATION SOLIDARITY IN BELGRADE

This paper is based on several visits to Belgrade over 2016 and 2017 and a five-month intensive fieldwork between March and July 2018. It is located within a broader research project concerned with migrants' and solidarity practices along the Balkan route as part of which I conducted fieldwork in several other countries, including Greece and Hungary. Both Greece and Hungary have received acute media and academic attention: the former has been primarily studied in the context of »the Greek solidarity boom«[5] characterised by important arrivals of solidarity actors, but also of humanitarians, researchers, journalists, film-makers, and other parties concerned with engaging in, or documenting, the explosion in refugee solidarity practices. Hungary

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4 | See Kallius (2019), who used the idea of »solidarity in transit« in her study of the Hungarian context.

5 | This is a term Katerina Rozakou used in several public talks and in private conversations.

for its part has triggered scrutiny for the radical anti-migrant campaigns and policies as well as the »border spectacle« deployed by its government (Cantat 2017). However, recent migratory events and related solidarity mobilisations in Serbia have been less written about.

Yet, as this paper sets out to show, the rise and fall of migrant presence and solidarity in Belgrade tells us much about the emergence of supportive popular responses to mass displacement in Europe (what we may call »vernacular humanitarianisms« following Čarna Brković 2017) and their ongoing marginalisation and disqualification by national and European authorities. The case of Serbia is also an insightful vantage point to understand the logics and mechanisms of the EU border control regime and the implications (on migrants but also on local actors) of the integration of the country within a system premised on encamping and marginalising people on the move (Obradovic-Wochnik 2018; see also Cantat 2017 for a discussion of the Hungarian situation). It is an important example of the ways in which global processes (securitisation of migration, neoliberalisation, and financialisation of public spaces) become embedded into particular contexts and of how these broader dynamics become rooted in the social relations and marginalisations that characterise local spaces. This is a general theoretical point (how global processes play out in local spaces) as well as an argument specific to Serbia and Belgrade which evidences their particular relation to the EU and the way they become subjected to the dispossessive forces of neoliberal development.

The fieldwork centred on neighbourhoods of downtown Belgrade where refugees had become visible in 2015 and 2016 in public parks and unoccupied buildings. It is important to note that the areas that became used by refugees and migrants in Belgrade coincided with sites earmarked for urban renovation projects where practices of dispossession and displacement of poorer local residents were already underway (see e.g. Ruff 2017; No Borders Hostel 2016; Jovanović/Miletić/Radovanović 2018). One of the latest and most controversial of such projects is known as the Belgrade Waterfront: a three-billion-euro urban project along the Sava riverfront, funded by an Emirati firm and subsidised with Serbian public resources, which will include luxury apartments and the largest shopping mall in the Balkans. In order to make way for the Belgrade Waterfront located near the historically working-class neighbourhood of Savamala, several hundred families that lived in previously state-owned houses were evicted. These downtown Belgrade evictions were taking place some hundred meters from the sites where refugees transiting through, or stranded in, Belgrade met and resided for some time—before themselves being removed. Both rounds of evictions—those of poor residents and those of migrants' squats—were underpinned by similar ideological and cultural discourses which masked the structural violence of

the state and capital with narratives of modernity, urbanism, and Europeanity.[6] The denunciation of the Waterfront project, and of the dispossession that accompanied its construction and affected both working-class people and refugees in Belgrade, was a key narrative I encountered from participants in the field. Many brought out connections between the displacement from urban spaces imposed on both impoverished local residents and on refugees. In that sense, while the transformation of regimes of urban spaces under conditions of neoliberal capitalism is not at the centre of this paper, the example of the Waterfront project still provides important insights and context to some of the complexities and tensions characterising Belgrade as a research site.

What it evidences in particular is how pauperised residents, national or non-national, were constructed as unwanted, surplus populations, hindering the development of Belgrade into a ›new European capital‹ and slowing down the process through which public space would be transformed into a space for the reproduction and accumulation of capital (Cantat/Rajaram 2018). However, as rightly emphasised by Obradovic-Wochnik (2018), migrants are also governed through particular mechanisms that differ from those applied to other social groups seen as undesirable. In particular, the availability of EU funding dedicated to the construction of migrant reception camps means that their marginalisation is orchestrated through their encampment and the NGO-isation of aid. In that sense, logics of racialised border control intersect with neoliberal capitalist processes producing a particular »migration-neoliberalism nexus« (ibid.: 73).

The paper explores these dynamics and their effects on solidarity actors through insights collected through twenty-seven interviews and numerous informal conversations with a range of individuals involved in assisting refugees in Belgrade in a variety of roles, including independent activists and volunteers, representatives of local and international NGOs, and state officers working for the Serbian Commissariat for refugees and migration (CRMRS). I also attended and observed a number of events bringing together representatives of local and international groups, including UN agencies and government organisations concerned with refugee protection, and consulted relevant reports and press releases from grassroots actors monitoring and reporting on their activities and the broader situation (often with a focus on border violence), as well as larger organisations such as the European Commission or Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). To preserve anonymity, all individual names have

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6 | For interesting parallels of processes of urban dispossession, past and present, in Belgrade, see Jovanović/Miletić/Radovanović (2018).

been changed, and I also avoid naming organisations unless participants explicitly agreed otherwise or the information was made public in other ways.[7]

As mentioned before, the majority of the fieldwork was conducted in 2018: this proved particularly challenging considering that refugee presence in Belgrade had largely been evacuated by then. This raised particular questions and methodological challenges: What happened to the people who were using these sites and whom I had met during my previous visits? How to study something which had been erased and whose traces had been largely concealed? What might be of importance at this particular point in time for the many actors who had been involved in creating and sustaining social spaces hosting refugees in Belgrade over the previous years? I spent the first weeks of my 2018 fieldwork speaking with activists, refugees, and colleagues, and figuring out how my presence as a researcher may be useful at this particular conjuncture. One issue that came up several times was precisely a willingness to reconstitute the chain of events and mechanisms that led to such an absence, and to clarify the political and economic motives and dynamics that had played a role in the process. It is therefore primarily with this objective that I continued my research in the city over the next few months.

As will be developed in the paper, one of the key findings is that, although there is no law formally criminalising migration solidarity in Serbia, the authorities successfully marginalised migrants (spatially and socially) and solidarity actors. I argue that this was achieved through the establishment of a state-controlled and camp-based refugee aid field funded by European money within which discipline was exercised over people acting in support of refugees in various ways. These findings complement insights developed by other researchers who embraced the same topic (see, in particular, Jovanović/Miletić/Radovanović 2018; Obradovic-Wochnik 2018). The key mechanism that allows the exercise of disciplinary power is that refugee support groups have to register as NGOs in order to remain operative in this context. In consequence, they become dependent on the authorities to gain access to the camps where refugees now reside and on donors to secure funding allowing them to operate in a formalised way. I use discipline and disciplinary power in a Foucauldian sense in order to understand the ways control is exercised through a range of tools, techniques, and leverages that render individuals and groups more docile without necessitating the use of force. There is a biopolitical dimension to this process: it is pro-

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7 | Further details on individual interviewees can be found in the list of references. However, interviews were conducted under the promise of anonymity and only information specifically agreed on has been disclosed. This means it was difficult to provide more details on the biographies, affiliations, and personal profiles of the people I have interviewed in the paper.

ductive of particular (compliant, depoliticised) subjectivities and modes of behaviour (Obradovic-Wochnik 2018; Cantat/Rajaram 2018).

Here also, the »migration-neoliberalism« nexus identified by Obradovic-Wochnik (2018) is a useful frame of analysis. It allows grasping the ways in which autonomous migrant and solidarity subjectivities, such as those enacted by people attempting to produce social spaces for refugees outside camps and the state-controlled system, become doubly disciplined. On the one hand, they are targeted through neoliberal logics premised on maximising the use-value of urban space: this generates desirable subjectivities determined by the ability to consume and generate profit and excludes other ways of being and using the city. The dynamic through which an image of a good and desirable urban citizen becomes connected to consumption practices is a broader biopolitical process that reshapes the boundaries of citizenship along class lines in particular and does not concern only people on the move (see Cantat/Rajaram 2018). On the other hand, migrants and their supporters are also interpellated by authorities through practices associated to border control regimes, premised on neutralising politicised socialities and on producing compliant migrants in camps as well as docile aid workers devoid of political ambitions. The last section of the paper will detail these disciplining mechanisms and their effects. Moreover, as we will also see, disciplinary mechanisms sometimes exist in tension with more coercive practices so that groups and individuals attempting to circumvent them may be exposed to forms of violence. The next part introduces the emergence of migration solidarity actors in central Belgrade.

MIGRATION AND SOLIDARITY IN BELGRAD

By 2015, public parks and unoccupied buildings of downtown Belgrade had become hubs where travellers passing through the country would gather and attempt to organise their journeys onwards. At the time, the Serbian government's official discourse towards refugees was one of humanitarianism, emphasising the authorities' openness and their good treatment of people on the move. Serbian authorities routinely contrasted their humanitarian inclinations to the behaviour of neighbouring countries, particularly Hungary and Bulgaria, renowned for their ill treatment of refugees (Jovanović/Avramović 2015). This humanitarian discourse was in large part aimed at the EU as a means of demonstrating Serbia's capacity to uphold human rights and, hence, of cleaning the country from certain stigmas connected to its 1990s image (Beznec/Speer/Stojić Mitrović 2016; Milan/Pirro 2018; El-Shaarawi/Razsa 2018). At the same time, the authorities also insisted on their capacity to ›manage‹ migra-

tion in order to show their willingness to abide by the role of border guard of the EU's external borders. This echoes important insights on the imbrication of humanitarian motives with processes of securitisation (Fassin 2011) as well as analyses of how a rhetoric that mixes security and humanitarian concerns is mobilised in order to justify further border control (Vaughan-Williams 2015).

In 2015, in spite of Serbian authorities' humanitarian discourse towards refugees, the situation on the ground was experienced in strikingly different terms. National and local authorities appeared as both unwilling and unable to provide support to people on the move. The social spaces created and used by refugees quickly became supported by the solidarity work of a number of volunteers and activists who provided clothes, daily food, and other items to their temporary occupants. One participant explained: »we had to do something, because the government was doing nothing« (interview with Fidel, 23.04.2018). This can be connected to discussions of the way in which post-Yugoslav solidarity politics have developed in the interstices of alternatively present and absent, securitised and neglectful, states that »emerge and recede in relationship to particular kinds of citizens and non-citizens« (Greenberg/Spasić 2017: 315, 319).

It is thus also important to think about migration solidarity in Belgrade in connection to the ways in which citizens (and others) adapt to a post-war, post-socialist and neoliberalising context in which the state's capacity or willingness to acknowledge and fulfil their needs has dramatically receded. Notably, in this context, some of the claims put forward by people in the region are articulated through imaginaries of a past relation between state and citizens, sometimes premised on imaginations of Yugoslav, socialist, or Non-Aligned ethics and socialities (Petrović 2013). In their study of refugee and activist struggles, El-Shaarawi and Razsa (2018) explain how the Balkan corridor roughly followed the path of the Highway of Brotherhood and Unity initiated by Tito in the 1950s and has now been replaced by national motorways (see also Peović Vuković 2018). The memory of this socialist infrastructure of international circulation also animated the social movements that refugees encountered along the route, even as new nationalist and Europeanist politics attempted to stop and impede their journeys.

The volunteer and activist groups that emerged in Belgrade over 2015 and 2016 to assist refugees formed a rather diverse community of actors. It included politicised activist networks with autonomist, anti-nationalist politics as well as groups of independent and grassroots volunteers moved into action by a variety of motives ranging from humanitarian compassion to more critical stances toward national and European border policies. A range of local NGOs, both pre-existing—including since the 1990s in response to displacement triggered by the wars—and newly formed, also

intervened alongside UN bodies (primarily UNHCR and UNICEF) and large international organisations, such as the Danish Refugee Council, MSF, and the International Federation of the Red Cross, among others. These actors varied significantly along ideological lines, previous experience (if any), political background, or operational modes. This configuration, whereby actors not traditionally cooperating came together in complex and often varying relational constellations, is not specific to Belgrade. In various points of transit or fixation along the Balkan route, coalitions of actors shaped by local politics, histories, and contexts emerged to »fill the gaps« left by states (Cantat/Feischmidt 2018).

This paper looks more specifically at the segment of this field that started in a largely independent, non-institutionalised fashion and operated under the label of »solidarity« in Belgrade. Migration solidarity actors in Belgrade comprised both Serbian and foreign individuals who originally acted as part of informal structures operated by volunteers or a very small number of (usually poorly) paid staff. The solidarity coalition was loose and largely heterogeneous in terms of the social profiles and situations of its members, making it difficult to offer a sociological overview. Most of the people involved seemed, at first sight, to belong to rather highly educated sections of the urban »middle classes«: they generally held university degrees or were at university, and those who had professional activities were mainly involved in fields such as civil society organisations, the arts, journalism, or academia. However, deeper conversations often revealed quite serious instability and precarity in their everyday life, particularly from a financial point-of-view. The panel of individual situations I came across ranged from people involved in small organisations or social spaces active in feminist and anti-fascist (and sometimes anti-capitalist) politics which managed to provide them with a (minimal) income, to a few people with no secure income or housing who struggled to find a place to stay on a regular basis and alternated between family accommodation, short-term stays in squats, and temporary flat-sharing situations. Yet, these also included a few people who, to the contrary, seemed to have their own sufficient resources (either financial or social in terms of securing various employment contracts for tasks such as translation, freelance journalism, curating events, and so on) to make activism and related activities their main occupation. Finally, a significant number of the people I met had a main job, often quite poorly paid, with little connection to their activism, and would use their evenings and weekends for political work. It must be noted that, for many, this mode of timesharing between an income-securing job and political activities was a longer-term lifestyle and did not start with their involvement in refugee solidarity. By the time I conducted formal fieldwork in Belgrade in 2018, however, a strong divide had emerged across two broad categories: people who entered the NGO field to sup-

port refugees as part of paid employment, and those who refused to do so, or could not, for a range of reasons.

Hence, even within this reduced category, marked differences remained across personal situations but also political positionings. Solidarity groups included for instance the local No Border network, made up of both local and international activists and supporting radical anti-border politics, and coalitions set up by expats—often with little pre-existing political experience, but who wanted to respond to the situation in the city. A number of foreign volunteers and activists also travelled to Serbia specifically to engage in refugee support: this pertains to a rather novel phenomenon which may be labelled *itinerant volunteerism or activism*. This somewhat new form of volunteer or activist engagement relies on the hyper-mobility of young people (particularly from the global North) able, through a variety of arrangements, to travel for weeks, months, or sometimes years at a time, and who follow the lines of movement of refugees and become active at points of immobilisation in order to provide basic services such as food, clothing, and other items. This is often the source of tensions: in Serbia, as in Greece and Hungary, local activists have sometimes complained about the patronising attitude and lack of knowledge of the local context on the part of international groups and individuals as well as about issues around responsibility, as some people may leave when things turn complicated or risky—and others not. However, the Serbian context seems characterised by a relatively collaborative model with less such tensions reported than in Greece or Hungary. A number of organisations set up by international volunteers are considered with sympathy and respect by local activists. The No Name Kitchen, set up in 2017 by Spanish volunteers, has, for instance, been repetitively praised by Serbian activists. Similarly, activists from Belgrade I spoke to speak in comradely terms of Hot Food Idomeni, a volunteer group formed at the Greek-Macedonian border that started being active in Belgrade in the early winter 2016.

In spite of visible differences in organisational modes and political trajectories, what seemed to bring together individuals and groups which mobilised the category of solidarity was the belief that their way of supporting refugees could be distinguished from other ways of providing assistance, as enacted by large-scale humanitarian or state agencies. This translated in particular into an insistence on their activities going beyond—or being different from—the mere distribution of goods. A strong emphasis was therefore placed on equalitarian social interactions, which may be described as »solidarity socialities« (Rozakou 2016). Solidarity socialities refer here to the types of connections and meanings which develop between individuals and groups who are engaged in a relation where aid and support are given and received in ways that attempt to subvert the top-down, securitised forms of humanitarianism

organised and deployed by states and official humanitarian actors. Some activists, for instance, were present in the parks everyday to provide and share warm tea, mostly in order to engage in conversations and build connections with people. When asking a volunteer from another group why giving out tea seemed important, he explained that, from his perspective, there was a particular meaning and symbol to sharing a cup of tea: »it makes people feel comfortable, it is a part of culture: you share tea or coffee with someone, it is like saying: »tell me, I am interested, let's speak« (interview with Mario, 26.04.2018). Participants often explained that what they understood as solidarity activities was as much about provision in itself (of various material goods) as about connections and sharing. Karika also told me that there was a fundamental value to »time spent and shared« and went on to say: »sometimes we cannot do all that much for a person. We might even feel like we are useless, but you learn also a lot yourself in this situation, and you learn the importance of not just distributing things but of being there your whole self and taking the time« (interview with Karika, 02.05.2018).

Another key leitmotiv of Serbian grassroots actors concerned their relation with the Serbian authorities. A participant explained:

> »In general what we understand as solidarity groups are those who refuse to implement the state's plan about the migrants, which has been one of not well-hidden racism... People like Vučić [President of Serbia] are playing on a double front: you know, they do everything to trigger hatred and defiance towards the migrants... but in the same time Vučić, he came sometimes to have his photo taken with refugee kids and stuff like that, to look as if he is a good humanitarian person... So for me all the groups who see this hypocrisy and denounce it, they are with the solidarity.« (interview with Karika, 02.05.2018)

Similar readings of solidarity articulated in opposition to the Serbian government and to a top-down mode of relating to people on the move were echoed in other interviews. Particularly in the time of fast transit, the focus of solidarity work was not on the building of common struggles but rather on the performance of alternative modes of connection, based on care and support. As put by a participant:

> »When you only meet someone for 48 hours, there is not much space to talk with him or her. [...] What does solidarity with that person mean? In my case, it means to show that unlike this government, I care about people, wherever they come from. You know, we will give some food or tea with a smile, which says I relate to you and I know we have

something in common and I value it. We will speak and chat and share what we can.« (interview with Fidel, 23.04.2018)

Many of the grassroots activists and groups present in the sites where refugees gathered were associated with other political networks, including anti-nationalist or anti-war groups. As observed by Nadia El-Shaarawi and Maple Razsa (2018) the Balkan route traversed the borders of the newly formed states of the region, and, hence, came across the social movements that had emerged in opposition to ultra-nationalist state-making processes. These movements might draw on »enduring forms of historical imagination and cosmopolitan sensibilities that span the borders of states, nationalities, and languages« (Henig 2016: 909, quoted in El-Shaarawi/Razsa 2018: 10). These may range from the legacy of Yugoslav socialist internationalism and the Non-Aligned movement to local smuggling networks developed in the 1990s during international sanctions against Serbia and former experiences of forced displacement and circulation (see El-Shaarawi/Razsa 2018: 17).

As we will see in the next part of this paper, over time, these groups had to renegotiate their relationship with the Serbian state, which strategically reorganised refugee assistance in Belgrade in ways that led to an almost complete institutionalisation of the field through the encampment of migrants. This often involves deep transformation in the form and discourses adopted by these groups.

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF REFUGEE SUPPORT

Up to the closure of the Balkan corridor, Serbian authorities were relatively disinterested in refugees, grassroots communities and their supporters in downtown Belgrade. Around the spring and summer 2016, however, this started changing. In July 2016, the municipality engaged in an impromptu renovation of parks, which soon was used as a pretext to ban refugee presence (Obradovic-Wochnik/Stojić Mitrović 2016). In April, Miksalište, an important service provider, had been displaced as part of evictions anticipating the Belgrade Waterfront project. The Serbian state forced the organisation out before destroying the building entirely. Other buildings used as shelters by refugees were also dislodged, such as the short-lived No Border squat also closely located to Miksalište. In November, a refugee aid kiosk ran by the volunteer group Info Park, located in the colloquially named »Afghan park«, was shut down by municipal authorities and forced to move to another location.

In November 2016, an official Open Letter was circulated to refugee aid groups by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy. One part read:

>[…] assistance and support in the form of food, clothing, footwear, encouraging migrants to reside outside the designated permanent asylum centers and transit reception centers are [no] longer acceptable, this [particularly] on the territory of the Belgrade city municipality.« (Ministry of Labour 2016, as quoted in Border Monitoring Serbia 2016)

The Open Letter was issued as the situation of refugees stranded in Serbia further deteriorated following the reinforcement of border control along the Balkan route. People faced a situation of immobilisation and stagnation with serious implications for their mental and physical wellbeing. Although not subject to the direct violence that many refugees experienced in neighbouring Bulgaria and Hungary, people stuck inside Serbia faced indirect violence and neglect through living in extreme poverty, intensive social exclusion, and lack of access to care (among other things). Many migrants developed complex forms of trauma as their experience in Serbia came to exacerbate already existing psychological conditions.

Although the Open Letter was not a formal piece of legislation, it came with important consequences for groups supporting migrants. The implicit message was that either groups would conform to the new camp-based securitised model of care provision, or they would sever their relationship with the state. One participant explained: »It was more blackmail than law, but it scared us to be honest. We could have, like, lost our status as an NGOs, which you know is quite a big risk to take, because this is where people work and their livelihood and so on« (interview with Srdjan, 25.04.2018).

While the official discourse was that camps could host all migrants, research participants explained that, even in the cases where migrants attempted to move to camps, it had proven difficult due to limited capacities. For single men in particular, who fell out of priority lists based on vulnerability criteria broadly oblivious to masculine vulnerabilities, access to camps near Belgrade was virtually impossible. Many people also preferred to stay in self-organised places around Belgrade or near the country's borders, including in Šid and Subotica, due to fears that they would find themselves further away from the borders they wished to cross or the smugglers on whom they had become dependent to organise onward journeys.

This attempt at stopping grassroots forms of assistance towards refugees seems to replicate logics of deterrence and criminalisation existing in many other countries. Yet, beyond deterrence, the Serbian government engaged in a more thorough operation whereby it produced the refugee population outside the camps as legitimately negligible and unworthy of care. The Open Letter implied that refugees lived on the streets out of choice: they were thus responsible for their neglect and legitimate tar-

gets of harassment. By stating its capacity to take care of those willing to abide by its rules, the state produced a legitimate public deserving of attention while justifying its negligence towards others. The production of a binary between people inside and outside the camps moved the authority to govern away from society, thus, authoritatively reasserting the primacy of the state in governing and ruling over refugees and those supporting them. This move was a key pillar in the institutionalisation and restructuration of the field of refugee assistance in ways that placed the state as the key actor of ›migration management‹. The process was also a crucial step in the integration of Serbia within the EU border control regime and was made possible with European funding reserved for building and running camps.

This becomes clear when reflecting on the situation in »the barracks«, an important site of self-organised refugee accommodation in central Belgrade. The barracks were a series of abandoned warehouses behind the city's central bus and train station that had been used since 2014 to accommodate people on the move but were more largely occupied in late summer 2016, as people were pushed out of public parks and as temperatures started to drop in the autumn. They subsequently hosted between 1,000 and 2,000 people through one of the harshest winters in decades. The buildings lacked windows, heating, or hygienic facilities. Whilst conditions were extremely tough, a self-organised community emerged. People installed tents, makeshift toilets and collective kitchens, and organised life in the barracks with the support of volunteers and activists. Even after the issuance of the Open Letter, a number of groups and individuals decided to break the governmental order not to help. In fact, many participants thought that, for some time, in spite of the Letter, the authorities tolerated volunteer activities as a means to make sure people had access to minimum services for survival. As put by Mario: »it is a miracle that no one died of cold or starvation in the barracks« (interview with Mario, 26.04.2018). This tacit acceptance eventually receded and, on 10 May 2017, the barracks were evicted in dubious, reportedly violent, circumstances.[8] After they were made to exit the barracks, refugees were gathered in parks and boarded onto buses. They were all taken to camps. The next morning, bulldozers razed the barracks to the ground, together with personal belongings the residents had not managed to collect. This event was particularly shocking for many of the people I spoke to for this research. The above account was reconstituted on the basis of interviews, and it clearly appeared that this episode marked an important shift and left a strong impression on refugees and their supporters.

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8 | Several participants confirmed the violence. Video footage of these incidents can also be seen (see Goddard 2017).

Indeed, this encampment was a key step in the state-led structuration of the refugee aid field and in the integration of the country into an EU-led regime of controlling borders and mobilities. Publicly displayed grassroots assistance—and the friendships and socialities that come from these encounters—became *de facto* impossible in Belgrade. In order to remain operative, aid groups had to register as official NGOs and gain access to camps through the Serbian state. In other words, the possibility to provide support and care to refugees became severely conditional on approval from the state. Informal groups and registered organisations with oppositional politics effectively saw their possibility to provide aid invalidated. A participant explained:

> »Just before destroying the barracks, the Commissariat had called a meeting... They wanted to tell us how it would work from now, and what we could do as NGOs in their new system... they didn't tell us the truth of how they would evacuate the barracks. But they were somewhat being nice, you know, they were kind of saying that if we help them with the situation, then we can keep working with the refugees... but in the camps.« (interview with Srdjan, 25.04.2018)

In other words, Serbian and local authorities institutionalised refugee assistance into a formalised field within which it concentrated the authority to select who could act and under which conditions. In order to assure the obedience of refugee support groups in Belgrade, they endowed themselves with a key leverage which could be mobilised to discipline or exclude groups that refuse to abide by the new rules: the power to decide who could gain access to the camps where refugees now resided.

This move had ideological implications: it was now expected that »civil society« would add its voice to that of the state in claiming that the only appropriate way to help refugees was through the state-controlled and EU-funded system. Institutionalised assistance became the only legitimate form of support. By forcing groups and individuals that had previously operated in independent, grassroots ways to become NGOs in order to remain operative, and by tying these NGOs to the securitised camp approach, the Serbian state established a disciplinary system within which actors were all encouraged to reproduce such forms of governance. It must also be noted that the management of this official aid field involves other organisations, perhaps most prominently the UNHCR who plays a key role in coordinating the activities and funding of various groups (including domestic institutionalised NGOs, governmental units such as CRMRS and ministries, and international NGOs) and officially acts in support of Serbian authorities.

DISCIPLINING SOLIDARITY

The establishment of an aid system strictly linked to state-run, EU-funded camps brought about further control both over refugees and over those non-state actors who had decided to continue their aid activities by registering and seeking approval from the government. Of course, this is not to say that there were no other reasons why people acting voluntarily in support of refugees in urban spaces became less mobilised over time. Among other things, one must take material issues preventing people from continuing to engage in unpaid, time-consuming activities into account, together with experiences of exhaustion. As explained above, solidarity actors faced various issues including financial precarity or a division of their time between political work and full-time employment that also contributed to activist fatigue. The very fact of being perceived as an activist was also a source of social difficulties. When I asked Mario what he thought were the biggest issues facing activists, his reply was multi-layered and shed light on the difficulty people mobilising against nationalist sentiments and the authorities could face in Serbia. He told me:

> »The Serbian society is still predominantly nationalistic and, as you know, the current government are the same people who were responsible for wars and crimes in the 1990s: that means that political activists can feel like complete outsiders to the dominant politics in Serbia... Actually, by fighting against nationalism, including by helping refugees in the barracks, we are just making our life harder in every sense—for our social experience as well as for ever finding a job.« (interview with Mario, 03.10.2018)

Mario went on to explain that this had a double effect: while it means greater difficulty and precarity for activists by enhancing feelings of social alienation and chances of fatigue, it also tightens links and care relationships within the activist community and can, thus, increase determination and feelings of mutual responsibility and resilience. He added:

> »Sometimes we need to back off, because we are exhausted, because of the whole context and the feeling it is us ›against the whole world‹, but also in a more practical sense because the burden on our backs is way too big, as for example in the barracks where there were hundreds of people in need, and resources were scarce. But this sense of catastrophe every day also forces you to continue. That's when it is important to be part of a group, to take some days off sometimes and have others to turn to and ask for support.« (ibid.)

In this context, the fact that some supporters of refugees decided to accept paid positions within the newly established humanitarian field can be seen as a response to the difficulty faced by unpaid volunteers and activists at social, physical, and financial levels. It may indeed have been perceived as a way to remain active in a more sustainable fashion and to keep engaging with people on the move while securing survival. In spite of these considerations, some of the activists who did not take this decision expressed their disagreement with this strategy. For instance, Fidel told me that:

> »In my understanding there are two kinds of people: those seeking job opportunities and who came here because they saw a chance of establishing themselves in the NGO sector, if possible in an international NGO, and in that way to gain profit. I am not saying they are always lacking ideology but even if they have it, they can put it behind if they have to. They are strictly focusing on doing their jobs and they don't care even if it contradicts their views.« (interview with Fidel, 23.04.2018)

As previously noted, this indicates the emergence of a strong divide within the loose network of volunteers and activists who had mobilised over 2015 and early 2016 to support refugees in the city. While it is likely that people's intentions for making diverging decisions were more diverse and complex than pictured in Fidel's account, his description still points to the serious compromises with their previous mode of engaging that had to be agreed on by people who started working in the official humanitarian field. A participant employed in a group that started in 2015 as an independent volunteer network and registered as an NGO in 2016 explained the radical change his organisation experienced:

> »For two years, their [his organisation, before he joined] entire work was taking place in Belgrade, first in the parks and then in the barracks… In a few days, it completely changed as these people we were helping were taken far away from Belgrade. We had access to the camps through an agreement with the Commissariat, so we started doing some activities there and that was all we could do.« (interview with Simon, 09.05.2018)

The literature on NGO-isation and professionalisation has documented their disciplinary effects and association with neoliberal modes of governance in a range of contexts (Omvedt 1994; Hearn 1998; Alvarez 1999; Hanafi/Tabar 2002; Jad 2004; Stubbs 2006). Arundhati Roy (2014) has equated NGO-isation, by which she means

the phenomenon through which the field of social change becomes characterised by a proliferation of funded, registered NGOs, with a denaturation of resistance and, in fact, politics. As neoliberalising states withdraw from providing public services in a range of areas, NGOs appear to »fill in the gaps« in ways that are limited or unaccountable to the people served through these services and biased by a dependency on donors. The NGO-isation of politics, she insists, turns rights into aid and political actors into recipients and victims. The effect on politics is substantial, as »NGOs [. . .] present their work in a shallow framework, more or less shorn of a political or historical context« in a process that »turns confrontation into negotiation [. . .] [and] de-politicizes resistance« (ibid.). These depoliticising dynamics are exacerbated for refugees who are turned into aid recipients within a camp-based system of humanitarian aid administration. As powerfully illustrated by critical scholars and activists, such modes of intervention based on charity and humanitarianism also have depoliticising and disciplining effects (Fassin 2011; Malkki 1996; 2015; Ticktin 2011).

In the regional context, Elissa Helms (2013) also shows how injunctions to become recognisable to the NGO-centric vision of donors transformed women's movements in Bosnia and at times weakened powerful practices of community activism rooted in the country's socialist past. Prescriptive demands from—Western—donors to conform to certain ideas of what »civic engagement« or »civil society« should look like are premised on essentialising visions of the region as suffering from a democracy deficit or civic underdevelopment often betraying a profound lack of understanding of local modalities of engagement and activism (Helms 2013). Here, funding again operates as a mechanism of power which successfully disciplines groups into modifying their behaviour in order to survive.

In the Serbian situation, »becoming an NGO« was also a process marked by the injunction to perform a sense of professionalism (Sapoch 2018; Pendaki forthcoming offers strong parallels in the Greek context). When I asked participants to reflect on what would guarantee access to camps and funding, they pointed to the need to present their organisation in a way that seemed in line with particular representations of civil society and professional aid providers. Spontaneous forms of relating with refugees, for instance, became increasingly discouraged within this model where the appearance of professionalism seemed connected to the assertion of a distance between the NGO and its »beneficiaries«. One participant explained:

> »[My organisation] started professionalising before the eviction [of the barracks], towards the end of 2016. This shift changed our way to work in the first place. But after the eviction, when we started working more in camps, then I can really say it changed a lot. . . in the way I speak

with, work with, even I think ›deal‹ with the refugees. The context of the camp, I mean the setting, is different and it doesn't feel the same as if we are sitting on a bench in a park, even if the situation is hard, it is more like speaking to a neighbour, for instance. But just also now we are not like doing this as volunteers, we are staff, and we need to act in the way of staff.« (interview with Srdjan, 25.04.2018)

Unlike the solidarity interactions that Srdjan was previously engaged in, the relations he develops with refugees in camps as an employee of an official NGO that has secured camp access through the Serbian state and funding through international aid agencies are inherently »hierarchical, non-reciprocal, non-dialogical and mediatised« (Pendaki forthcoming for Greece). They are in this sense thoroughly depoliticised.

Moreover, as NGOs, these groups also had to engage in competition over access to funding. This competition had, at first, an effect on the relation between organisations. An employee for a recently registered NGO that started as a network of volunteers providing assistance in Belgrade's public spaces remarked:

»Sometimes we are really walking on eggs... If other groups perceive that you are trying to infringe on their territory, they can become very nasty... In 2016 ... we had a good working relationship with almost all the other groups; we could share information and resources like storage spaces and stuff like that... Well now, we don't see it like we need each other, rather, we see each other as enemies or like competitors ... .« (interview with Simon, 09.05.2018)

As put by Srdjan, »helping refugees is only part of the job now... we still do that but also it is about making your space in the market« (interview with Srdjan, 25.04.2018). This was often referred to as an inevitable consequence of neoliberal capitalist modes of functioning which produce their own forms of control and governmentality:

»The irony is that we now have interest in the system because it has become our jobs, our source of income... So we started by asking for government's action like for them to take responsibility for the people, and they didn't because they don't take care of the people as we are now in the capitalist system... and then... we became one of the organisations which need things to be like this to survive... So we started all this to change things and now we need the *status quo*.« (interview with Simon, 09.05.2018)

In turn, survival within the *status quo* also influences the way organisations speak and think of their work and report on their activities. Some participants complained that

other organisations inflated their activity reports, to »look as if they do more than the truth« and, thus, secure more funding or satisfy their donors (interview with Danika, 30.04.2018). Some participants explained that the pressure to find a particular organisational »niche«, a service area within which the organisation could present itself as competent and attractive to donors, became more important than the work done with refugees. This point was regularly repeated in relation to the criteria of vulnerability that often underpins calls for projects from large donors and institutions. A researcher who has also worked with numerous INGOs and local groups noticed:

> »Donors only focus on pre-defined vulnerable groups, mostly women and children. As a consequence, all NGOs who want to access funding have to create projects addressing the situation of women and children primarily. And so there is nothing for young men, including unaccompanied minors in their late teens. If you constantly ignore a group on the basis that it doesn't fit your vulnerability criteria, then you actually produce the most vulnerable group of all!« (Discussion with Jelena, 25.08.2018)

All in all, with the institutionalisation of the refugee aid field, NGOs find themselves subjected to particular forms of governmentality whereby they develop an interest in projecting and performing their alignment with official discourses and practices. In turn, they become themselves control elements of the Serbian and European border regimes.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

This process is underpinned by a particular political economy in which the EU plays a key role. Serbia has been in accession negotiations since 2014: as documented, accession negotiations have a strong regulatory effect on countries. Scholars have in fact noted that EU influence is at its strongest during the accession process (Malova 2011). At the most concrete level perhaps, the overall EU framework around migration, characterised by closed borders and attempts at externalising migration control through the use of third countries as border guards, is the key element explaining why refugees found themselves stranded in Serbia. To this extent, the structural effect of the EU on the migration situation in Serbia cannot be overstated (Milan/Pirro 2018). Moreover, the EU has been the main donor to ›migration management‹ in Serbia. Between 2015 and 2018, the EU has officially disbursed over 100 million euros for this purpose. According to the European Commission, this money has been allocated

»to ensure the accommodation of migrants and refugees in accommodation centers; to support the delivery of health and other primary services to refugees, migrants and host communities; and to reinforce its border control capabilities« (EC Press Release 2017). A large part of these funds was disbursed through the state and the UNHCR, thus further reinforcing NGOs' dependency on those actors.

In other words, the process under examination in this paper, and which refugees and their supporters brutally encountered, is that of (further) integration of Serbia into the EU border control regime. To that effect, the EU operates both through its political capacity (reinforced by the accession process) and through its economic position as the main donor in the field. In turn, the field represents the EU's interest in the establishment of a functional asylum system and the reinforcement of border controls in Serbia. Serbian authorities have shown firm commitment to align their migration policy to the EU's regulations and approach, a position which is instrumental to their accession negotiations.

Moreover, the authorities' interest in aligning themselves with EU norms also lies in the large amounts of funds they have received and which have been largely unaccounted for. According to participants, vast amounts have not been spent correctly: prices for service provision, such as food in the camps, have been inflated and subcontracted to private companies with links to the government. A participant told me: »how comes that when it was Hot Food Idomeni, providing a hot meal cost less than one euro, and when it is through the government, it comes up to four euros per person?« (interview with Nino, 20.04.2018). Nino went on to add:

> »[…] they are happy that Serbia has accepted to control their borders for them. When you ask the EU Delegation: ›where is all the money; where did it go?‹, then they say: ›oh the only problem with Serbia is the reporting is not consistent yet, we are working on it‹. That means everyone is happy to turn a blind eye as long as migrants are kept outside Europe.« (ibid.)

There is thus a convergence of interest between the EU and the Serbian government about accommodating and, in fact, stranding people in state-run camps. For the EU, this means the eradication of the kind of street-level assistance that is associated with the facilitation of onward journeys—thus, making it more difficult for people to travel westward and enter the Union. For Serbia, this means a lucrative source of funds with little financial and ideological associated cost: none of the refugee assistance activities have been funded by the national budget and refugees are kept in camps isolated from the rest of society. Hence, the political economy of migrant governance in Serbia is such that there is an incentive for the authorities to keep people stranded,

socially isolated, and in limbo situations, which allows them both to comply by EU rules and to receive significant amounts of funds whilst not engaging in meaningful activities to make refugees' lives liveable in the country.

However, it has by now become apparent that stranding people in camps could considerably decelerate journeys yet not necessarily suspend them in the long run. For instance, as soon as a new route opened up via Bosnia, camps in Serbia started emptying as many people attempted to restart their journeys. According to an MSF representative, as a result, the EU has started questioning whether the large-scale encampment strategy deployed in Serbia was the most appropriate one for the purpose of keeping people away from its territory. Since 2015, only 37 people have received a protection status in Serbia. When I interviewed CRMRS representatives, they boasted of the comprehensive ›integration‹ program the country was developing. Yet, when I asked them how many people had benefited (in the way of accessing language classes, support in seeking work, and other activities deemed as promoting integration) from this program, the response was 12 (interview with CRMRS officers, 22.05.2018). In recent months, the EU has therefore been actively pushing for Serbia to be more proactive when it comes to ›migrant integration‹.

CONCLUSION

The institutionalisation of refugee support has produced a model of governance whereby actors in the field have been compelled to either professionalise or quit their activities on a meaningful scale. This mode of governmentality has had differentiated effects on different groups, depending on their ambitions, politics, relation to the state, and their sources of funding. Overall however, the field of refugee support has been restricted in ways that neutralise and marginalise grassroots, critical, and potentially subversive, actors. As a consequence, the prescribed identity for refugee aid groups has become a purely humanitarian, non-political one. In order to survive, they develop an interest in projecting and performing their alignment with official discourses and practices. In turn, they become key elements of the Serbian (and European) border control regime that brings together racialised border controls and securitised forms of humanitarian assistance.

Some of the participants working for NGOs seemed to embrace the apolitical identity of their organisation, yet more expressed their frustration with this assigned position. They found themselves in the vexed situation of having to enact behaviours they did not necessarily agree with on an individual level. Some of the people I interviewed mentioned that taking up paid employment in an NGO to work with refugees

was about »keeping an eye on what happens inside« and »seeing if there is room for change from within«, but ultimately most of those who made this choice hoping there would be a margin of manoeuvre expressed their disillusion and explained how this hope was vexed. As for activists who refused to be involved in state-led assistance, some were able to continue small-scale activities, but these have been made difficult and fragmented. Mario, for instance, continues to support a refugee family now living in one of the reception centres by arranging weekly visits to Belgrade for them and spending time with family members, mainly the children. Yet this has become disconnected from larger political activities or advocacy on behalf of refugees in Serbia as it operates on an individual basis.

What may we learn from the rise and fall of migration solidarity in Belgrade? This paper would like to close with a call for the recognition of potential common grounds for struggles between refugees and other social groups. Indeed, until people were transferred to the camps, the stage where much of the migration solidarity work unfolded was right in the centre of the city, close to other spaces of urban violence and struggle. While the possibility of a convergence between various urban struggles concerned with the right to presence in the city was not fully articulated in Belgrade, the prominence of a narrative that denounced the way in which neoliberal urban development projects such as the Waterfront affected the poorest in the city—migrants and locals alike—could have been pushed further in order to bring together seemingly separated struggles.

Indeed, while this paper focused on specific historical events and situated actors, thinking migration solidarity in Belgrade in relation to different fields and spaces of struggles encourages us to emphasise their possible connections. This effort to identify intersections and commonalities in turn opens up a space for more imaginative and interventionist propositions. As elsewhere, and without overlooking the specificities of the local context or the particular relationship between civic groups and the state in Serbia, it seems that the future of solidarity and the hope for its meaningful intervention on the political scene can be located precisely at the intersection of apparently separated struggles which need to converge in order for a more systematic critique and resistance to emerge.

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Patricia Artimova is a PhD student at the University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. In her research she analyzes migration movements and the changing perception of migration in the Balkans, mainly in Serbia. Since 2015, she is an active member of volunteer initiatives operating in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Karolína Augustová is a PhD candidate in Sociology and International Relations at Aston University, researching the displaced people's everyday experiences of border violence along South-Eastern Europe. She is interested in how diverse forms of violence (direct/structural/cultural) affect everyday social processes along borders as well as how the role of intersectionality (masculinity with other locations) plays in violence. In her research, she uses activist ethnography; volunteering in informal refugee camps.

Selma Banich is a Zagreb-based artist, social activist, and community organizer. Her artistic and social practice is based on processual, research, and activist work and is politically inspired by anarchism and feminism.

Barbara Beznec graduated in Political Science of International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University in Ljubljana, where she later earned her PhD on the subject of European Citizenship. She is a researcher of migration at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts.

Emina Bužinkić is a political activist examining the state and police violence against migrants and refugees, particularly concerning issues of border control and violence. Her work extends to understanding the inscriptions of border regimes in the field of schooling by researching the experiences of refugee and migrant students. She is currently obtaining her PhD in critical studies in education and human rights at the University of Minnesota in the United States. She is linked to the Centre for Peace Studies (*Centar za mirovne studije*), the Welcome! Initiative (*Inicijativa Dobrodošli!*), and the Taste of Home (*Okus doma*) in Croatia. Recently she has been

working with the *Transbalkan Solidarity* and *Pirate Care Syllabus Writing Collective*.

Céline Cantat is a postdoctoral fellow at Sciences Po with H2020 project MAGYC-Migration Governance and Asylum Crises. Previously, Céline was a Marie-Curie Fellow at CEU, Budapest, studying migration solidarity groups along the Balkan route. She holds a PhD in Refugee Studies from the University of East London and is co-editor of *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe* (Palgrave, 2018) and *Challenging the Political Across Borders: Migrants' and Solidarity Struggle* (CPS Book Series, 2019).

Andrea Contenta is an independent researcher and a humanitarian worker. After spending some years between Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan focusing on violence, conflicts and displacement, he decided to move to Belgrade following the Balkan corridor. Today he lives and works in Athens.

Marijana Hameršak is a senior research associate at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb. Her main areas of research and teaching are migration, children's literature and book history. She is the author of the books *Pričalice* (*Taletellers*, 2011) and *Uvod u dječju književnost* (*Introduction to the Children's Literature*, with Dubravka Zima, 2015), and she has edited several edited collections, with the most recent one, being *Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor* (with Emina Bužinkić, 2018).

Sabine Hess is professor at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology, University of Göttingen, since 2011. Her main areas of research and teaching are migration and border regime studies, anthropology of policy with a focus on EU integration and processes of Europeanisation. She is a founding member of the online journal *movements* and of *kritnet* (Network for Critical Border and Migration Studies).

Azra Hromadžić is Associate Professor and O'Hanley Faculty Scholar in the Department of Anthropology at Syracuse University. She is the author of *Citizens of an Empty Nation: Youth and State-making in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina* (translated into Serbian *Samo Bosne nema: mladi i građenje države u posleratnoj Bosni i Hercegovini*). She also co-edited a volume (with Monika Palmberger), titled *Care Across Distance: Ethnographic Explorations of Aging and Migration*. She is currently working on a new book that investigates riverine citizenship in northwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Civil initiative **Info Kolpa** started in the spring of 2018 as a response to illegal actions of Slovene police, which started systematically denying people the right to seek asylum in Slovenia and pushing people back to Croatia. In the autumn of 2018, we established an informal telephone number for assistance to people wishing to seek asylum in Slovenia. The help we provided proved unsuccessful but with operating the number, we gained a lot of information on practice of push-backs on Slovene-Croatian border, which we presented to Slovene and international public.

Teodora Jovanović is as a research assistant at the Institute of Ethnography of SASA and a doctoral student of ethnology and anthropology at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy. For her doctoral thesis, she conducted an ethnographic fieldwork in reception centers for asylum seekers in Serbia. Previously, she worked in »Miksal-ište« refugee aid center in Belgrade, and she was involved in »Refugees in Towns« project at Tufts University, Boston, as a local case study researcher.

Andrej Kurnik is assistant professor at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. He is a member of editorial board of Časopis za kritiko znanosti (Journal for Critique of Sciences).

Romana Pozniak is a PhD candidate with working experience in the humanitarian sector and an interest in the area of humanitarianism, biopolitics, refugee studies, and anthropology of labor. Her dissertation explores transformations, practices, and narratives of humanitarian work with migrants/refugees/asylum seekers in post-transitional Croatia. She works at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb.

The **Push-Back Map Collective** is a transnational group of people that come from different fields of radical politics like feminism, anti-capitalism, and anti-racist struggles. Its members are active in documenting and counteracting push-backs and violence at the internal and external(ised) borders of the EU. One main goal of the mapping project is to provide a platform for transnational, non-hierarchical, radical grassroots interventions and exchange.

Robert Rydzewski is a PhD candidate at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. Formerly, he held a scholarship at the Central European University in Budapest and was a Doctoral Fellow Researcher at the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at University of Alberta in Edmonton in Canada. His scientific interests are migration, civil society, transformations of post-Yugoslav cities. Currently, he is completing his PhD dissertation about the migrant movement in the Serbian part of the Balkan route.

Jack Sapoch is an activist affiliated with the NGO No Name Kitchen, where he co-ordinates the collection of push-back testimonies. In this capacity, he works in the wider Border Violence Monitoring Network—a joint-project organized by independent NGOs—to draw attention to the issue of border violence in the Western Balkans. He received his undergraduate degree from Bates College (USA) where he researched the institutional influences affecting refugee assistance in the ›barracks‹ of Belgrade in 2017.

Zita Seichter, **Miriam Neßler** and **Paul Knopf** met each other at Bauhaus-University Weimar in 2017. Today, they are studying Art and Architecture, Urban Studies as well as Human Geography and Regional Development in Weimar, Berlin and Eberswalde. Besides being interested in border regime practices in Belgrade and beyond, they are involved in activist and artistic contexts, researching and teaching on Solidarity Cities, the Right to the City, transformation strategies from a decolonizing perspective as well as art and architecture in the context of the Anthropocene. Related publication: Eckardt, Frank / Neßler, Miriam / Seichter, Zita (Hg.) (2019): Weit weg und unbeachtet. Stadt und Flüchtende in Belgrad seit Schließung der Balkanroute.

Marc Speer holds a degree in Sociology and is currently finalizing his PhD thesis on the *Humanitarian Border Regime* at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology at the University of Göttingen, Germany. In addition he works for the research association bordermonitoring.eu, focusing in particular on the European border regime in South-Eastern Europe.

Marta Stojić Mitrović is an ethnologist and anthropologist working at the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade. In her research, she focuses on discourses and practices related to the topics of migration, citizenship, human rights and discrimination in Serbian, regional, and the EU context.