FRAGMENTS OF A TRANSITION TO NOTHING

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON POST-SOCIALISM IN SERBIA

Julia Mitić

Supervisor: Madina Tlostanova Gender Studies, LiU

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Abstract
This thesis represents an attempt to challenge power hierarchies infusing white Western European academic and political fields. It constitutes a project, built on decolonial critique of privileges of research, that aims at attending to local and marginalised feminist perspectives in order to reach a deeper understanding for a complex and ambivalent Serbian post-socialist reality. A critical scrutiny of previous research conducted within the field of Comparative Politics and post-socialist feminist critique of academic knowledge, has led to the identification of problematic results of unequal distributions of power within politics and the academia. Moreover, through a historical overview of the geopolitical context and the feminist legacy of the region, the importance of contextualisation and the necessity of an epistemological and ontological shift within knowledge production has further been emphasised. Lastly, with a combining approach of qualitative interviews and autoethnography, lived experiences of post-socialism and its intersections with feminism have been sought and analysed. By highlighting women’s activism in democratisation processes and the severe socio-political problems facing contemporary Serbia, these experiences problematize the hegemonic Western projections of a post-socialist transition as an elite project towards ‘progress’ and Europeanisation.

Keywords: Post-socialism, feminist activism, transition, democratisation, decoloniality, bodypolitics and geopolitics of knowledge.
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1. Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Eastern communist bloc signified the end of the cold war and embarked upon drastic changes in the geopolitical landscape of the European continent. Finally, the archenemy of capitalism was defeated and the destiny of Central and Eastern Europe was instantaneously rewritten: carved into stone. Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History* (1992), captures the zeitgeist of this period very well. All the former socialist states injected a neo-liberal shock therapy and were transformed into post-socialist spaces in transition towards a fully-fledged market economy (Balunović 2013). Moreover, this period of transition has broadly been taken for granted as a process of Europeanisation and democratisation and as the only way ‘forward’ from a socialist ‘backwardness’ (Koobak & Marling 2014). Nonetheless, despite the radical changes, the old meta-geography, that is the conceptual map according to which our knowledge about the world is constructed, remained intact (Suchland 2010). As a consequence, a global power imbalance has been pertained between the former first and second worlds.

One of the visible signs of the cold-war world meta-geography is the general assumption within academic knowledge production that the former second world is supposed to ‘catch up’ with the first world (Koobak 2013). Moreover, within comparative studies Central and Eastern Europe are continuously measured according to a Western yardstick (Silova, Millei & Piattoeva 2017). These ideas are particularly evident in the political discourse on transitions where the endpoint of the post-socialist transition is defined as a transformation into or at least as a mimicking of the Western European ideal.

The waves of democratisation that have been swiping over Europe have attracted a lot of attention from scholars within the field of Political Science, yet they have failed to recognise the roles of women in these changes and the implications for gender relations that these processes have entailed (Waylen 1994). Instead, studies have mainly focused on the political elites managing and implementing democratic and neoliberal policies (Linde & Ekman 2006).

Knowledge production and politics are tightly connected (Decoloniality Europe 2013) and thus in an effort to contest global patterns of inequality between different geopolitical regions, one must also turn to a critical investigation of the knowledge sustaining them. Who defines the ontology of the political? Whose perspective on the political is validated and what
consequences follow from it? Those are the type of questions that I aim to deal with in this thesis. Apart from a mere critique of the current state of affairs within the politics of knowledge production it is also my endeavour to formulate an alternative narrative of the Serbian post-socialist transition. This narrative will, in contrast to Western mainstream approaches, be grounded in the lived experiences of women living in the middle of this post-socialist reality: women who have been active in the feminist movement during the period of economic and political transition.

Many feminist scholars originating from various post-socialist regions have recognised this urge to formulate new knowledge from the margins and are now raising their voices against the colonial structures of the white Western hegemony of academic knowledge production. These critical voices have represented a great source of inspiration during the conduction of this thesis. Their passionate energy has shaped my own critical perspective and increased my consciousness about the consequences of an unequal distribution of power among knowing subjects. Ultimately, conflated with the insights acquired from decolonial theoretical work and my critical reading of mainstream political science theories, the post-socialist feminist critique made me arrive at the compilation of my research questions.

The writing of this thesis transformed into a journey home for me. I travelled to Belgrade, to meet women that have been part of the feminist movement during socialist times and during the period of transition, after the breakdown of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. I was traveling with the hope that they could help me find the ingredients of a Serbian post-socialist soup that is obstinately threatening to boil over with discontent, misery and desperation. As feminists, they have always been fighting the unequal distribution of power in society and the violence and other mechanisms with which these inequalities have been maintained. Now I am seeking to discover the ways in which their struggles and their lives are intertwined with the political, economic and social spheres of the Serbian post-socialist society.

1.1 Aims and Research Questions
The overall aim of the thesis is twofold. Firstly, I want to challenge the politics of knowledge production by creating an opportunity for otherwise neglected perspectives to make a contribution to empirical as well as theoretical feminist research. Furthermore, I want to work towards a feminist epistemological revolution within the study of Comparative Politics by
investigating the significant intersections of local experiences and global political and economic processes. Secondly, I wish to reach an understanding for the relation between post-socialism and other processes of change such as those concerning gender issues. More particularly, the thesis will be focused on the Serbian context and feminist activists from the region will be asked to speak about their lived experiences of the post-socialist transition and to describe the reciprocal relation between their specific locality and their feminist resistance. Therefore, the questions I will undertake are:

- What are the lived experiences of Serbian post-socialism among feminists in Serbia and how does their particular geopolitical and geohistorical location influence their feminist resistance?
- How could their experience and knowledge contribute to creative theoretical and political feminist changes in terms of challenging global power relations in politics and the academia?

1.2 Theories and Concepts

There is a particular set of theoretical assumptions and concepts that have served as the basis for the creation of this thesis. I will in this section try to define those foundational ideas and elucidate how they have informed different choices along the research process such as the formation of purpose and research questions and the selection of methodological directions.

1.2.1 Thinking from the Border

It could be said that the process of writing this thesis has been a manifestation of border thinking from the very beginning. As it grew out from a recognition of colonial difference, that is the difference that through dominant discourses have been assigned to ‘others’ and that defines them as inferior in relation to the centres of hegemonic knowledge production (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2006). Moreover, this border thinking evolved in my formulation of a power critical response to those patterns of domination within the politics of knowledge production.

My power/knowledge critical approach, inspired by the works of decolonial scholars, has been integrated throughout the research process as a metatheoretical foundation upon which the thesis has been built. Having informed every step I have taken along the way and underpinning my aim for social and political change, decolonial strategies have offered me a way of
understanding the world that is rooted in spatiality and the body. The introduction of the terms *geopolitics* and *bodypolitics* of knowledge into my understanding of the world and as such also into my approach to knowledge production has provided me with the tools necessary to make an ontological and epistemological shift from the main-stream Western paradigms. By accentuating *geopolitics* and *bodypolitics* of knowledge I depart from the assumption that the knowing subject perceives the world through embodied experiences that are shaped by a particular location and its history (Tlostanova 2015). This philosophical point of departure has been the base for my critique against the conventional way of studying the post-socialist transitions in Eastern Europe, which, as I will illuminate in an upcoming chapter, reproduces a power imbalance between Western and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the kind of critical analysis I am engaging in is going beyond the aim of exposing power inequalities to also include the objective of criticising those power relations, raising consciousness about them and engendering change by empowering the less powerful (Patton 2002).

1.2.2 Privileges of Research

In my attempt to turn this thesis into a project that will challenge global patterns of power imbalances and bring about feminist change I have chosen to devote a lot of attention to a critique of knowledge production. Due to the specific relationship between knowledge and power (Decoloniality Europe 2013), this has been a crucial course of action, in order to critically assess the political changes in post-socialist Serbia. My understanding of the political is that it is a dimension of human life that is always intersecting with economic, cultural, ideological, ecological and social spheres.

Taking inspiration from decolonial thought I recognise three particular privileges of academic research that are directly influencing and sustaining white politics (Decoloniality Europe 2013). Firstly, the *teleological privilege* of research is the mechanism through which academic knowledge production exercises power in the political realm by defining what is a possible, realizable and realistic future (Decoloniality Europe 2013). Secondly, the *privilege of epistemic perspective* refers to the way the hegemonic standpoint of white western scholars is premiered while perspectives that are different, are treated as less valid and never receive the status of ‘theoretical’ knowledge. The privilege of the epistemic perspective is enacted by researchers who for instance, only evoke colonial and Eurocentric canons in their knowledge production. Thirdly, the last privilege, which is inextricably entangled with the epistemic one,
is the *privilege of ontology*. This privilege designates the power over ontology in terms of the right to define what exists and what does not (Decoloniality Europe 2013).

By examining the experiences of post-socialism and the intersections of feminist activism and post-socialist processes of change from a feminist perspective, I hope to be able to contribute to a contestation of the three privileges of Western academic research. Firstly, it is my aim to challenge the ontological privilege by presenting a different version of the post-socialist transition than the mainstream one. Moreover, by highlighting a positive force from the region, as I will argue that the feminist movement is, it is my ambition to oppose the equation of Balkan or Eastern Europe with violence and backwardness (Koobak & Marling 2014; Todorova 2009). Secondly, I want to challenge the privilege of epistemic perspective by attending to knowledge that is created from the marginalised perspectives of Serbian feminists. And thirdly, it is my endeavour to use the collected material in this thesis to challenge the teleological privilege by criticising the outcomes of what has been considered the only viable option in the post-socialist transition and by discussing alternative versions of the future.

Other concepts and theories transpired at various stages in the thesis and have been integrated in the different chapters as tools that have helped me emphasise or criticise certain aspects in the studied material. As they appear throughout the text I will aim at providing clear explanations of the theoretical concepts I use as well as of the purpose of using them.

### 2. Methods

The methodological journey of this essay has been diversified and vivid. Different moments in the research process have required their own distinct method and I have thus been confronted with many choices that I will try to make myself accountable for in this chapter. The departure of the journey was somewhere in my writing, and I used it as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000) in order to come to terms with a research topic. Once the topic was settled, I proceeded with reading. A qualitative textual analysis was the method I utilized to reach a thorough understanding of the field and to obtain substance for a report on previous research. Alongside the background research I began to prepare myself for the interviews I intended to conduct with Serbian feminist activists. I opted for the method of qualitative interviewing and booked a flight
to Belgrade. In a methodological contemplation about how to reach and word the knowledge that was dwelling inside of me and that was developing through the meetings with my interviewees I arrived at an encounter with autoethnography. Through the course of this chapter, I will try to sketch out the map of all these movements.

2.1 Writing as a Method of Inquiry

Inspired by the idea of using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000) I have been writing consistently since the beginning of the research process, even though I often had the feeling of being unsure of what I actually was writing about. Conceptualising writing as a way of knowing (Richardson 2000:923) it has helped me process all the vibrant emotions, knowledge and memories connected to my field of study that I have inside me. After analysing my writing, I found traces of reflections concerning transitional processes, the global market economy, different ideologies – in other words, phenomena that are traditionally studied within the field of political science. Given my training in this particular discipline it is clear that my positioning in relation to my research topic is highly influenced by my academic background. Moreover, as a person belonging to the Yugoslav diaspora in Sweden, I became aware of the significance of place and space at a very early age. This is probably the reason why my writings in many aspects were oriented towards the issue of spatiality. Throughout the research process, I found myself in rather ambivalent positions, unable to separate my memories from stories I have been told, unable to distinguish reality from imagination (if there ever is a clear distinction) The words I produced guided me through this colourful landscape.

2.2 Literature Survey

After having formulated an idea and specified my own entrance point and approach to a wider field of research on post-socialism, I performed a literature survey, in order to reach a more thorough understanding of the topic. Since I wanted to situate my research in a borderland between political science and feminist studies, I tried to mainly focus my survey around research on post-socialism that have been produced within these two fields. Moreover, I tried to merge the two disciplines by using the feminist dimension of my work as a tool for criticizing the ontological and epistemological presumptions that have been foundational in the study of transitions within political science. A snowballing sampling method was used in my search for previous research. More particularly, I began by analysing the course literature that we had used during my studies in comparative politics at the Department of Political Science at Linköping
University. In the exhaustive summaries of the academic field provided by Landman (2008) and Linde & Ekman (2006) I found further sources that have been important contributions within the studies of democratisation processes. In contrast, my sampling method for the feminist field followed a different pattern. I have conceptualised the feminist dimension of this thesis as a standpoint from which I am approaching the aim of my study to challenge the politics of knowledge production. Therefore, I have chosen to include sources from feminist research with a link to post-socialism that could help me reach this aim by being specifically concerned with critique of knowledge production.

My intention to seek the intersections of post-socialist changes and feminist activism led me further to the inevitable task to engage in a background research about the feminist heritage in the region of Yugoslavia and today’s Serbia. By mapping the historical paths of feminism in the region I hoped to be able to contextualise the present day feminist struggle. The sampling method I utilized for this particular stage in the research process could also be described as following a snowballing pattern. However, in contrast to my quest for previous research within the field of comparative politics and post-socialist feminism which was mainly conducted through literature, I found key sources about the history of the Yugoslav feminism through feminist scholars and activists from Serbia that have a great knowledge about what has been written so far. I would, moreover, want to emphasise how important this feminist networking have been throughout the research process. As it has been difficult to gain access to works written by and about Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav feminists, which most probably is an indicator of the global power inequalities within academic knowledge production, the help and solidarity that I have received from key informants from the region has been invaluable. Without it, this thesis would not have been possible to complete.

2.3 Qualitative interviews

The next step in my research process was to prepare qualitative semi-structured interviews that I would conduct with Serbian feminists that have been active in the region during the post-socialist transition. Due to their profound engagement with the civil society, their close ties to politics and their vast knowledge of women’s every day struggles, I decided to interview feminist activists. However, it is important to emphasise, that a distinguishing feature of the feminist movement in this particular geopolitical context is the close connection between theory
and activism (Lukić 2011). Thus, a rigid division between feminist theory and feminist activism does not completely apply within the context I am studying.

2.3.1 The Structure of the Interview

The relation between the researcher and the research objects and subjects is always infused by a power dimension. In accordance with the positivist research ideal, this power relation has traditionally been upheld by certain methodological rules and principles that are assumed to contribute to objective and scientific research results. However, what these rules attain additionally is an unequal power relation that enforce a subordination of a passive research subject and a researcher in control of the research process (Letherby 2004). As it is my intention to challenge this research tradition I am opting for a semi-structured interview in order to provide space for the interviewees to govern the course of our conversation. By semi-structured I am referring to what Patton (2002) explains as a strategy for combining different interview approaches. More particularly, this procedure included both the design of an interview guide and the inclusion of conversational or unstructured elements. While the interview guide included a number of specific topics that I wanted to investigate during the interview session I nonetheless left space for the interviewees to govern the conversation in whatever course they found appropriate. This strategy required me to be highly flexible and attentive during the interview event and many questions emerged through the direct context. One negative aspect of conversational interviews is that they often appear to be very time-consuming methods (Patton 2002). Due to the limited timeframe for the research process in general and the interview sessions in particular, and on request from my interviewees, I decided to prepare an interview guide for the meetings with my informants. Apart from facilitating a more effective utilization of time during the interview situation, the guide also provided me with a more systematic approach that can be fruitful when several interviews are conducted (Patton 2002). Consequently, as I do not live in Belgrade and I was only able to stay there for a short while during the research process, to demarcate in advance certain topics that I wished to investigate seemed as a necessary choice to me.

Through inspiration taken from decolonial strategies for research, I explained to the women I met that I wanted their stories to emerge in the interview situation without any limitations in terms of questions specified by the researcher in advance. In order to challenge the dichotomy between me as a researcher from a Western European university and the researched Eastern European subject, it was important for me to let the women I interviewed decide what topics
and questions are significant within the context I am investigating (Decoloniality Europe 2013). However, as mentioned earlier, on particular request by my interviewees, I created an introductory structure of my idea of the interviews in an interview guide that I sent to all my interviewees before our meetings. Although I did design a template for the interview it was of utter importance to me that the interviewees knew that they could, change, add and reformulate my idea of the basic structure of our conversation. Thus, when I sent them the interview guide I also informed them that I wanted them to feel free to send me suggestions for amendments before our meetings as well as to add new aspects that they would find important during the interview situation.

Rather than specific questions the interview guide included three topics related to three different time periods that I wanted us to discuss and that I found relevant for an exploration of their experience of post-socialism and their feminist activism. In order to meet the aims of my study and to create a feminist narrative of post-socialism rooted in the geopolitics and bodypolitics of knowledge of women engaged in feminist resistance, I explained to my interviewees that I was interested in three different periods. Moreover, I explicated that I was interested in investigating both their experiences of the internal context of the feminist movement and the external contexts it was working within during these periods. The three topics were the following: Yugoslav feminism, Post-socialist transition and transition through war, and Contemporary post-socialist Serbia. Judging by the nature of these topics, I realised in hindsight that I might have been more influenced by the traditional understanding of post-socialism as merely a time period of transition detached from spatiality than I have thought from the beginning, and this probably affected also the answers I received in some way. Yet I will argue that the stories I collected from the women I met in Serbia nonetheless provide a lot of material that challenges the inadequate equation of post-socialism with a specific time span. A more detailed exposition of this will be provided in the analysis chapter of the thesis where I report on the results from my interviews.

2.3.2 Choice of Informants and Sampling Method

Although I do have personal experience and previous knowledge about the specific geopolitical context I have been investigating in the thesis, I live and study in a northern European country and this is also the place where my own feminist activism mainly has been concentrated. Thus, in order to be able to contribute to knowledge about post-socialism and post-socialist feminism,
I concluded that I would need to enter the perspective of feminists active within a post-socialist context and that their experiences would be appropriate units of analysis.

Furthermore, my understanding of the concept post-socialism was another crucial condition for my choice of informants. As I have explained in a previous chapter I conceptualise the prefix ‘post’ in post-socialism as indicating an incomplete transgression from socialism. Consequently, the very term post-socialism becomes an indicator of a transition, yet, as I find it important to emphasise, a transition with an open end. Given my comprehension of post-socialism and my attempt to map out the path of this transition and its intersections with the trajectory of feminist activism I began my search for informants that could provide me with the knowledge needed to accomplish these tasks. I decided to search for feminists in Serbia that have experiences of life and feminist activism in Yugoslavia as well as in the period after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. Moreover, using my feminist contacts in Belgrade I found my interviewees through a snowball sampling method, an approach used to pursue key-informants that have profuse experience and knowledge about the topic of the research project (Patton 2002). All my interviewees gave me their permission to use their real names and some of them even insisted that I use their names in the thesis. I interpreted this as an opportunity for them to gain recognition for their important feminist work and as a way of letting them be the owners of their life-stories.

2.3.3 Focus on Lived Experiences
One of my research questions enunciates the mission to investigate the *lived experiences of Serbian post-socialism among Serbian feminists*. Moreover, I understand ‘lived experience’ as being composed of several different dimensions of human life. All of these dimensions require specific kinds of questions to be elicited. Keeping in mind the distinguishing features of each type of question necessitates an attentiveness by the researcher during the interview session to what questions are being asked and facilitates the formulation of appropriate answers by the interviewee (Patton 2002). However, I also believe that it often is very hard, and sometimes even impossible, to separate those different dimensions of experience from each other. Thus, keeping them in mind before, during and after the interviews was rather an attempt to ensure a wide conceptualisation of lived experience to transpire and not to deny the intersections of different dimensions of it. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided a lot of space for openness and flexibility and hence most of the questions arrived in the direct context and encounters with the women I interviewed. Nonetheless, inspired by six question options
described by Patton (2002), I approached the interview situation and the analysis with a conceptual matrix of different topics meant to illuminate deep and rich descriptions of lived experiences of post-socialism.

I. Behaviour and Actions

In order to attain knowledge about behaviours, actions and experiences I constructed questions that would elicit a response about what the interviewees do or have done. For example, the question if I was with you during one of your feminist activist events, what would I see, who would I see? was posed with the aim to get a description of what kind of activities Serbian activists engage/d in. However, I rarely had to ask such questions as the interviewees offered me an abundance of stories that included descriptions of behaviours and actions.

II. Opinion and Values

Another aspect of their lived experience that I was interested in is the one containing interpretative and cognitive processes such as values, opinions and judgements. Questions that were supposed to illuminate that dimension were formulated in a way that would provide answers of what my interviewees think of certain experiences.

III. Emotions

Furthermore, I asked questions and searched for elements in their answers that elucidated descriptions of affective responses to the experiences of feminist resistance and life in general in post-socialist Serbia. While some of the ‘emotion questions’ were asked as follow-up inquiries about something previously stated or described by the interviewee, all of them were asked about how it feels to be part of this society constituting present day Serbia.

IV. Knowledge

I made a distinction between what my respondents ‘know’ about certain topics and what they feel or think about them. I put ‘know’ under citation marks because I believe that also emotions, just like ‘facts’, should be counted as knowledge albeit perhaps a result of a different way of knowing. This dimension was employed to tap factual information that I found crucial in the quest for answers to my research questions. A question about
which kind of topics that the feminist movement have worked with during the
democratisation process and in present day Serbia is, for instance, was one of the
formulations that I would position under this section. During some of the interviews I
received a lot of valuable material, books and articles, written by my interviewees and
their colleagues. These sources provided me with a lot of information that I positioned
within the ‘knowledge dimension’ of lived experience.

V. Sensory Input
Although the sensory dimension is difficult to distinguish from the other topics, I
nevertheless also paid attention to how my interviewees make sense of their everyday
life in a post-socialist society through sensorial experiences.

VI. Background information
My main interest in background information was in the way my interviewees
themselves perceived and worded their backgrounds. I experienced that there was no
need to ask specific questions about their background during the interviews as all of the
interviewees weaved together their personal context and history with their narratives of
feminism and post socialism. Moreover, this particular dimension of background
information was crucial to me in order to contextualise the stories of my interviewees
in terms of their own geopolitics and bodypolitics of knowledge.

2.3.3.1 Dimensions of Time
Apart from keeping the different types of questions in mind while preparing as well as
conducting the interview, I likewise thought about the specific time frame according to which
all my questions were asked. By paying attention to the intersections of lived experience and
time, I could find interesting patterns of how the past, present and future are entangled in the
consciousness of my interviewees.

Already after the first interview I realized that my initial plan to structure the interviews in
accordance with three different time periods was not compatible with the way my interviewees
approached the research topic. It seemed impossible to talk about their experiences in
accordance with a linear timeline. Rather, their stories emerged as bricolages of memories,
emotions and strong opinions. Fragments from the past intertwined with the disappointments
of today and fears for the future, were uttered passionately in an attempt to squeeze a lifetime
into three hours. Moreover, during the relatively short amount of time we had together, I did not have to ask too many questions as their stories floated like the Danube itself. My own story was the river Sava and Belgrade was our confluence.

2.4 Autoethnography

Inspired by an advice of my supervisor, I decided to keep a fieldwork diary during my stay in Serbia in which I wrote down thoughts regarding the interview meetings as well as notes on my everyday experiences in Belgrade. Reading and analysing the diary afterwards I realised that my fieldwork did not come to include only interviews with Belgrade feminists but also deep personal reflections on my everyday experiences and interactions with the interviewees and other co-citizens of Belgrade.

Letherby (2004) argues that a research process rarely proceeds in the pace or in the exact track as it was planned to do from the beginning and my own production of my master thesis was a perfect example of that. Without having thought about it before my journey to Belgrade, I came to the conclusion that the thoughts that floated through the pages of my diary and in my head, were important parts in the description of the reality I was trying to portray, a reality that is also mine. I believe in the words of Muncey (2010), that conducting research cannot be separated from living and I was searching for an adequate method that would unravel my complex relationship to and passion for the topic I was writing about.

Thus, I opted for autoethnography, which is a method for articulating marginalised perspectives and experiences that hitherto have not been voiced and a method for examining ambiguous junctions between self and culture (Boylorn & Orbe 2014). By taking a self-reflexive stance towards my own positionality and my interpersonal and intercultural relations during the research process, I have engaged in a critical approach to the method of autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe 2014). I definitely, conceptualise intersectionality as being a crucial aspect of this self-reflexivity. I will argue that the intersectional analysis, containing an examination the intra-actions of various identity markers and power differentials (Lykke 2010) is an absolutely crucial foundation for avoiding unidimensional descriptions and understandings of complex phenomena. Moreover, precisely because I am so passionate about the topic I am writing about and because I am deeply integrated into the context I am investigating, I decided to use the method of autoethnography for collecting and analysing data from my fieldwork in Belgrade. Additionally, I have also used autoethnography as a method for reporting my research results.
In my diary, you can read about bus rides, news and tv-shows, long walks in the rain on the wide boulevards of Novi Beograd and the voice of a little Roma boy. These experiences, alongside the stories by Serbian feminists and my background research, became crucial pieces in my attempt to lay a puzzle of a complex Serbian post-socialist transition. I intend to integrate passages from my diaries into the analysis and compare my experiences with those of the Serbian feminists and to reflect on the meaning of my observations and its relation to my body politics of location.

As a method for conducting research and reporting research results, autoethnography grew out of the field of ethnography with a critique of the traditional ways in which academic knowledge production was conducted and reported. Instead of conforming to rigid and colonialist research methods, an autoethnographical approach to data collection and presentation endorses the utilization of personal experiences and memories of the writer. Moreover, the writer approaches the research topic self-reflexively and reports his or her findings through a storytelling practice with the aim to make a social, political or cultural phenomenon graspable (Hogan 2016). The autoethnographic part of my research became a method for channelling all the emotions, memories and thoughts that tingled inside of me every time I sat down to write. Moreover, it was not so much an option as it was a necessity for me in order to stay true to myself and to the reader.

Autoethnography is a method that connects the personal and the political (Boylorn & Orbe 2014) and as such I will argue that it is highly consistent with feminist research ideals. In fact, it is a strategy for inviting the audience emotionally, morally and intellectually into the context the writer is engaged with in the research process (Hogan 2016). This particular aspect of autoethnography appeals strongly to me because as a border person I know that every endeavour to translate one culture into another is a path full of pitfalls. Oftentimes the meaning is lost in translation. However, by focusing also on conveying an emotion maybe I can increase my chances of making myself and my research understandable.

As I have described earlier, my encounter with gender studies made me aware of the significance of the marks I have in my body caused by my spatio-temporal location, from Yugoslavia, from the war, from being a child of the bloody 1990s, from being torn apart between two very different places that I consider to be my home. I do believe that I have felt
what Mignolo (2000) calls *border gnosis*, that is, the knowledge extracted from a life lived in the border. I am certain that it has not only shaped me into the kind of woman I am today, but that it is absolutely crucial for the academic work I create. It is there, in all that ambivalence and pain, that most of my creativity dwells, and it is also there that I find inspiration for feminist change. Having lived in a borderland my whole life, I know that the border is a muddled place, a permeable membrane through which flows of energy pass incessantly in the shape of words, touches and emotions. The autoethnographic method requires me to question all those contradictions, feelings and motives I have inside of me in an introspective analysis of myself while also remaining observant of the world around me (Bochner & Ellis 2000). Moreover, the idea is to reach an understanding of others and a particular way of life by exploring my own personal lived experiences (Bochner & Ellis 2000). This was what I tried to achieve through my reflections on the everyday interactions and moments I had in Belgrade. Furthermore, by reporting these reflections in a narrative inspired style with rich description of the setting, I hoped to be able to create a portal through which the reader could feel and grasp the context being described (Patton 2002).

2.5 Analysis and Patterns of Interpretation

Scholarly texts traditionally tend to construct an idea of a separation between the analysis and the collection of data having them placed in different chapters. However, in such a naturalistic inquiry that I was conducting, an approach to research that in opposition to the positivist research paradigm is rather fluid and unfolding, data collection and analysis are in many ways interconnected (Patton 2002). I will argue that the autoethnographic dimension of my study, which is present in every chapter, challenges this dichotomous structure of academic writing further, as it was created through self-reflexive contemplations in all the different steps that constituted my data collection.

Faced with the vast material of transcribed interviews and texts that my interviewees provided me with, my research continued with a process of interpretation and analysis. Although the analytical process of course started much earlier than that, I was now facing the challenges of qualitative analysis, that is to concretise large quantities of data by sifting relevant passages from trivia and by finding meaningful patterns. Letting these patterns emerge from the collected data that I have studied openly in a discovery oriented way, without an on beforehand defined hypothesis, I followed the strategy of an inductive analysis. I began structuring my analytical work by doing a cross-case analysis of the different interviews in which I assembled and
analysed answers from the different informants regarding central topics and questions (Patton 2002). Moreover, this process became intertwined with the way I organised and reported my data. Through their stories, I identified key issues and sensitising concepts according to which I structured my empirical and analytical report. My autoethnographical style of reporting was yet another dimension of this part of my thesis as it braided together my life experiences with theirs.

2.5.1 Hermeneutic Spiral
The analysis and interpretation of the collected data followed the pattern of a hermeneutic spiral (Patton 2002). By attending to my sensitivity to and previous knowledge of the context I was investigating in order to interpret both fragments and the wholeness of the data, the hermeneutic spiral continues its eternal spin by transforming emerging knowledge into new preunderstanding. New synergies of context sensitivity and preunderstanding further developed into the creation of new knowledge in the continuing process of interpretation (Patton 2002).

2.6 Concerns During the Research Process
A narrow time frame was moreover not only an issue during the conduction of my fieldwork in Belgrade. Rather it was a constant shadow hanging over me throughout the research process that transpired as a feeling of being late before I had even started. It is a feeling that I will argue is typical for our neoliberal times, a perception that convinces you to push your body towards the very verge of sanity and salubrity. In my case, life on this particular verge was materialised in a split state of existence which I found myself in while I was writing this thesis. Half of my being was poising on a tight rope, with an appalling abyss under my feet, threatening to swallow me whole if I would have missed a step. Yet the other one was passionately engaging in all the encounters I had with challenging ideas, inspiring people, interesting words and different worlds. These encounters were my fuel throughout the whole research process and they preserved my endeavour to create a feminist change.
3 Background Information and Previous Research

3.1 A Short Introduction to the Geopolitical Context

In this chapter I offer the reader a short overview of the history of Serbia and the wider Balkan area. This section is further followed by a self-reflexive account of my own relation to the region. As such, the chapter represents an attempt to situate both the geopolitical and geohistorical context as well as myself and my bodypolitics and geopolitics of knowledge. Apart from being a guide for further reading and enabling greater comprehension for the context I am writing about, it is also my hope that this introduction serves as a little window into my soul.

The Balkan peninsula has always been a region characterized by vibrancy and turbulence. It is a space that geographically, socially, politically and culturally has been considered to constitute the border separating the Occident from the Orient and Christianity from Islam (Foteva 2014). Many different armies have conquered the Balkan soil and over the course of history the region has been subjugated under the rule of various empires, among others the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Byzantine, and Roman (Foteva 2014:1). The Balkans are, moreover, treated as a liminal space that distinguishes Western Europe from what it is not (Foteva 2014; Todorova 1994; Zagar 2012).

It has been argued that in political and cultural discourses the name Balkan carries its violent history inherently (Todorova 1997). This ambiguous meaning of ‘the Balkans’, as carrying both connotations of a cultural imaginary and a geographical space, makes the very definition of it a disputed topic (Foteva 2014; Kolstø 2016). While it is easy to identify the Balkan peninsula on the map it has seemed to be more difficult to pinpoint exactly which countries are included in it. Instead, there is a tendency among authors to create their own delimitation of the area. (Kolstø 2016).

During the palmy days of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, the particular location constituting contemporary Serbia became an in-between space created on the border between the two imperial powers. This geopolitical location had a deep cultural and political influence on the local population and have left the Serbian cultural identity multi layered as a result of
being in the midst of a tripartite power struggle between the two very different imperial systems and the Slavic orthodox tradition (Foteva 2014).

Although the Balkans have no colonial legacy, scholars originating from the region have argued that Western knowledge production focusing on the Balkan peninsula historically have been founded on similar colonial attitudes as the ones reproducing patterns of exploitation and domination in the contemporary post-colonial world (Bakic-Hayden 1999; Todorova 1994). While drawing parallels to Said’s Orientalism, Todorova develops the concept Balkanism as the specific way the West continue to reproduce its exploitation and dominance over the Balkan peninsula through knowledge production (Todorova 2009). What makes Balkanism different from Orientalism is precisely the detachment from colonialism and its ambivalent metageographical location as a part of Europe yet at the same time conceptualised as its Other (Todorova 1994).

After the independence from the empires and the end of World War I, the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was an attempt to gather the South Slavic people of the Balkans (aside from the Bulgarians) in one nation. This marked the beginning of a shared Yugoslav history, which covered the greater part of the 20th century (Djilas 1990). The Yugoslav history could roughly be divided into three time periods, a monarchical, a socialist and a post-Yugoslav or post-socialist era. The monarchy, that would later change its name into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, lasted until the partisans freed the country from the Nazi occupation by the end of World War II and the communist party came to power with Josip Broz Tito as their leader. Both the monarchical and the socialist Yugoslavia included the republics that today constitute Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo (Petranović 1988a). This synergy of different linguistic and cultural traditions was in many ways an example of how enriching and exciting a multicultural space can be.

In the aftermath of breaking the close ties with USSR in 1948, an event in Yugoslav socialist history often referred to as the Informbiro or simply the IB, Yugoslavia once again became the locus of an in-between space, this time between the Western World on the one hand and the Soviet bloc on the other. Amid the great tensions of a bipolar system, Yugoslavia, together with a large number of third world countries, formed a non-alignment movement (Petranović 1988b). Apart from its aim to foster peaceful cooperation, the movement also included an
explicit anti-colonial dimension by stating in its founding document that world peace could only be secured through the radical eradication of all manifestations of colonial, imperial and neo-colonial domination. Moreover, within this non-aligned context there was also room for a feminist movement to grow. By elucidating the role of Yugoslavia as a non-aligned country and the activism of women within this space, western projections of ‘the violent Balkans’ (Todorova 2009) could hopefully be challenged and problematised.

Our peaceful Yugoslav coexistence was tragically terminated by the eruption of a fatal war of secession in the beginning of the 1990s. It was a war that claimed many lives and which left the people of this region with scars that until the present day have not healed. With the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia a transition from socialism to neoliberal democracy was initiated through the traumatic experiences of an armed conflict. As a war-torn and impoverished nation with a destroyed infrastructure, Serbia entered the global market economy by starting selling out public assets and national resources to western companies and investors, transacting profound and drastic changes in the geopolitical landscape (Balunović 2013).

The violence during the wars in the 1990s followed by the corruption and the complex relation between organised crime and political economic elites helped re-establish the centuries old stigmatizing imaginary of the Balkans. This figuration was reproduced in both international and local media as well as in academic knowledge production (Horvat & Štiks 2015). By switching to a path towards a neoliberal economy and democracy the ex-Yugoslav states entered a process of transition that seem to be endless (Horvat & Štiks 2015). Wandering around in a post-socialist swamp we are assumed to be the ones to blame for our failure in finalising our transition by not being able to reach an endpoint that is already definite and defined by someone else (Buden 2015).

Today, Serbia has earned the status of a so-called candidate country and has initiated negotiations with the European Union about a prospective EU membership. Despite the alleged democratic ‘progress’ that Serbia has undergone according to the European Union, and several rankings of democratic development (European Commission 2016; Habdank-Kolaczkowska, Csaky & Roylance 2015; Polity IV 2014) many people in my surroundings, including myself, express deep concerns about a democratic deficiency in the country.
On the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of April 2017, the presidential elections were held in Serbia. My whole family, gathered in front of the TV in our living room, awaited the election results intently. Although I knew he would win, I could not smother my hope for a different scenario, for a second ballot at least. No further ballots were needed. The presidency was secured for Aleksandar Vučić, who at that time was Serbia’s prime minister as he received around 55 \% of the votes (N1 Beograd 2017). As we all were quite certain about how the elections would end, I cannot say that the feeling that weighed heavily in the room was shock. Rather, it was a kind of amazement that the support for him was actually that vast. Amazement enmeshed with a gnawing fear.

I am writing this thesis at a very critical time in Serbia’s political history. Since the presidential elections, every evening from six o’clock the streets of Belgrade and other Serbian cities become flooded by people who are marching in protest against Aleksandar Vučić and his regime. The Slovenian philosopher Močnik formulated in his book \textit{Koliko fasizma?} [How much fascism?] (1998), that fascism was never defeated but that it instead was institutionalised and became an integral part of our everyday lives. He further argues that the question is not about whether fascism exists or not but how much of it we can tolerate (Močnik 1998). The thousands of people kicking back in the streets may be an indicator of that that we might have reached the verging point where the amounts of fascist elements in our everyday lives have become unbearable and intolerable.

Contemporary Serbia is a country where senior officials, such as the mayor of Belgrade Siniša Mali, can plagiarize their doctoral dissertation and remain in office without any pressure for resignation (Santovac 2016; Karapandža 2014; Teodorović 2017). Serbia’s head of government, soon to become head of state, is a man who was the minister of information during the late 1990s and early 2000’s, a time when journalists were killed for criticizing the regime (Udruženje novinara Srbije 2017). Not many years ago, this same man was also the right hand of Vojislav Šešelj\textsuperscript{1} in the Serbian Radical party. Among the many offensive things Vučić has said and done during his political career, I find the street action he was leading in Belgrad, where he was covering official street name signs with posters carrying the text \textit{Bulevar Ratka Mladića} [Boulevard of Ratko Mladić\textsuperscript{2}], particularly repulsive (B92 2007).

\textsuperscript{1} Vojislav Šešelj is a Serbian ultra-nationalist politician whose political career has been built on profanity and insults (Vreme 2000).
\textsuperscript{2} Ratko Mladic is a former Bosnian-Serb general that has been prosecuted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for being responsible for war crimes such as the massacre in Srebrenica and for the siege of Sarajevo (Nationalencyklopedin 2017a).
Despite profound political and economic changes, Serbia and the other post-Yugoslav states are today facing many serious problems. Huge unemployment rates, impoverishment, a declining life expectancy and enormous public and private depths are some of the alarming features of our post-socialist reality. Moreover, tens of thousands of people are leaving the country every year, most of them well-educated young people seeking a better future than the one that is awaiting them at home (Horvat & Stiks 2015).

3.1.2 Traces of Yugoslavia on My Body
The many different tribes, nations and empires that have stayed or just passed through the region have certainly left their marks in one or another way, making Serbia into a space that is breathtakingly beautiful and culturally rich. In the language and the cuisine, you can taste this diversity, and in the music and art you can feel the pain and suffering of generations. It is a place famous for its hospitality and a place where people will share their food and their last dinar with you notwithstanding the general scarcity affecting the country.

My own relation to Yugoslavia and Serbia has always been conditioned by suitcases and separation. As a child, I used to travel the distance between Sweden and Yugoslavia by car with my family. I remember that the cornfields enclosing the highway when we entered the country made me feel safe, made me feel at home. Now when I think about it, I find it peculiar that the Hungarian corn, which was surrounding our car right until the border crossing at Horgoš and which aesthetically was quite similar to the Yugoslavian one, did not evoke the same feelings in me. In the meantime, I grew older and I realized the dangers in separating the features of one nation as better than those of another, even if it may be a trivial matter such as corn. Then the arrival point of my journeys changed name from Yugoslavia to Serbia and Montenegro, and finally to Serbia. I wonder, did the people and familiar places constituting my Yugoslavia change with her names? Moreover, the patterns of my journeys also went through a process of change, becoming shorter, more frequent and losing their collective character as I started traveling to Serbia on my own very often by plane. It is interesting how my understanding of becoming ‘grown up’ as becoming more independent also relates to how my relation to the ‘homeland’ became less limited by the structures of the family.
Thus, as a child, I grew up with one foot on the ostensibly firm soil of the plain of Östergötland\(^3\), while the other one was wading in a muddy pond consisting of personal experiences from post-Yugoslav Serbia intermeshed with family narratives of both the socialist and pre-socialist period of my home country. In a diaphanous yet affective way, the pre-socialist era transpired through my grandmother’s enchanting stories about her childhood in the little village Navalin in southern Serbia and in the sagas she recited, filled with figures from Slavic mythology and traces of collective memories of subjugation in the Ottoman empire. The socialist period on the other hand, always felt very intimate and tangible. The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was the country that my grandparents, and later on my parents, emigrated from and it continued to be reconstructed in my family as the ‘home’, the place to yearn back to. My diasporic experience has mainly evolved around learning to navigate through diverse cultural, linguistic and emotional landscapes. Moreover, it made me realize, at a very early age, that geopolitical and geohistorical locations leave traces on our bodies and that our specific spatio-temporal locations inspirit different ways of knowing.

Growing up also made me aware of my inherited privileges: of having two native languages, of having free access to the Swedish education system, healthcare and labour market. Faced with the fact that the majority of my friends and young relatives today have left the country or are talking about leaving meant another sobering slap in the face with my Swedish passport which is drenched in the odour of global power asymmetries. Nonetheless, an awareness of my privileged position has always been present in my life. Even as a child I could not possibly fail to take notice of the tremendous class differences between my two homes. Yet, on the other hand, I have also always felt a certain contempt or a sort of racism translated into ethnicity that becomes particularly ambivalent and difficult to pinpoint when the ‘differences’ separating me from the Swedish majority are invisible. This has been manifested in the perception of belonging to a certain geographical and cultural space that is defined in a Western European context, through media and scholarship, as Other and backward. Growing up in Sweden, I do not recall that I ever read something nice about my other home. At times, I found myself taking a rather defensive position, desperate to prove the negative voices wrong. Yet by doing this, I became selective in my own representation of Serbia. This is why the discovery of feminism, and of Yugoslav feminism in particular was such a revelation to me. To me it represented a

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\(^3\) Plain of Östergötland, or Östgötaslätten in Swedish, is a flat region of the province Östergötland, in which the town of Linköping is situated (Nationalencyklopedin 2017b).
different option, a possibility to be critical of the western projections that reproduce global patterns of domination, while at the same time remain critical towards the local context as well.

Dwelling on the border between East and West, I recognise that I am in the position of building bridges between two seemingly separated spaces by nurturing a perspective of understanding and caring. I prefer to see myself as a person inhabiting the position described by Shu-Mei Shih as the role of the diasporic intellectual (Shih 2002), although, ‘an intellectual’ is an ambitious designation to ascribe to myself. However, I will claim that as a student at a Swedish university I have access to the same powerful arena as the diasporic scholar. By recognising this privileged position, as not only encompassing a power relation to my Serbian co-feminists, but also to western mainstream canons, I might be able to use my resources to do good by challenging global inequalities.

3.2 Post-socialism

What characterize our existence today in times of shiftiness and controversy is according to postcolonial theorist Bhabha a living in the realm of the beyond (Bhabha 1994:1), and on the borderlines of present (Bhabha 1994:1). This ambivalent position is marked by the prefix ‘post’, as in postcolonialism, postmodernism and post-socialism, which signifies neither a new inception nor a complete alienation from the past. In a similar vein the prefix ‘post’ is further used by Lykke (2010) as a concept indicating both a transgression from and an inclusion of the term succeeding it. Moreover, Bhabha describes our current location as a moment in transit (Bhabha 1994:1). This resonates with the case of post-socialism, where the hegemonic discourse around it has been one founded on the idea of transition (Iveković 2005; Balunović 2013). The transition is, moreover, assumed to be a process from socialism towards neoliberalism, that includes not only a reorganisation of the economy but also a shift from a one-party-rule to liberal democracy (Balunović 2013). Iveković (2005) argues further that to conceptualise post-socialism as a transition that merely involves the ex-communist states is a limiting classification. Rather it should be viewed as a larger process of European integration as the fall of the Berlin wall did not only mark the end of communism but also the breakdown of a bipolar world system.

Chari and Verdery (2009) explain that post-socialism from the beginning was used as a term signifying the time after the conversion to a neoliberal mode of production and after the dissolution of a one-party rule. However, they argue, the concept later became conflated with a
critical perspective towards both socialist and neoliberal grand narratives within politics and knowledge production (Chari & Verderi 2009). In the next subchapter, I will bring forth some of the contributions made from this critical post-socialist standpoint.

3.2.1 Post-socialist Feminist Critique

The critical voices that I have merged together and presented in this chapter have been formulated from various feminist geographical and theoretical post-socialist stances. Despite their different points of departure and motives, they nonetheless have the critique against politics of knowledge production in common. Furthermore, the chapter will also include a brief section of the intersections of post-socialist and post-colonial studies within feminist research.

Suchland (2015) argues for the need of a theorisation of post-socialism as a *geographical difference*. Moreover, she claims that the limiting features of the discourse on transitions, such as the idea of the *inevitability* of a neoliberal capitalist market transformation, have been particularly problematic as they have disabled critical approaches to the radical changes post-socialist societies have been undergoing. Furthermore, in cases of inability to implement certain transitional policies, legacies of state socialism have often been portrayed as the reason behind these failures (Suchland 2015).

Within feminist academic circles, post-socialism is still a rather marginalised field of study (Tlostanova 2017). Despite the many intersections with post-colonial thought, post-socialism has not achieved the same prominent status within Western academia as post-colonialism (Bonfiglioli 2016). Moreover, there is a lack of studies made by scholars originating from post-socialist geopolitical contexts who refrain from using Western mainstream theories to analyse their reality (Tlostanova 2017).

Chary and Verdery (2009) offer a definition of the term post-socialism as a critical standpoint and argue further for a merging of the two discourses of post-socialism and post-colonialism. Although there are, as Tlostanova (2017) notes, intersections of the trajectories of post-socialism and post-colonialism, their respective paths have been fuelled by different forces and historical conditions. While recognising the value of dialogues and maybe ultimately an alignment against the coloniality of power, Tlostanova (2017) nonetheless criticizes Chary and Verdery for producing an overly simplistic and in some ways even inadequate understanding of post-socialism.
Although there certainly are many similarities between postcolonial and post-socialist realities I would refrain from conflating postcolonial and post-socialist theory completely. Due to the different trajectories and diverging relations to different imperial and colonial powers, I believe that we should keep the two theoretical schools separate, albeit I recognise that there is much to discuss and much to learn from each other. Being to a large extent still a marginalized field of research, I will argue that we need to be particularly cautious when applying old approved concepts for explaining contemporary post-socialist feminist issues. As Močnik warns, in a lecture filmed and uploaded by the Faculty for Media and Communication in Belgrade (2013), there is a risk that we fail to notice new patterns and phenomena if we use only old concepts in analyses of our contemporaneity.

Many feminist scholars have been pointing at the issue of the invisibility and inaccurate positioning of Central and Eastern Europe within feminist knowledge production (Koobak & Marling 2014; Suchland 2011). An example of the inaccurate framing of post-socialist Europe in relation to the West within Western scholarship is exemplified in an article by Fraser where she, in a footnote, states that second wave feminism did not appear as a political influence before 1989 in the region (2009: 100). However, as I hope to illuminate in the chapter containing an historical overview of feminist organising in Serbia, and later in my analysis, this statement by Fraser is questionable.

The knowledge gap in terms of an invisibility of the region, pointed out by several scholars (Koobak & Marling 2014; Suchland 2011; Tlostanova 2017), within knowledge production ought to be problematized further in respect of the specific context of former Yugoslavia, due to the fact that it is not characterised by a complete lack of interest in the region. While there are studies that do invest in issues concerning the geopolitical location I will argue that a mere inclusion of the region in academic knowledge production is not sufficient in terms of challenging power relations between Eastern and Western Europe. A lot of research focusing on the Balkans that have been produced in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s by western scholars have been concentrated around the issue of violence and war crimes (Kašić 2004; Tlostanova 2016). As a consequence, differences and existing stereotypes constructed by western European scholarship portraying the people of the Balkans as violent and barbaric (Todorova 2009) seem to have become naturalised and reinforced (Kašić 2004).
Slapšak (2012) argues further that the international research that has been done during the decades following the disintegration of Yugoslavia has been characterized by a colonial attitude often consisting of a sensational treatment of ‘hot’ topics such as war rapes and of an ignorance of regional sources and unreliable selections of data. Furthermore, she criticizes the neglect of the comprehensive body of Yugoslav feminist research by the global power centres in academia. According to Slapšak (2012), this lack of international support impeded the work of Gender Studies scholars in the Yugoslav region as they were faced with a domestic academic sphere that was overflowed by nationalist and conservative ideologies in the 1990s.

The omission of perspectives from certain geopolitical regions has additionally been problematized by Blagojević and Yair (2010). In a collaborative article, these scholars are criticizing what they call a catch-22 syndrome that social scientists in regions such as the Balkans are faced with. In order to reach international recognition and acceptance, academics from what Blagojević and Yair call the ‘semi-periphery’ often have to compromise their initial intellectual, political and ethical perspectives. Moreover, they argue that apart from disclosing the unequal distribution of power within international knowledge production, this marginalization of local knowledges obstructs creativity and innovation (Blagojević & Yair 2010). Consequently, the writing of this thesis is a political act with the ambition to ascribe importance to the work of Serbian feminists. Furthermore, I wish to support their struggle that on the one hand is severely impeded by inequalities on a national level and on the other, often remains neglected within Western European knowledge production.

Apart from the Western European dominance within feminist knowledge production, it is also common that experiences of non-westerners become marginalised in discourses of globalisation. Hence, there is a pressing need for more research that focus on local accounts of the lived experiences of post-socialism which are needed in order to understand the complexities and ambivalence that the concept entails (Hörschelmann & Stenning 2008). Post-socialism is not merely a process in which macro-economic and political structures are being reconfigured, as it is often portrayed in hegemonic discourses on transition, but it has also brought about fundamental cultural, social and geographical changes that can only be reflected through the experiences of those who live in the midst of those processes.

In this subchapter I have outlined some critical stances that I have found crucial for my aim to challenge the current structures of academic knowledge production. I would argue that all of
the cited authors are in some way engaging in a critique of the three privileges of research mentioned in the previous chapter. The teleological privilege is for instance problematized by Suchland, who argues that the conceptualisations within the academy of the economic transition as ineluctable, have hindered critical perspectives to be framed and thus also an alternative future to be perceived. Moreover, Blagojević, Yair and Slapšak are criticising inequalities among different viewpoints within academic knowledge production that are created through the Western privilege of epistemic perspective. And lastly, the ontological privilege is touched upon by Koobak, Marling, Kašić, Tlostanova and Todorova, who emphasise the inaccurate framing of Eastern Europe and the projected stereotypes and differences linked to this region within the construction of academic knowledge.

3.2.2 Post-Socialism Informed by my Bodopolitics and Geopolitics of Knowledge

My own ambition to conceptualise post-socialism is informed by Lykke’s and Bhabha’s definitions of our contemporaneity and the prefix ‘post’ as well as my own experiences of the time-space the concept post-socialism is referring to. Although I do understand it to signify a moment in transit (Bhabha 1994:1) and as an incomplete shift from socialism to something else, the equation of post-socialism with transition is nevertheless a problematic task due to the hegemonic discourses of transitology. As I will account for more in detail in a forthcoming chapter, the dominant narratives of transitions assume a certain beginning and a defined end (Linde & Ekman 2006). However, post-socialism was not created in a vacuum, and it is not a state of a temporal limbo disconnected from life itself. Rather I see it as intertwined with our past but also in constant dialogue with the future and always rooted in a specific location. As such, it is per definition a concept that aims at describing a complex contemporaneity, a moment in a transition that stretches over different dimensions of time. However, it is also a concept that in my understanding of it evokes the spatial turn into the theoretical discussion of transitions with an emphasis on the necessity to study spatial aspects in order to reach a comprehension for our contemporary situation (Soja 2010). While I define post-socialism as a time-dimension, it is nevertheless a time that is inseparable from the bodies inhabiting the geographic space affected by it. By attending to the conditions forming real people’s realities it opens possibilities towards an analysis of a transition from socialism that is grounded in local knowledges rather than in the disembodied and disengaged perspective of a Western scholar. In other words, my understanding of post-socialism embraces a recourse to bodopolitics and geopolitics of knowledge.
I will in my thesis use the terms post-socialism and post-socialist transition interchangeably to refer to the ambiguous and fluid time and space forming the realities of bodies living in the midst of the intersecting political, economic, cultural, ideological and social changes that have been engendered since end of communism. Although in general, the concept is marking the many different spaces that experienced communist rule, I will in my thesis, due to space limitations, make the delimitation of studying only the Serbian case of post-socialism My own personal relation to the region was moreover decisive for my choice to focus particularly on Serbia.

3.3 Processes of Democratisation – Post-Socialist Transitions Within the Field of Political Science

This subchapter will provide an overview of the previous research on transitions and democratisation processes within the subfield comparative politics. Furthermore, I will continue, in a similar spirit as the feminist critiques presented in the previous chapter, to criticise the conventional ways of studying post-socialist transitions and argue against what I consider to be some of the main problems in Western knowledge production.

Before 1989, Sovietology and Eastern European studies were the fields that dominated western research on the geopolitical area that constituted the socialist states of the European continent. However, with the end of communism, these ‘experts’ on this particular area became strongly criticized on the base of their inability to predict the rupture of the cold war-era. A sudden interest in Eastern Europe of scholars from diverse fields resulted in a strengthening of an old discrepancy between two strands of research roughly divided according to a positivist and a hermeneutic philosophy of science (Linde & Ekman 2006). In line with the positivist research ideal, many political scientists within the subfield of comparative politics embraced the new world order in their research in which they aimed at applying generalising theories from their previous research on democratisation processes in Latin America. The former Sovietologists, on the other hand, continued to emphasise the uniqueness of the Eastern European context and thus argued for the inadequacy of using models of explanation from other geopolitical contexts. Interestingly, the greatest amount of resistance towards universalistic hypotheses, concepts and assumptions about the transitions in the Soviet bloc and eastern Europe was found among North American sovietologists (Schmitter & Karl 1994).
The rapid and considerable spread of democratisation processes over the European continent attracted many scholars to democratisation studies, which developed into a sub-discipline within the field of comparative politics (Landman 2008). An important distinction was made between the initial processes of transition, characterised by uncertainty and turbulence, and the latter process of consolidation which refers to the phase when democracy becomes the only viable option (Grugel 2002). Thus while the field of democratisation reached a leading position in the studies of our contemporary political world (Grugel 2002) it was roughly divided into two strands, namely transitology and consolidology (Schmitter & Karl 1994).

3.3.1 Transitology
Within the field of transitology, researchers have mainly focused on the activities of political elites in transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy (Linde & Ekman 2006). There has been a rather pronounced consensus among scholars that the main actors in the process of transition are the political elites and hence these agents and their strategies have become the primary units of analysis (Landman 2008). In contrast to this, the roles of the civil society in processes have been negligible (Linde & Ekman 2006).

O’Donnell and Schmitters (1986) have defined transition as the interval between different political regimes (1986:6). Furthermore, it is understood as a period within which political regulations are not clearly defined or institutionalised (O’Donnell & Schmitters 1986). A transition is, in contrast to transformation, assumed to have a distinct start and end. Questions regarding the start and the end of transition are however matters of controversy. While there are no standard definitions of what counts as the initiation of the transition or when this interim reaches its end, Linz’s and Stepan’s definition of a ‘complete transition’ has nevertheless become one of the most cited ones (Linde & Ekman 2006).

According to Linz and Stepan (1996), a democratic transition is finished when a new constitution has been installed, when a government has been elected through just and free elections and when this government has a virtual power to engender new policies. Most theoretical frameworks related to transitology within the field of political science treats transitions as processes characterized by uncertainty and not necessary as linear processes from an authoritarian rule to democracy (Linde & Ekman 2006). However, the post-socialist transition has commonly been taken for granted as a synonym for a democratization process (Koobak & Marling 2014).
Croatian philosopher Buden (2015) argues that the discourse on transitology explicitly indicates unequal power relations between Western Europe and the Eastern European transitional countries. The power saturated relation is depicted in metaphors alluding to an old legacy from the enlightenment, namely the analogy between historical human progress and the growing up of a child. Buden argues that this idea fosters an infantilisation of the post-socialist regions assumed to be undergoing the transition as they have been encouraged to follow, listen to, implement and imitate the advices of those who know better. Having previously studied the transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America and Southern Europe, the scholarly works of the ‘experts’ on transition began to echo Fukuyama’s end of history after 1989. In contrast to the previous research which was based around the conceptualisation of transitions from authoritarian rule, the established interpretation of the post-communist cases was a transition to democracy (Buden 2010).

The mainstream track within the political science research on transition, consolidation and democratisation in more general terms, has been the target of critique from within the field. Waylen (1994) argues that the field of research is characterised by a knowledge gap concerning gender dimensions in processes of democratisation. Moreover, she criticizes the fact that the political activities of women’s movements are seldom included in research on the topic of democracy development (Waylen 1994).

### 3.3.2 Consolidology

According to theories of democratisation a process of consolidation of the democracy emerges after the transition is finished (Linde & Ekman 2006), although the two different processes can be overlapping (Grugel 2002). At times the languages of transitology and consolidology seem to be rather contradictory and ambiguous, especially in the treatment of former communist states. Whether or not Serbia has passed its period of transition is a matter of controversy. I find it interesting that the idea of an ongoing and unfinished democratic and economic transition is constantly repeated both in local and international discourses (Horvat & Stiks 2015; Roaf et al. 2014; Habdank-Kolaczkowska Csaky & Roylance 2015; Stojiljkovic 2012). The reproduction of this idea is intriguing due to the fact that according to some of the most influential definitions of a political transition, like the one formulated by Linz and Stepan (1996) our transition should be treated as finished. As I have argued earlier in this chapter, my own understanding of the very concept post-socialism indicates an incomplete transition from
socialism to something else. However, I want to emphasise that the post in post-socialism rather refers to a more general level of life experiences and perception rather than to the ideas of transition developed within transitology.

The consolidation of democracy is, precisely as the concept of transition, a controversial issue. While there is no unitary definition of the concept consolidation it is commonly assumed to be a phase in the democratisation process where democratic principles are institutionalised, stabilised and legitimised (Linde & Ekman 2006). Moreover, it is regarded as a distinct and multi-layered phase of the democratisation (Pridham 2005). Since it is supposed to be a more complex phase than the transition, consolidology scholars tend to include other units of analysis than just the political elites. The support for democracy among citizens are for instance often included in studies of the consolidation of democracy (Linde & Ekman 2006).

Although transition and consolidation are, as noted, controversial subjects, I find it utterly important to underline that they are nevertheless always defined from a western gaze. Scholars immersed in western academic canons as well as politicians and bureaucrats of the European Union interpret and define the vast changes in Eastern Europe and make decisions that affect real people. In the European political context, the Copenhagen criteria have been formulated as a measurement for the end of transition and the progress of the democratic consolidation process (Pridham 2005). The Copenhagen Criteria were adopted in 1993 in Copenhagen at the European Council and include a certain amount of requirements that need to be fulfilled by a country in order to become a member of the European Union. Apart from standards for democracy, the accession criteria also include requirements regarding market oriented economic principles and devotion to the political, economic and monetary objectives of the union. Moreover, there are additional requirements for the former republics of Yugoslavia that involve regional stabilisation and cooperation (European Commission 2016).

Democracy is usually measured quantitatively and there are many democracy indexes and various organisations that attempt to measure and compare democratic development globally. One of the most known measurements of democracy is provided by the Freedom House, claiming to quantify freedom in the world (Linde & Ekman 2006). The American based non-governmental organisation monitors, advocates and analyses democracy globally. According to their analyses Serbia is ranked as a ‘free country’. Moreover, Serbia is one of the many Eastern European countries that is included in Freedom house’s research project Nations in

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Transit. In the results of their research, published in a report from 2015, it is stated that Serbia is a ‘semi-consolidated democracy’ with the democracy score 3,68 on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 designates the highest degree of democratic progress. What the project Nations in Transit is aiming at is a measurement of progress and regression in democratisation processes in the post-socialist states of Europe and Eurasia. The research results are based upon quantitative studies and ratings of the following indicators: National democratic governance, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, juridical framework and independence, and corruption. More particularly, Freedom House conducts the research in consultations with academic advisers, regional experts and the authors of Freedom House’s country reports (Freedom House 2017). It is not clear however, if the regional experts and academic advisers are persons that actually have lived experiences from the context or if they are western scholars studying the region from abroad. Nations in Transit is another survey that studies the conditions in post-socialist countries from a top-down perspective based on formal institutions and ‘expert knowledge’. Who the bearer of this ‘expert knowledge’ is however not clarified.

3.3.3 My Disciplinary Disobedience

Despite the inspiring teachers and the vast amount of interesting topics and areas of research covered during my studies at the department of Political Science at Linköping University I oftentimes felt misplaced in that institution. I recognised an ontological and epistemological rift between my own attempt of a feminist approach to studies of the political and the mainstream line within political science in general and within comparative politics in particular. Firstly, the ontological disagreement is based on the premises of what constitutes the political. If the political in the study of transitions is reserved to the political elites of a country such as Serbia, then the political will be a subject completely emptied of women, workers, Roma people and other underprivileged groups that are excluded from the ruling class. In the first multiparty Serbian parliament for instance, only 4 women, that is 1,6 per cent, were elected (Bozinovic & Marjanovic 1991). Secondly, my critical standpoint toward universalist truths constitutes the base for an epistemological dissonance with mainstream studies of politics.

My main concern about epistemology lies in the fact that the radical political, economic and social changes that have occurred in post-socialist countries such as Serbia, have been studied mainly against the backdrop of conventional theories, assumptions and hypotheses and the methodological approaches they engender. The omnipresent, invisible and neutral scholar
producing objective knowledge has furthermore remained unquestioned in all the political studies on democratisation that I have encountered. It has, moreover, remained unquestioned and uncriticised that the scholars producing knowledge about the sea-changes taking place in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism, are predominately western men. As a heritage from the enlightenment, this positivist epistemological position continues to reproduce the authority of reason claimed by those occupying the hubris of the zero point (Tlostanova 2015). Once reserved to God, as the unquestioned locus of production of universal truths, the hubris of the zero point has shifted and transformed into the hegemonic position of western knowledge production. By being detached from the real world, this vantage point his masking different geo-political, geo-historical, gendered and raced locations and their junctions with epistemology. Furthermore, the zero point is also structured in accordance to certain linguistic and conceptual traditions and thus it disregards the attempts to knowledge production that are written and thought in languages and conceptual frameworks that deviate from the western epistemological hegemony (Tlostanova 2015). As a consequence of producing knowledge from the invisible, disconnected, secure and uncriticised zero point, there is a tendency particularly among the social sciences and humanities of lost links between academic disciplines and real people and their social reality. This phenomenon has been observed by many non-western scholars who claim that it is indeed a troubling development within academia (Tlostanova 2015). Instead I am arguing for a different conceptualisation of knowledge as always processed through a sensing body rooted in a specific geopolitical and geohistorical location.

I remember that I always found it utterly problematic, that the books I was assigned to read during my studies in political science were so distant from my own reality. Even when I read about the democratisation processes in former Yugoslavia, which included series of elements that clearly have had serious impacts on my life, the cold and rigid language never touched deeply enough. The operationalisation and mechanical study of democracy made its flavour rather wishy-washy. Democracy somehow lost its powerful meaning, its connotation of freedom and aspiration for emancipation when millions of post-socialist bodies that had yearned and struggled for it were excluded from the analysis of democratisation.

I would like to contest the idea that the conventional epistemological and methodological approaches to the political study of democratisation are neutral and objective by claiming that theories that omit the knowledge and experiences of marginalised groups of people are in fact partial (Nelson & Nelson 1994). Political changes, such as the shift from communist means of
production to a neoliberal market economy and democracy, intersect with people’s bodies and lives and as such, I will argue, it necessitates an unconventional interdisciplinary approach to research on the political. Rather than following the traditional pattern of focusing on the activities of political elites in transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy (Linde & Ekman 2006), I want to develop my thesis from a bottom-up feminist perspective by analysing lived experiences of this blurred reality (Balunović 2013). In an attempt to write my thesis in a borderland between studies of democratisation and post-socialist feminism, I will investigate the intersections of political processes, the feminist movement and personal lives. It is my endeavour to question and challenge the politics of knowledge production and the privilege of epistemic perspective (Decoloniality Europe 2013) by turning to marginalised knowledges about the kaleidoscopic Serbian socio-political environment and by attending to the correlation between one’s embodied geopolitical and geo-historical space and epistemology. At best, this undertaking will result in a greater understanding for a highly complex and ambivalent post-socialist situation. Moreover, in my quest for a reconceptualization of post-socialism attuned to marginalised epistemic perspectives I hope to contribute to a challenge of both the ontological and the teleological privilege of research.

3.4 History of the Yugoslav Feminist Movement

Previous research on the Yugoslav feminist movement will in this chapter be mapped out in order to reach a deeper understanding for the context. Moreover, this short review of the history of the feminist movement and the literature about it will further serve as an indicator of which knowledge gaps need to be filled and consequently assist in crystallising my own direction of research.

It has been claimed by DeHaan (2008) that the history of the women’s movements in Central and Eastern Europe have to a large extent remained unwritten. I will argue however, that if DeHaan includes the geopolitical region of former Yugoslavia into her definition of Central and Eastern Europe, her statement is actually not true. On the contrary, the feminists of former Yugoslavia have been publishing many books that cover the historical development and achievements of the women’s movement in the region. However, these works have seldom been translated into English. This raises anew the question about the hubris of the zero point and invites to a problematisation of what and who’s knowledge is acknowledged in the great canons of academic knowledge production. On the one hand, I have a great understanding for the
difficulties in finding these sources, not only because of the linguistic barriers, but also because they are not really accessible through conventional academic search engines and archives. But on the other hand, I find it less defensible to assume that if something is inaccessible to a white researcher in a Western European university that it simply does not exist. According to Koobak (2013), feminist movements in Eastern Europe tend to be measured towards a western yardstick. Perhaps according to this yardstick the contributions made by feminists from the post-Yugoslav region, in terms of studies on their own past, might seem insignificantly small.

One of the major contributions to the mapping of the history of Serbian feminism is the book *Zensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* [The Woman Question in Serbia in the XIX and XX Century] written by Bozinovic (1996). This extensive historical account of the feminist movement in Serbia covers feminist activities in the region during the 19th and 20th century. Bozinovic, who was herself an important figure in the movement, a partisan and one of the main actors in Antifasisiticki front zena [the Anti-Fascist Front of Women] (AFZ), claims that the history of Serbian feminism intersects with courses of feminist motions in other parts of Europe. She further explains that the northern Serbian province Vojvodina has been a particularly important space in the development of feminism in the region. In contrast to the rest of the country, that until the year 1878 was a colony under the rule of the Ottoman empire, Vojvodina belonged to the Habsburg empire and later the Austro-Hungarian empire (Foteva 2014).

According to Bozinovic (1996), it was through this historical connection to Europe that Vojvodina became a pedestal in the building of a feminist movement in the region. To me, this statement seems almost as an indication of that the Western narratives of emancipation, built on the dichotomy between the ‘progressive’ West and ‘backward’ East, have sneaked in to Bozinovic’s work. This is moreover, a pattern that I have discovered many times in local discourses. The idea of Europe as an emancipated part of the world which Serbia should aim at mimicking is not only evident in Bozinovic’s work but also in the local political discourse in Serbia.

Perhaps Bozinovic is right about the significance of the location of Vojvodina for the extensive emergence of women’s activism in this particular region. However, it might have been the location on the border between two empires (Foteva 2014) and the fact that Vojvodina is a
multicultural space that shaped the course of the feminist trajectories in Serbia, rather than the European connection.

Bozinovic’s research further shows that during the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia many organisations were established through various women’s initiatives. The Yugoslav women’s movement became a rich space in which women organised themselves in various activist groups in all the different countries. Within the labour movement, in political parties and the syndicates, women were struggling for women’s rights alongside their devotion to the class question (Bozinovic 1996).

Another milestone in the history of women’s political activism in Yugoslavia was the formation of the People’s Women’s Union of Serbian, Croat and Slovene Women. This union of around 200 different organisations was devoted to the development of ethical and feminist social work. Moreover, the group supported the international ideology forming the base for a united Yugoslavia. Furthermore, after its formation it joined the International Council of Women. The new global feminist relations influenced the work of the union which started adapting its agenda in accordance with global feminist standards. Another proponent of internationalism was the Alliance of Women’s Groups in the Country of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The alliance was a major force in the local struggle for women’s rights and cooperated actively with the international movement for women’s right to vote within the International Alliance of Women (Bozinovic 1996).

Many other feminist groups were formed at the universities in the kingdom and several feminist journals and newspapers were issued during this time of Yugoslav history. Furthermore, despite its short period of existence, I find it important to mention that a women’s party was formed in 1927. The Women’s Party was founded as a reaction to the inert existing efforts for women’s rights. According to Bozinovic (1996), their short-lived struggle was a passionate one and they managed to attract a large public at the rallies for women’s vote that they organised. However, in 1929 with the abolition of the previous constitution, the Women’s Party along with all other political parties were prevented from continuing their work (Bozinovic 1996).

Before, during and after the second World War women played an important role in the anti-fascist movement and the demands for women’s rights became an integral piece of the struggle for freedom and democracy. Moreover, women were active in both the political and social
branches of the movement as well as on the frontlines. AFZ was formed in 1942 with the aim to mobilise women for support of the anti-fascist movement. One of the main merits of the front were their efforts in increasing literacy among women in rural areas. Another one was their vast influence on legislation making processes after the end of the war in which they managed to bring gender equality to the fore (Bozinovic 1996).

By the end of the 1970’s, feminist groups started to take form at different universities in Yugoslavia, particularly in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In 1978 women from these three cities worked collaboratively to organise an international feminist conference that was called DRUG-CA ZENA [Comrade/Comrades Woman] in Belgrade. The conference signified a breaking point in Yugoslav socialist history as the gender question for the first time became politically formulated as prioritised issue and not as something that would be solved through the socialist rhetoric of class struggle (Mladjenovic 2017).

Recently, a younger generation of scholars have shown interest in the legacies of the Yugoslav women’s movement and thus a number of important works have been published on the topic. Many of their publications are written in English and are thus more accessible to a wider audience.

One of the latest contributions to the study of Yugoslav feminism is the dissertation “Learning a Feminist Language”: The Intellectual History of Feminism in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s from Central European University written by Lóránd (2014). Lóránd’s research is concentrated around an examination of the activism and theory production of Yugoslav feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. More particularly, the study focuses on the feminists that took part in Zena i drustvo [Woman and Society], a group that evolved in the 1970s along the line of the three Yugoslav cities Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. Lóránd’s work shows a strong connection between activism and discursive practices developed by the feminists in Zena i drustvo. Arguing for a re-appearance of Yugoslav feminism in the 1970s, Lóránd further explains its particular features of being at the same time cooperative with and critical towards the state. The strong influence from the Anti-Fascist Front for Women a crucial factor behind the confluence of Yugoslav feminism and the socialist ideology. For her research project, she gathered data through interviews with Yugoslav feminists that were active during the two decades she was particularly interested in. Some of the women she interviewed were also interviewed by me during my fieldwork in Serbia. However, my focus was rather on their
experiences from life and activism in post-socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia rather than in the former Yugoslavia.

Another doctoral dissertation focusing on the legacies of the Yugoslav feminist movement is *Taking a Stand in Times of Violent Societal Change: Belgrade and Zagreb feminists’ positionings on the (post-)Yugoslav wars and each other (1991-2000)* written by Miskovska-Kajevska. In contrast to Lóránd, Miskovska-Kajevska focuses her work on the Yugoslav feminist activism during and after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Her research is demarcated around the positionings, in terms of activism and discourse, of feminists in Belgrade and in Zagreb. She is, moreover, investigating their positionings as a relation to each other and as a political stance on the Yugoslav wars of secession. Some interesting aspects of Miskovska-Kajevska’s work are the way she conceptualises the term ‘post-Yugoslav’ and her reluctance towards using the expression *former* Yugoslavia. As she explains, the prefix ‘post’ is in the context of her work used as an adjective describing phenomena that were created in socialist Yugoslavia and that continued to exist after the country’s dissolution. Furthermore, she is critical towards what today has become rather a standard designation for the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, namely former Yugoslavia, since she argues that it is creating a conceptual attachment of the region with an *irreversible past* (Miskovska-Kajevska 2014).

Miskovska-Kajevska identified two different clusters of feminists, within each of the respective cities her study was focusing on, with different positionings towards the war and towards each other. Those clusters could roughly be divided into self-declared anti-nationalist feminists and ‘nationalist feminists’ who were declared ‘nationalist’ by the anti-nationalist groups. Moreover, by applying Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of different forms of capital, Miskovska-Kajevska interpreted the positionings, i.e., the activism and discourses, of feminists from both antinationalist and nationalist clusters in Belgrade and Zagreb as a power struggle for feminist symbolic capital or in other words to gain recognition and legitimacy within a wider feminist field. This struggle over feminist symbolic capital was, according to Miskovska-Kajevska, particularly evident on conferences and other contexts abroad.
4 Fieldwork and Analysis

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

It was during the time when seas of primroses cover the river banks of Danube, heralding the arrival of spring, that I flew to Belgrade to gather empirical material for my thesis. My fieldwork, that consisted of autoethnographic reflections and encounters with four remarkable women, was a journey through a familiar landscape albeit with greater deliberation around things that I would otherwise have treated as parts of my daily routine. The women I encountered were feminist activists who had been prominent figures in the feminist movement in Socialist Federative Republic Yugoslavia, during the wars and after the breakdown of the socialist state. Nadežda Radović, Lina Vušković, Staša Zajović and Sofija Trivunac are the names of these four women who bravely disobeyed the firm grips of the regime and the church even during the times of the bloodiest warfare and who still today proudly stand behind their opinions. I am endlessly thankful to them for inviting me into their homes and offices and for sharing so generously with me their life stories, valuable insights and some of their deepest concerns. Apart from the interviews I conducted in Belgrade I also kept a dialogue on the topic with Jasmina Tešanović, a feminist activist who was one my initial interviewee candidates. Unfortunately she could not participate in an interview as she was not in Serbia at the time of my fieldwork trip. Nonetheless, I found her story and her comments too important to be left out from the study and therefore her words will be included in my analysis.

Their voices still resonate in me and I will do my best to relocate them adequately onto these pages. Having said that, I find it important to emphasise that this thesis is to a large extent the product of their words processed in my body and disseminated on a blank page through my fingertips. In other words, despite my efforts to make this research project a collaborative effort, with the aim to disengage from the power hierarchies traditionally underpinning academic knowledge production, I acknowledge that my imprints will be present throughout the text. I will however attempt to make my interviewees visible by including many of their own quotes in the thesis. Nonetheless, even this will require an amount of my interference as I will need to translate their words from Serbo-Croatian to English.

As argued for in a previous chapter, my own integration in the context I am investigating was one of the main reasons behind my option of utilising autoethnography in the research process. While there are converging points between the stories of the four women I interviewed and my
own, there are nevertheless many differences as well. This is why I would like to treat our voices as four respective narratives of post-socialism that are unique due to our diverging perspectives and different positionalities.

Although my interview guide followed the structure of different time periods that is framing the post-socialist transition, it seemed very hard to disentangle these time dimensions from each other in the stories the interviewees shared with me. Hence the analysis will not be structured chronologically but instead it will follow a line of different themes that emerged as significant patterns in the collected material.

4.2 Encounters with Feminists and Encounters with Belgrade

4.2.1 Nadežda Radović

I met Nadežda on a cloudy Tuesday afternoon. Arriving to the city centre much earlier than agreed I sat down on a bench in the park surrounding the sport hall Pionir. I took out some cookies I had brought in my bag and gave half of it to the pigeons around my feet while examining the architectural monument I had in front of me. Hala Pionir is one of those relics of socialist modernism that look like some strange space ships that have landed on Belgrade soil. Nadežda awaited me with her door opened and I entered her apartment which was full of captivating art objects. Very soon I realised that her soul was as colourful as her apartment and her clothes.

As a child, Nadežda moved many times with her family between different cities in Yugoslavia due to her father’s work within the military. She graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Belgrade and worked for many years at the institute. She became active in the feminist movement in 1986 and was one of the founders of the NGO Autonomous Women’s Centre, which today has grown in to one of the largest and most influential feminist NGO’s in Serbia. Apart from her engagement in collective forms of feminist activism such as street actions, protests and panel discussions for instance, she has also published a great deal of books and articles. For Nadežda, writing and publishing books and articles has constituted an integral part of her feminist struggle.
4.2.2 Lina Vušković

Sunbeams were making their way through the heavy clouds on the day I was about to meet Lina, creating a yellowish light that revealed how dirty the suburbs of Belgrade actually are. I took the bus from the bus stop near the Sebes canal, a yellow bus, one of the many that we received as a donation from the government of Japan. I have always felt a peculiar ravishment for the public transport. To me these short transits through the urban landscape represent a moment for contemplation and some of my greatest poems are written on the bus line 95.

Despite being officially resident in Sweden, I perceive every arrival to Belgrade as a feeling of coming home. I do not feel as a tourist in my city. On the contrary I feel a great solidarity with my fellow Belgradians. Yet the closeness I feel to the people surrounding me in the crowded public transport is furrowed by one important deviance. I am the owner of a passport that can take me out from this messy post-socialist jungle whenever I wish for it. Nevertheless, there is a specific feeling of intimacy that I perceive during every bus ride in Belgrade. It is a zone for meeting glances, a space where we chitchat with strangers and jump up readily to leave our seats for pregnant women, children, old people and others that need them more than we do.

On that particular day, when I met Lina, there was a little Roma boy who sang for us at the bus. Accompanied by a man who played the accordion, he mesmerised me with his thin voice and every tone in minor carved into my heart like a knife. I imagined that he was around six years old, just like my niece Melinda, and I could not keep my tears from falling. When he finished his melody, everyone gave him a part from whatever amount of money they had in their pockets. Perhaps they all felt the same pain as I did.

Lina’s red lipstick reflected her vigorous personality. She comes from a family of mixed Yugoslav ethnicities and grew up in Belgrade. While she graduated in biology she never worked in that field. Instead she became a journalist and published many texts that were highlighting issues related to feminism. In the 1980’s Lina started organising feminist panel discussions in the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade with a group of other women that carried the same interest in feminist issues as she did. During the 1990s she was defying and protesting against the nationalism and war together with her feminist allies. She was also one of the founders of the feminist party Zenska stranka – ZEST. Today, however, she claims that here activism is mainly focused on spreading the word and telling the history of the feminist movement in Yugoslavia.
4.2.3 Staša Zajović

When I met Staša it was raining. Her habitual familiarity and vibrant energy was invigorating as always. During the period that I did an internship in Belgrade I was introduced to Staša at a street action against violence against women. She is the kind of woman with whom you feel a strong and solidary sisterhood taking shape right at the very first handshake.

Staša is the leader of the Serbian branch of the feminist organisation Women in Black. She comes from a small city in Montenegro but moved to Belgrade in her youth to study. Her leftist activist passion comes from her childhood environment constituted by people who fought in the anti-fascist struggle. When she moved to Belgrade, she became active in the leftist dissident groups at the university. As one of the founders of the Serbian group Women in Black, she was a strong opponent of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and her struggle continues up to the present day to be centred around the tremendous injustices brought about by the armed conflicts.

After the interview with Staša, I took the bus to Novi Beograd. Novi Beograd is a strange place. It is a forest of massive, grey, square-formed concrete buildings that seems to have been invaded by foreign invertebrates. Amidst all the landmarks of socialist modernism, Western European banks and corporations are sprouting on every corner.

4.2.4 Sofija Trivunac

The 14th of March was the day I met Sofija. After surviving a traffic jam with the bus on the Pancevo bridge and in the street 29th of November4, I took a taxi from the Square of the republic to Slavija. In the navy-blue Mercedes, an oversized cross was dangling from the rear-view mirror and I caught myself being surprised when the muscular and tattooed driver addressed me with a friendly tone.

Sofija has a cordial aura surrounding her, an energy that made me feel at home as soon as I entered her office. She is working as a psychologist, particularly focused on therapy for women. In contrast to the other women I interviewed, Sofija has lived abroad for a very long time. When the war started in the beginning of the 1990s she got an opportunity to leave Yugoslavia and

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4 29 novembar (29th of November) was the name of the street Bulevar despota Stefana during socialist times. The 29th of November was the Republic Day of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and one of the most important national holidays. Although the name of the street has been changed into Bulevar despota Stefana, the name 29 novembar has remained widely used.
move to Cyprus, where she lived for a short period and collaborated with Cypriote feminists. Later Sofija moved to the United States, and stayed there for several years. She told me that she never found a place in the American feminist movement and that there seemed to have been a mutual lack of understanding between herself and the American feminists. Before leaving Yugoslavia, she opened the first practice in the country that offered a feminist influenced therapy. Furthermore, together with Lina, she was one of the main figures in the group organising feminist panel discussions in the Belgrade Student Cultural Centre in the 1980’s. During our conversation, she emphasised the importance of certain female characters from her family and the influence they have had on her formation of her feminist consciousness.

**4.3 Feminist Activism and the Initial Phase of Democratic Transition**

In articles and books that I received from my interviewees, I had the chance to read about the amazing feminist initiatives during the first period of democratic transition after the disruption of socialist Yugoslavia. The material shows that feminist activists were important actors in the development towards democratic policies. However, since their activities mainly took place in parallel political spheres, not in the official parliament or government for instance, they have remained neglected by scholars studying political transitions, that as mentioned are usually concerned with the political elites (Linde & Ekman 2006).

*Beogradski zenski lobi [The Belgrade Women's Lobby]* was formed as a feminist reaction against the many attempts in the Serbian federal parliament to authorize a legislation on family planning which was consistent with the nationalist ideology that was permeating the society in the beginning of the 1990s. The main activity of the lobby was public advocacy in terms of, among other things, organising protests, petitions, writing appeals to various political institutions and amendments to legislative documents. In the incipient democratic society, the women’s lobby argued that the political elite, that now was transforming into a multiparty body, remained a masculine and patriarchal force that excluded the life experiences of women. Therefore, a minimal program for women’s demands was formulated by the Belgrade Women’s Lobby. The document, that was written in 1991 included a distinct intersectional dimension as it was stated that *all experiences and all lives of women are important, that they (The Women’s Lobby) will work for the increase of women’s power in all dimensions of public and private formations of relations and for the expansion of solidarity between women that diverge on the
Apart from the Belgrade Women’s Lobby another interesting feminist political actor during that time was the women’s party Zensa stranka – ZEST [The Women’s Party – Zest]. The party formulated a political platform that took a clear stance towards the development of a democratic, green and social government. Moreover, the foundation of a feminist political party was an attempt to step out of the marginalised parallel political sphere in which the women’s movement always had acted. Instead, at this breaking point of the dissolution of communist rule all over Europe, a small group of women decided to enter the formal political space in order to affect the influence their own future and the path towards democracy (Cockburn 1991).

The Belgrade Women’s Lobby and the Women’s Party supported the formation of a parallel women’s parliament. While the lobby and the party mainly consisted of feminists from Belgrade, women from all over the country joined the women’s parliament (Liht & Drakulic 2017). Due to the almost non-existent representation of women in the official multiparty parliament, women recognised the need to form their own forum where their experiences and interests would be validated (Bozinovic & Marjanovic 1991; Liht & Drakulic 2017).

4.4 Professionalisation of Feminism and Neoliberal Fragmentation

A pattern in three of the four interviews emerged regarding the organisation of feminist resistance today. While only one of the interviewees claimed that she found contemporary Serbian feminism to be much better than it was before, all the other women complained about the nature of feminist activism today. More particularly, it was the structure of feminist activism that the women were particularly critical of. They argued that feminism had become a profession and that the NGO arrangement of different feminist groups had contributed to a fragmentation of feminism in Serbia. Nonetheless, even though they expressed deep concerns about these kinds of organisations they all emphasised their solidarity with women working with feminism in NGO’s. Although they were critical towards NGO-feminism, they all pointed out that due to the lack of job opportunities in Serbia it is understandable that women agree on a professionalization of feminism out of necessity. Nadežda expressed her concerns about NGO-feminism and explained that she had been against it from the very beginning.
When they started with nongovernmental organisations, I was against it. Actually, that was how the women’s movement was strangled. That is a method for putting the energy of the movement under control and now we have a heap of crumbled women’s organisations that are against each other. They are competing with each other for some small and miserable grants and we do not have a solidary women’s movement. Of course, most women did not agree with me as they saw an opportunity to get an employment in some women’s organisation. It is good that they exist because women can earn some money from feminism. However, women’s rights are poorly moved that way. It is a very cunning way for controlling the energy of change, the nongovernmental sector.  

A strong disapproval of the professionalisation of feminist activism was enunciated by Sofija, who was very critical towards the fact that Serbian feminism is dependent on foreign donations. Feminism has become a profession, and that is a tragedy. Just like it is a tragedy when health becomes profit oriented, when food becomes profit oriented, school becomes profit oriented, the society goes to hell. You know, when they make industrial food, it cannot be like food that is cooked. It’s the same with feminism, if you turn your natural need to struggle for an improvement of women’s lives, or the whole society, into a profession, then you are at the mercy of donors. Donors from Sweden, donors from this, donors from that..  

I understood their worries and I saw the potential problem in being dependent on foreign grants. Yet, as I have been active myself, through an internship, in one of the largest NGO’s in Serbia, namely the Autonomous Women’s Centre, I did not completely agree with the critical voices represented by my interviewees. Nevertheless, I did not confront them with my divergent opinions as I in the moment felt that it would be inadequate to interfere with their personal experience. In hindsight I wonder however, if it would have been fruitful to discuss our different perspectives and if this discussion could have contributed to more nuanced understandings of the organisation of contemporary feminist activism in Serbia.  

During my internship at the Centre I was given the opportunity to gain more insight into the local NGO sector. According to my experiences organisations such as the Autonomous Women’s Centre are doing an incredibly important job in the Serbian civil society and I would say that their work does have a great impact on the feminist struggle for women’s rights. I would for instance bring up the new legislation around violence against women that will be

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5 N4 – The combination of letters and numbers is a coding system for quotes that is there to help the reader find the original quote in Serbo-Croatian in the appendix. Original quotes in the appendix are marked with the same code as in the footnote.

6 S3
enforced from June 2017, as an example of how significant the work of the Autonomous Women’s Centre is. The legislation is more or less a result from their active lobbying and their many writings of amendments of the law.

Despite all the important work that is done in the feminist NGO sector, I nonetheless believe that the critique towards the professionalization of feminism formulated by the women I interviewed is highly important in an analysis of the intersections of feminism and post-socialist changes. Some of my interviewees expressed that they experience that the feminist movement in Serbia have become profit oriented and that the different feminist organisations are competing with each other for grants. It seems to me as if what they are describing are experiences of neoliberal infused strategies governing feminist activism. According to Larner (2002), critical approaches have failed to recognise the profound influences of neoliberalism in governance. She argues that a conformity to norms and rules of the market become instilled within institutions as well as among individuals through a certain kind of governance that neoliberalism engenders. A neoliberal governance, as a strategy of rule, is moreover found in almost every kind of societal institution (Larner 2000). Along with the elements of competition and profit orientation, another feature of neoliberalism is, according to Zygmunt Bauman (2002), a general state of social fragmentation, difference and plurality. Both Larner’s and Bauman’s ideas resonate with the interviewees’ experiences of the organisation and structure of feminist activism in Serbia today.

4.5 War and Feminism

Bombardovanje [the bombing]. I shiver every time someone utters that word. That is the war I remember. Those were the 78 days during which I cried myself to sleep every night, silently, paralysed by fear. It is unimaginable how devastating wars are for people, and I did not even have to lose someone dear to me, not during that war. Yet I lost my childish innocence and naivety. I suppose bloodshed has that effect on small human beings. The goose bumps on my back always reveal the haunting presence of it all. And whenever I pass the demolished buildings from the NATO-bombings in 1999 on the street Nemanjina, glimpses of children’s nightmares dance in front of my eyes, dreamt in Belgrade’s subterraneous bomb shelters. Bombardovanje.

Memories from the wars, both personal and inherited, seem to be something that is characteristic for people from this region. Moreover, according to my interviewees, the
common presence of war in the Balkans did not only leave us memories but has also affected women’s position in the family and in society as well as the feminist heritage in the region in peculiar ways. While feminist activism has to a large extent up to the present day been centred around resistance to war, women have according to the interviewees been both exploited and strengthened at the same time. In the next subchapter, I will discuss the interviewees’ experiences of the strengthening effects on women during wartime in more detail.

Historically the organisation of the women’s movement has been closely related to topics concerning the war. From the anti-fascist struggle and the formation of AFZ (Bozinovic 1996) to the more pacifist feminist approaches during the war in the 1990s. Although there is no ongoing armed conflict at the current moment in Yugoslavia, feminist organisations such as *Zene u Crnom* [*Women in Black*], are continuously working with pending injustices and atrocities committed during the many military and paramilitary offensives in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. Moreover, as the women accounted for in their stories, feminists in Belgrade organised themselves in aiding the refugees that fled from the regions affected by war in the 1990s.

Lina told me about her engagement in the feminist refugee aid but added that she nonetheless had some troubles with that particular way of organising feminist activism.

The war started and the refugees started arriving. […] I told them to register. They registered on my address and that kept me safe in a way. So, they could not do anything to us. Milosevic let us work, because we were so small. And that is why all of it could function.\(^7\)

Serving others, and taking care about refugees. I see it from another side, and I think it is a very sensitive issue. Because you enter a female role, and you care about the uncar. You know, you care about and attend to someone. Like my friend who is active in that now, she goes there and cleans for them. And I tell her, why are you cleaning? Give them brooms and they can clean themselves. I am absolutely for a political support of them and so on, but this…But some people just do not see where the problem lies. I see a problem in that patriarchal suit.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) L4
\(^8\) L5
Following a similar pattern of a dilemma deeply integrated into the feminist resistance, Staša expressed her thoughts about the feminists aiding the refugees and the more general role of women during the wartime in the 1990s.

Women in Serbia were the ones who undertook the greatest burden of sustaining not only the family economy but also the entire regime through their invisible and unpaid labour, buying up the social peace in their families. Engaging in smuggling they sustained the regime. And that is that big drama, we sustained, they sustained the regime. WE sustained the regime by going to the refugee camps. Because they were producing those victims, the victims that we were feeding.  

4.6 Strength, Courage and Adroitness are Words in the Feminine Gender

Apart from the courage shown by the feminist activists in their fierce protests against the war, my interviewees seemed to show a consensus about how women in general were affected by wartimes. That women demonstrated a lot of strength during the wars and that they might have even been strengthened by them was a recurring topic.

In some way, which is not the merit of the feminists, during these wars, that self-awareness was raised among women in general. Because men, especially in Serbia, were somehow humiliated, because that war was lost and experienced it in that way. So, they were grumbling, while there was an economic poverty in which women always manage to operate. They managed to make pita from nothing. They are managing, feeding and managing out of nothing. And somehow, I consider that they became stronger through that. Now it is up to you to see through your research if that is true.

Lina’s beliefs about the strengthening of women corresponded with what Nadežda said to me at the very end of our conversation: ‘Although all those wars brought with them so much pain and misery I think that they also brought out the best in women and that they made them stronger’.

In an intense depiction of the role of women during these times of hardship, Sofija stayed on a comparable track as the other interviewees. Moreover, she braided together the latest wars and

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9 SZ4
10 Pita is a pastry traditionally made with filo dough and various fillings. These pastries with their rich variety of fillings have many names and are integral parts of the Balkan, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines.
11 L6
the immense suffering that was as result of a deep economic crisis and sanctions imposed on
the country by the international community with the difficult situation of today.

Women were heroines, since time immemorial until today, who carried on their
backs, in Serbia and in the whole Yugoslavia, but especially in Serbia and in
Bosnia, where there were bombings, hunger and sanctions. They carried that
misery and all those wars on their backs here. Ordinary women, who worked three
jobs, laundered, went from house to house. I know women who are highly
educated and who wash other people’s underwear so that their children can
survive. That is how it is, the misery is huge, they do not have anything to eat or
they have enough for a very small amount of food and so one. So it is one general
misery, and we are talking about the pride festival.. I mean, generations are
destroyed with these bombings, generations. Do you know how big the percentage
of cancer is here, it is unthinkable. And of course, most of them are young women,
who die like flies. And men who cannot, who lack, their sperms do not work. And
nobody wants to say that it is from the bombings.\(^{12}\)

4.7 Controversy Around the Word Movement

Lina said to me at one point during our conversation that the very word ‘movement’ is in fact
an inadequate expression for feminism within the Serbian context. The term, which I often used
when I talked about the feminist activism in Yugoslavia and Serbia during the interview and
which was an integral part of my very research question, has according to Lina been imported
from abroad and is not fit for describing feminist activism in Belgrade. According to Lina, it
was precisely because of the informal structure of the feminist resistance that they were able to
function freely in socialist Yugoslavia without any interference by the state.

We did this fantastic thing without even being aware of it. We didn’t have a
registered group so they did not know what to do with us or where to put us. It
was a completely anarchistic group, completely, without any leader, without any
structure, without any organisation, without a statute. In Zagreb they made an
association within the Sociological society, they created a feminist group. But
ours was absolutely completely informal. We did not have any head office, no
leader.\(^{13}\)

They could not catch us. As I told you, there was no movement, rather it was a
group. They never knew how many we were, and we were very few, our domain
was really small. As I recall, it was the panel discussions that we organised that
were the activities that attracted the greatest public, especially those about any
topic regarding sexuality and psychoanalysis. That really attracted an audience.

\(^{12}\) S4

\(^{13}\) L2
But there it was a maximum of one hundred and something people. So, you know, you cannot say how much but that was how the influence was spread.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, in my email correspondence with the famous Yugoslav author, filmmaker and feminist activist Jasmina Tešanović about the research topic, she told me that the word ‘movement’ is an ambitious word for the feminist activism what was happening in the field. Rather than talking about an organized group with a distinct structure, there seemed to have been a number of women who shared a passion for feminism and who, according to the stories some of them shared with me, worked relatively independently with different topics that they were interested in. Nonetheless, Staša, Nadežda and Sofija all used the word pokret, which is the Serbo-Croatian word for movement, in their interviews. I do not know if it was because I planted the word from the beginning by using it when presenting my research topic. A possible reason for the controversy around the use of the term might be that we have different understandings of what a ‘movement’ actually is.

Whether we decide to signify the feminist activism that took place in Yugoslavia as a movement or not, feminists felt the urge to organise themselves more actively in the early 1990s, as a reaction to the violent nationalist madness and the clericalization that was growing stronger. Although they were few, they showed a great amount of courage and solidarity with those that the nationalist regimes in cooperation with religious institutions required them to hate. Despite facing a lot of resistance and maltreatment they stood up for what they believed in.

It was in 1991, Vukovar was starting. And we stood in front of the house of parliament with banners and handed out some leaflets that we had made, while some minister of Vuk Draskovic came out to the rostrum, some Srbislav Milovanov, and he said: Some ladies have come here that want to make love instead of war. And I had, in spite of our agreement, written on a piece of paper that I held ‘Make love not war’. That was my slogan from 1986. And he continued “Let them go to Croatia where the police officers will rape them”. Look at the overturns he had, to him making love and rape was the same thing, police officers were rapists and we were ‘ladies’. I mean that is complete madness.\textsuperscript{15}

I think that women always were the more reasonable side of Serbia during all these wars. We were standing, they were spitting on us, teared up our banners, told us all kinds of things. But we endured it all, continued to stand up, even though we were few.\textsuperscript{16}
I will argue that Michel Foucault’s famous formulation ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (1990:95) is an interesting quote to bear in mind when one analyses social movements in totalitarian contexts such as the Yugoslav communist regime. As Lina was describing in the quote above, despite the surveillance and control executed by the state, the feminist group, as she prefers to call it, nevertheless found strategies to come around those obstacles.

4.8 ‘You think one thing, you do another and you say a third’ –

Discrepancies Between Ideals and Reality

I spent a lot of time discussing the current political, economic and social situation in Serbia with my interviewees. All my interviewees were pointing at the issue of an enormous discrepancy between an ideal model of society that is constantly reproduced in media and in formal political discourses and people’s actual perception about what life in Serbia entails. This discrepancy was according to all the interviewees a crucial aspect of the former socialist Yugoslav state and it is a pattern that seems to have remained intact as it is continuously discursively reproduced.

There are, to say the least, alarming tendencies in the media to construct a picture of Serbia that diverges considerably from what I, my interviewees and many of our friends perceive as the real state of affairs. While I was staying at my grandmother’s house during my fieldwork in Belgrade, I had the misfortune to be forced to listen to the news reports every morning on the regime friendly TV channel Pink, that my grandmother insisted on watching. It was during the period of time preceding the presidential elections and I was amazed every time by the vast amounts of inconsistent lies. Even my grandmother grew tired of seeing Mr Aleksandar Vučić’s face in every single report.

The gap between the ideal and people’s realities provoked feelings of anger in Staša, who recognised its implications for women. Moreover, at the core of her critique was the disappointment in the Yugoslav socialist state due to its inaction regarding the securing of women’s rights.

I always felt that fury, that fierce fury. Why did not socialism do more, with its legislation, its excellent legislation, why did it not do more in schools and
everywhere, through that party of theirs? That is why I always was angry. How was it possible that despite the possibilities and influence of their party, it was their party and not mine, nothing was done to change the patriarchal ideas about women? That was horrible, it was such a retraditionalisation already during socialism. Yet on the other hand it was hard to change those ideas because there was a huge discrepancy between the ideal and normative and the factual. That is the schizophrenia, the lie, the chasm that separates the legal and normative from what is real so utterly awfully to this day. And I think that the consequences of that are horrible. They teach you from an early age that what you say is not important, you do not have to do it at all, it does not matter. So, we had that saying, you think one thing, you do another and you say a third. That is one enormous lie, created and maintained until this very day. And that is a huge problem in this country.\(^{17}\)

Passionately and, similarly to Staša, with a considerate dose of anger, Lina was addressing the notion of a democratic system in Serbia and arguing for the inaccuracy of such an idea.

No, this system is nothing. This system has no idea of what it is, that is the thing. These are all post-war systems. That is when ordinary scum come to the surface and pieces of shit, I am sorry, emerge everywhere. That happened in all these countries, except for Macedonia while they had Kiro Gligorov, he was amazing. As soon as he left, a catastrophe. Those are post-war systems. No, there is no system. What is this? Is this a democracy? What is this? What bloody democracy? And then they say, “there you have your democracy”. Like my friend, who enjoyed socialism, “there you have your democracy”. But wait, do you think that this is democracy? It is not. It is just some kind of simulation. We do not have democracy now, especially not here.\(^{18}\)

4.8.1 The Gap Between Academic Knowledge and Reality

The different measurements of democracy and studies of democratisation that I mentioned in the chapter on previous research conducted within the field of comparative politics, have provided various rankings of Serbia such as a ‘free country’, a ‘semi-consolidated democracy’ and a ‘nation in transit’. What is the purpose of such measurements if they do not correspond to people’s lived experiences? If the results of these statistic inquiries diverge from real people’s realities perhaps the questions being asked and the methodological tools which are used in the quest for answers ought to be revised. Within decolonial research ethics, the importance of a critical stance towards methodology is highlighted as it encompasses the mechanisms with which the hegemonic position of the white political field is maintained (Decoloniality Europe 2013). I suggest a shift towards geopolitics and bod politic of knowledge as the basis for

\(^{17}\)SZ3

\(^{18}\) L3
knowledge production in order to challenge the discrepancies between academic constructions of knowledge and people’s realities.

Something that I constantly felt threatening our conversations and connections was my inclination to utilize pieces from my theoretical toolbox that I have acquired during my studies. It was yet another discrepancy, between words and reality, that I was guilty of trying to recreate. During the interview as well as when I in hindsight tried to interpret the transcribed interviews, the theoretical concepts that I had come to juggle with so comfortably suddenly felt heavy as anchors. Rather than facilitating my communication with the interviewees or enhancing my analysis the concepts became obstacles that I stumbled upon. Against the backdrop of their lives and their experiences of Serbian post-socialism, those concepts felt rather contrived. ‘What is even a transition?’ Lina exclaimed sarcastically during our conversation. ‘It’s one of those expressions that are used nowadays, such as “the western Balkans”’. According to Lina the use of those concepts is a ‘deliberate deception’ that serve to blur the difficult circumstances making up people’s realities and to hide a shared Yugoslav past.

4.8.2 Towards a Relearning of the Word ‘Transition’

In a discussion about the Serbian political and economic transition via email correspondence, Jasmina wrote to me at one point: ‘For years I have been calling this transition “a transition to nothing”’. She explained to me that the alleged ending point of our transition, the very social, political and economic system that we are desperately trying to achieve, is in fact something that is falling apart. ‘We are living in the globalisation of balkanisation’, she further wrote and argued that the global breakdown of the economic system in the whole world today requires a different kind of thinking. Moreover, she suggested that we should think together to try and find solutions to the problems we are facing today. Lastly, Jasmina concluded that women have a particular potential for dealing with difficult issues and for thinking and working collectively.

Women have always had a potential common platform in the world based on misogyny and sexism. Now all this is connected with the general crisis, so it is time for women to deal with general issues and to carry out the world out of crisis, both the moral and the material one.

A transition to nothing. As I was reading Jasmina’s words on the screen over and over again I felt how they were etching into my being. For some reason, that particular formulation appealed to me. Thinking about post-socialism as a transition to something that is ceasing to exist could
perhaps make us learn to unlearn (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2012) the traditional understanding of transition. Unlike the traditional definition of transition, as a change towards an on beforehand defined end (O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986), a transition to nothing has no terminus—or its terminus is nothing. I will argue that the discourse of transitology, within the studies of democratisation processes and comparative politics, is an example of what Mignolo and Tlostanova (2012) refer to as the rhetoric of modernity as it is centred around a human progress story in the direction of emancipation and truth. Jasmina’s idea sets off in another direction and could be used to enhance my definition of post-socialism. By situating post-socialism in a world that is not stable and in a global political system that is changing, we can go beyond the limiting thought structures of the conventional formulations and studies of transition. In a changing world, the post-socialist transition can become a possibility for us to imagine a future on our own terms.

4.9 Post-Socialist Emotions

Since I wanted to investigate the women’s experiences of life in Serbian post-socialism and since I understand human experience in a very wide form (Patton 2002) I asked all my interviewees to describe the emotional spectrum of life in the contemporary society. Fear, disgust and disappointment were some of the feelings named by my interviewees as connected to their experience of life in contemporary post-socialist Serbia. These emotions, that are perceived through their specific embodied location, appeared to be related to different dimensions of time. While being felt in the present they seemed intertwined with anticipation for the future and memories of and knowledge about the past.

Sofija stood out from the interviewees with her answer that reflected her zestful character. You know what, I am happy, I am overjoyed! I love to be here! I do not believe that people are made for perfection and that means that I prefer the chaotic situation here prior to the more orderly America. But perhaps that is nostalgia. Nevertheless, there is more freedom here than in America, I will tell you that. Despite the fact that we are a colony, and that we are plundered, humiliated, depressed and so on, there is still, on a personal level, more freedom here than in the most developed society. I absolutely stand behind that. And that is not only my impression. That is also the impression of my friends that have come back, and those who have not.19

19 S5
Despite the happiness Sofija felt over being back in Belgrade, she nevertheless stated that Serbia is a colony.

The other three answers I received showed less signs of optimism and cheerfulness. Lina gave me an answer that included a lot of worries about the current political situation yet also a small dose of hope.

Disgusting, disgusting. I mean, there really is no dignity. I really deeply feel that fear. Our lives changed drastically with the arrival of Milosevic. Simply our personal lives were changed, politics crept into our personal lives. It became the primary topic in every kind of socialising interaction. So, when I now happen to find myself in a situation where it is spoken about something completely different, about art or philosophy, that takes me back to memories, to old memories, to the time until the middle of the 1980’s, until he came. I ended so many friendships during that time and then after that with these wars. Everything was collapsing. There were bloody strives in the society. And not to mention the current situation. I really see, I feel that danger so strongly, and I am not the only one, ask other people. I suppose that the younger generations are feeling rather hopeless. But I am interested in what the end for this guy will be (referring to Aleksandar Vučić), I would like to experience that. His end is not our end, and the question is what will happen after him. And how long he will, the longer he stays the more dangerous it will be I think. That is the question…

When Nadežda was faced with the same question, she expressed a disappointment in the current state of affairs by making connections to former Yugoslavia and her past.

Well you know, since I lived in a different system, it is devastating that we have come to this point. Somehow, something disappoints you every day, that is how it goes. It started in the 1990s with those wars that were horrible, we were unconscious of that we were creating wars, that we were the agent who was producing them, and that some idiots were making deals while real people were dying, children that we knew. And then all the rights we lost, because on that general level of egalitarianism women here had really strong rights. I am not saying that all those rights were used but at least no one could insult you in public. No one could place sexist stories in media. All of a sudden that emerged here. The laws started to degrade women. Suddenly the law about habitation that took away from women their rights, because while we had the tenancy right you could only share that tenancy right with your husband, but with the change of the law, when in most cases he became the owner of the flat, he could kick you out without having to face any consequences after it. I mean there were differences in the wages but you could also protest about that. But not anymore, it became normal to give a woman a much lower wage than a man. And then all the rights related to childbirth began to be subverted and suddenly the church appeared there with
its antics and the patriarch and all the others. I think that the women’s movement played a very important role there, we did not give in there, and we were standing with banners under the patriarch’s window. He was watching from above and it was written ‘less church more contraception’ and the girl holding it was a real beauty haha.  

What I found particularly interesting in Staša’s reply was the connection she made between intersecting power relations on local and global levels. Nonetheless, her reply also touched upon some feelings of concern and distress that I many times have felt myself about the global political processes shaping our present time.

Oh, I do not know… I have this awful feeling because I live in a society that is mired in the disavowal of crime, that is the problem for me. I am less interested in that post-socialist, but for me the hard thing is that I live in a society in which war criminals are celebrated, in which the suffering of others is not acknowledged, in which there is no space for others, that is hard for me. Because those are some other people that dreamt about socialism. The women of Srebrenica in Bosnia dreamt about socialism and they believed in it until the very last moment, much more than I did, they believed, because they did not know. But yes, it is a society that seems to not have any space for others, for compassion, for solidarity. That is what scares me the most. I am scared, when I go to the hangars (the place in Belgrade where refugees are taking shelter) and our people are not there, only foreigners. That scares me.

I feel demeaned by racism. I have a huge problem with that, with racism against these people (refugees), or against Roma people. It was less during socialism, but it always existed. It always existed, it always existed. And that demeans me. And to be honest, whether we are talking about a capitalist or a socialist mode of production is not important. Because socialism was not socialism.

It is shameful that post-socialist countries are so anti-Semitic, that they are so racist, that they are so defiled in clero-fascism. Today they take pride in that Poland has only one refugee, and they hate all refugees. Hungary! Bulgaria, that is killing them. That is post-socialism and that is humiliating to me, that whole block. It is absolutely awful. And that is what frightens me the most. Racism in Europe is what frightens me the most. When I see Mari Le Pen, Wilders, Orban, Vučić, that is what frightens me. Because that is the Hitlerian, that is that Europe, that is the Europe which led to concentration camps. That is what I am afraid of. I am awfully afraid. Or when I see Swedes talking about a master race, or those Finns. So that is fascism, that fear of these people arriving from the Middle East. Why? Allegedly they cannot integrate them. Can you imagine that the European Union cannot take in 5 million people? Can you imagine that racist panic? And they can, they have money for it, when they can spend so much money on these
external borders. Oh, how much they spend and then they come and tell me that they do not have. They have money, but it is racism. Racism.  

4.9.1 Reflections on Racism and European Politics

Staša was talking about one of the most alarming features of our contemporary world. She also denounced at another point during our conversation that while the European Union is closing its borders for refugees they are at the same time giving money to Serbia that are meant to be used for maintaining the refugees that are currently situated there. By doing that, it is almost as if the European Union is making Serbia into something resembling buffer zone, a concept used in several different contexts, such as the military and in preservation of world heritages. In UNESCO’s World Heritage Papers from 2008, a buffer zone is defined as an area that is surrounding a site that needs to be protected from negative influences such as human encroachment (Martin & Piatti 2008). Furthermore, it is stated in the same report that the buffer zone in itself is not of outstanding universal value (Mürner 2008: 12) and that it should be understood as a tool envisioned to obstruct change of a cultural or natural space (Martin & Piatti 2008). The buffer zone becomes a metaphor for the role Serbia has been ascribed by the European Union in a global context where migration waves from the Middle East are arriving at the shores of Europe. Serbia is bordered by four member states of the European Union: Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Croatia. All of these neighbouring European countries have shown an explicitly negative political stance towards the refugees from the Middle East (Frej 2015; Cruickshank 2016; Milekić 2016) as is also explained by Staša. Thus, the purpose of the financing by the European Union of the maintenance of refugees in Serbia and the simultaneous funding of the erection of fences and the implementation of rigorous border control could be assumed to be to keep the migrants away from Europe. I imagine the creation of Serbia as a buffer zone as a manifestation of a racist panic to protect the European cultural heritage from human encroachment in the shape of Syrian refugees.

What has been described by some scholars from the ex-Yugoslav region as a never ending process of transition (Horvat & Stiks 2014) seems consistent with the metaphor of a buffer zone because it is referring to a prolonged state of in-betweeness. Zygmunt Bauman wrote that the core of power is the right to define with authority (Bauman 2002: 250). Thus, I will argue, that we need to critically examine who is in the position of defining Serbia’s progress in the clearly specified path towards democracy and a ‘free’ neoliberal market and who has the right to keep

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22 szs
the country’s limbo position intact. Naturally, the European Union, appears as one particularly powerful actor due to its exclusive right to grant or deny a country membership in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria.

With reference to decolonial critique of academic knowledge production, I will argue that it is equally important to scrutinise the field of political science and its privileged position and monopolisation of the political (Decoloniality Europe 2013). The teleological privilege of western academic knowledge production is particularly relevant to emphasise here as it refers to the power to control the politics in terms of defining what is a realistic and achievable future. On these premises, it can be assumed that the politics of the European Union and the construction of knowledge within academic fields such as political science are closely interlinked.

4.10 Diverging Ways of Relating to the Socialist Past

Adams, Murphy and Clark (2009) argue that a defining feature of our contemporary life is a particular form of anticipation and an orientation towards the future. Interestingly, when my interviewees were asked to describe the present situation in Serbia and how it feels to live in that very society their answers indicated orientations to the past rather than towards the future. Perhaps Yugonostalgia as well as the more general orientation towards the past occur precisely because of hegemonic discourses such as transitology, in which the future is already known and fixed. The neoliberal ‘end of history’, that is deeply embedded in the very way our post-socialist transition is conceptualised, has become just another historical determinism that have replaced our socialist one. When you are deprived of the right to create your own future maybe a resort to the past becomes a natural option. Despite the many attempts to regulate the history of Yugoslavia through historical revisions, our memories are difficult to control. So, while our future is stolen, the past becomes a sphere in which the post-socialist subject still has some power to think, interpret and define.

I have always found extreme forms of Yugo-nostalgia very suspicious. Although I many times have found myself guilty of indulging in a strange retrospective longing to a home that in fact never was mine. A melody, a poem, a taste or a smell can suddenly become a portal to a different time-space, to a somewhere and sometime in Yugoslavia. I grew up in a Yugo-nostalgic home, as probably many other children in the diaspora did. Being used to identify Yugoslavia with
freedom, I remember how shocked I was when my mother told me, quite recently, about the story when my uncle many years ago in Socialist Yugoslavia was arrested and beaten by the police for being at the wrong place in the wrong time. The story goes on with that my uncle in desperation and panic started singing out loud a socialist song about Tito upon which the police officers stopped beating him. I asked my mother why she never had told me that story before. I don’t know, she answered.

This is in a way a manifestation of my suspicion towards such nostalgic narratives. Unfortunately, I believe that they often represent romanticised and simplified versions of a very complex past, that rather contribute to a repainting of the world in new dichotomies. Having said that I furthermore want to emphasise, that I do not claim that such narratives do not deserve our attention. On the contrary, I put a lot of significance in personal accounts and experiences of the past and I will argue that they are of utter importance for understanding our contemporaneity. Yet I suggest a higher dose of self-reflexivity and a power critical approach in those historical projections.

The shadow of Yugoslavia seemed to be constantly present in the conversations with the interviewees. Even when specifically asked to describe the contemporary situation in the Serbia, it was there, embroidered into the fabric of their everyday lives. Yet I never had the feeling of it being misplaced. On the contrary it felt obvious and very relevant for an analysis of the present. However, while our perception of post-socialism is partly constituted by specific relations to the past, the nature of these relations varies of course due to our different synergies of intersecting power differentials and identity markers such as gender, age, class, academic background, ethnicity etc. This is where intersectionality appears as a tool to make sense of those experiences stemming from complex synergies of identities and their relation to privileges and disadvantages (Lykke 2010).

All of the interviewees recognised the meaning of being a woman in a patriarchal society and how it had brought them all to struggle for feminist change. Another important aspect we discussed was the meaning of having an employment as it seemed to have had an impact on the way they related to the socialist past in terms of whether or not they experienced that they had gained any benefits from the socialist state. Interestingly, the employment question was in their stories not standardised as a class issue, since as they explained, one could come from a high-income family and be well educated and still not have a job. Unemployment in the former
socialist state could according to my interviewees be a result of an unwillingness to join the party Savez komunista Jugoslavije or of a lack of contacts (which were often attained through the party). Nonetheless, I find it important to emphasise that my interviewees and I agreed of that being unemployed in present day Serbia is very often a consequence of similar structures of nepotism as the ones that existed during state socialism.

My interviewees described a sensibility towards othering and an awareness of how identity politics might harm people associated with or ascribed identities that deviate from the norm. Through their accounts of their backgrounds and childhood environments they all brought up examples of being Othered, ostracised or just having felt different. Mixed ethnic backgrounds, deviating accents and diverging cultural belongings were described as the foundation for the cultural racism or simply the sentiments of belonging to a group distinct from the norm that they had experienced in Serbia. According to Bakic-Hayden (1999), racism in the Yugoslav region have been translated into ethnicity and formed an internal hierarchy based on the different religions that act as separating indicators of different ethnic groups in the region. Apart from the Roma population, which is one of the most discriminated groups in our societies, Serbia and the rest of the former Yugoslav states are predominantly white spaces. Yet this whiteness needs to be problematized with the insights provided by my interviewees and scholars such as Bakic-Hayden. Despite the seemingly homogenous features of the ex-Yugoslav region in terms of colour, I will argue, in line with my interviewees and Bakic-Hayden, that racism does indeed exist. Its colourless nature makes it however different and maybe at first glance harder to detect than in many colonial and post-colonial contexts. Yet it is nevertheless there, always intersecting with other dimensions such as religion, class and ethnicity.

The imperial legacies from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires have nevertheless left their marks in the socio-political landscape of the space that once constituted Yugoslavia (Bakic-Hayden 1999). Yet, since it is a region that has no history of colonialism, the trajectories of racist power relations differ from the ones formed in an American context for example. Thus, when applying racism as a concept to name and discuss a certain kind of oppression within a Serbian context one must bear in mind that the ontological and epistemological foundations of that very notion might differ from western and post-colonial contexts.

4.11 Critique Towards Western Interventions
From the beginning of this research process I have been interested in the relation between East and West. More particularly, between what has been constructed as the first and second world according to the old cold war metageography which, as I have argued elsewhere, is still relevant. Thus, I was searching for elements in the interviews that would provide me with a deeper understanding of connections between these two geopolitical regions. In the encounters and conversations with the women I found signs of a perceived western ignorance towards their life and their reality that could be found in their stories. While bringing up a recollection from a feminist conference preceding the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia in 1999, Nadežda described how she confronted an American woman who had come to the conference to plead for the necessity to bomb Yugoslavia (the region that is present day Serbia). Apart from urging for NATO bombings, Nadežda asserted that the American lady delivered a speech at the conference that was full of historically incorrect features.

So, I stopped her, and gave her the Women for Women pamphlet in English that we had made, the protests that the Belgrade feminists had made. And I told her, I am not going to comment on everything that was incorrect in your presentation but there were so many mistakes, even a high school teacher at our place would never make such mistakes. And just so you know, about the conclusion you made, if bombs will be falling over Belgrade tomorrow, they will be falling on the women that made this pamphlet as well.23

Sofija shared with me the frustration she felt while she was living in America when her fellow American citizens totally lacked any knowledge about the context she originated from.

They were all shocked when I told them that we had feminism or when I told them we had one year paid maternity leave and three years if your child is sick. When I told them that I always had had paid vacation. They did not believe it, they thought I was some agent that was there to tell them something about socialism.24

Being a border person myself, I recognize Sofija’s remark as I have experienced similar situations within my Swedish environment. However, I would add that according to my personal experience simplistic understandings of foreign contexts exists also on a general level in Serbia.

23 N1
24 S1
Nadežda was also critical towards western interventions in the region. In an account of a peace conference she attended during the war, she told me how she remembered how Western European and American feminist and peace activists organized several meetings and workshops with the idea that they were bringing peace to the war-torn Yugoslavia. This instructional mentality was, according to Nadežda, highly problematic.

The American women imagined that they were the ones who brought peace to the region of former Yugoslavia. They did not bring peace. My experience was that whenever foreign women came with a thesis, or called upon us with a thesis, that did not succeed.  

You cannot interfere in something that has a long history. Then you will be an elephant in a glass shop. You have to listen, that is the only way, to listen. And people have to find their way themselves. Because only that way can bring you somewhere. Some gentle guidance can be given, like we did it this way and they did it that way. But nothing by force. It is not working by force.

Nadežda seems to have recognised that the teleological privilege in the shape of the Western peace makers arriving with a hypothesis about the right way to solve an issue in the Balkans is highly problematic as it is may be in conflict with the perspectives and realities of the people inhabiting the region. What she moreover argues for is precisely a shift towards bodypolitics and geopolitics of knowledge by giving the right to knowing subjects of a certain region to decide their future themselves.

Furthermore, Staša told me about her worries concerning the politics of the European Union and their support for the current regime and Aleksandar Vučić who was Serbia’s prime minister at the time the interview was conducted. Moreover, on the one hand she argues that the foreign and economic policy of the European Union is harmful for Serbia but on the other she highlights that the very same Europe is our only possibility. This shows an understanding of the relation between Serbia and the European Union as highly complex and versatile.

I want to say that the politics of the European Union is highly dangerous for Europe and for the Balkans, I have to say that it really is on the highest level of concern. On the one hand that is our only possibility, I have to believe that it is a possibility. But with this kind of politics and incompetence of the European Union, I mean of the European bureaucracy who has sold out everything, it is

25 N5
26 N6
absolutely awful. And they totally support the regimes here in the Balkans in their worst moves. Vučić could kill us all, they would absolutely not care at all.27

I share with Staša similar feelings of unrest and I am deeply worried about the negligence of what I and many with me consider to be a regressive political development in Serbia. Swedish media coverage of the protests against Aleksandar Vučić and the democratic deficit that are taking place every day in Belgrade and other Serbian cities is minimal and some information in the few articles I find is insultingly erroneous. In an article in the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter it is stated that the group of protesters consists mainly of ‘EU-hugging liberals’ but also of ‘hard line Serb-nationalists’ (Nevéus 2017). As a passionate dissident of Vučić’s regime who identify neither as a EU-hugging liberal nor as hard line Serb-nationalist and who supports the protests, albeit not being able to join them physically, I personally feel very offended by such a report of the events. Every day, at six o’clock, my heart travels to Belgrade to walk with the thousands of students, workers, policemen, teachers and pensioners who simply have had enough of the everyday violence and empty promises about democracy.

4.11.1 A Brick in the Game of International Politics

The discussion on Serbia’s relation to the European Union presented in the earlier subchapter Post-Socialist Emotions resonates moreover with Suchland’s approach to post-socialism as situated both within and outside of the global (2015: 11). While the post-socialist transition intersects with the everyday life and struggles of subjects in actual post-socialist regions such as Serbia, it also seems to be part of a global system of power relations. This particular situation requires us to ask questions about what kind of challenges this entails for the feminist movement in Serbia today. I noticed disputing elements in the stories of my interviewees regarding the issue of global migration waves for instance. While Staša, who is very engaged herself in the activism and initiatives for refugee aid in Serbia, is of the opinion that one of the integral tasks of feminism is care for others, Lina on the other hand found this stance highly problematic. Although both Staša and Lina agree on that the refugees should be given political support, the discord seem to be centred around how and to what extent feminists should be involved in this struggle. As mentioned in a previous subchapter, according to Lina, the problem lies in that the traditional female role is reproduced through the care-work performed in the refugee aid, whereas Staša argues that care is in fact an essential feature of feminism.

27 SZ1
What I furthermore find interesting is that my interviewees experience that Serbia has a given role in the international political arena, that is a brick serving a specific purpose in the game of international politics.

So many rights were lost. Because you see, what is happening, all that foreign capital that comes in to the country, which is the only one that employs people since everything here is destroyed, partly due to the bombings and partly due to the demands that were set by the International Monetary Fund and other financial institutions, to shut down factories and so on. So those that are coming here, they do not come with an abundance of human rights and with worker’s rights. Rather they come here precisely because there are no guaranteed worker’s rights and because they can extort. Because something that they have to pay one thousand and something euros for in their countries they can get here for three hundred. But over who’s back? Over the backs of the workers who will barely survive, together with their families, from the money they get. And on top of that they should be grateful for having a job, because most people do not. Fantastic factories were shut down here, that worked perfectly well, that had a market, that had a good quality and so on. Here the Demokratska stranka [The Democratic Party] have a lot to be blamed for. A lot of concessions were made for foreign capital and there are corruptive stories behind all that. And it will take a long time before the workers arrive at the point they were at before Yugoslavia fell apart, in terms of some guaranteed rights. All the rights subsided, starting from the rights to health, to education and so on.

I frequently hear stories about factory workers that go several months without receiving their wages. The other day on the television they reported on the news that a man, who was working in a foreign owned factory, had committed suicide as a consequence of the high emotional and psychological pressure his financial situation was causing. Similar to Nadežda, Sofija also expressed something that to me sounded like a trace of an experience of living in a country that is being exploited by more powerful political and economic entities. As it was phrased in one of the sections above, Sofija stated that Serbia today is a colony. Moreover, Staša pointed out that the European Union is supporting the corrupt, nationalist and racist regimes of the ex-Yugoslav republic and that they are making those political elites into vassals through so called mechanisms for European integration. She moreover argued that the European Union is letting these regimes, as far as they collaborate uncritically, do whatever they want with the people living under their rule.

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28 N8
I will argue that we cannot really talk about a democratisation process today without having in mind the intertwinement of political change and the economic transition. This is evident in the case of Serbia and other post-socialist countries, where the end of their transition is explicitly formulated in the Copenhagen Criteria that include political as well as economic preconditions for accession. The political power of the European Union is thus inseparable from the global flows of capital and it reverberate with the idea formulated by Larner (2000) that neoliberalism has become foundational for every strategy of rule. Also the testimonies of my interviewees show an understanding of the neo-colonial patterns of domination and exploitation as following the logic of capital.

4.12 Traces of Pre-Socialist Times

Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008) argue that in order to avoid a simplistic and deterministic representation of post-socialism one ought to bear in mind the complex and unique historical trajectories of all the different areas in which state socialism was imposed. Moreover, they argue that the pre-socialist legacies as well as the different experiences of the socialist period have a great impact on how post-socialism is perceived. In some sections of the interviews, particularly in the women’s accounts of their backgrounds and family histories, I encountered glimpses from pre-socialist times. Sofija’s story for instance, revealed traces of a turbulent past and patterns of migration.

My mother was an immigrant. While she was born in Serbia her family were Greek refugees who flew from the genocide in Asia Minor, present day Turkey. It was the time when the Armenian genocide took place, at the same time there was a Greek one. And then my grandfather was mobilised to the Turkish army to fight against the Albanians, always the same story. So then he flew to Serbia, because he was Christian orthodox and because Serbia was independent from Turkey. Then he brought my grandmother here. And she had five children and millions of pregnancies. It was a painful story, a lot of wars, a lot of prison, a lot of everything. But they were immigrants, and they were Turkish citizens for a very long time. And every time there was an outbreak of Balkan wars my grandfather was arrested, removed and what do I know…until it was regulated somehow. And during the second world war two of his children were in war.29

Also Staša talked to me about a past affected by wartime, but the focus of her recollections was more on an anti-fascist struggle and the implications of socialism for women’s emancipation.

29 S2
That was my Yugoslavia, not the state, not the army, not the party, nothing. But the Yugoslavia of those people who had the deepest faith in that a new world would be created. A just, solidary and international world. Those were ordinary people to whom that meant a lot, ordinary people, men and women. Because women from a feudal and extremely patriarchal environment, such as the women from Montenegro that I was surrounded by, my aunts and grandmothers, they all took it very seriously. They took it very seriously that a new era had come, and they thought that the Anti-Fascist Front for Women was an important space. They were devastated when AFZ was abolished. So for them socialism was not the party nor the army. Nor was it some kind of winning of some position in society. Rather it was a change of themselves, changes in the family relations, changes in their experience and notion of themselves, the idea that they did not have to marry if they did not want to and that they could work. I think that was the most important thing, women in the world of labour, that they had their autonomy in movement. Those are the type of women that influenced me very strongly.30

My own family history resonated with the stories these women shared with me and I merged with them in feelings of recognition. Nadežda Todorovic, my maternal grandmother and one of the most important women in my life, grew up on the countryside in southern Serbia. Being a child during World War II she remembered how the Bulgarians came and raided her village and teared her family’s house down. She was also a child during a time when her father had the right to deny her the right to go to school, and thus she remained illiterate all her life. For my grandmother, socialism meant a possibility to leave the family farm and the village, a possibility to go to work and to meet other women. It meant an opportunity to move to Sweden with the great wave of labour emigration from former Yugoslavia. Just like Staša, I recognise the importance of women such as my grandmother for my own feminist struggle and for the very formation of my character. During my happy childhood, she taught me an abundance of important things about life, among other things the significance of economic independence and education for women.

Historical narratives constructed within Western knowledge production are often based on simplistic understandings of human differences. These differences are moreover translated into oppositional structures such as superior and inferior or good and bad. Due to a lack of adequate strategies for dealing with those issues people are rather taught to respond to differences with feelings of disgust and fear (Lorde 1984). The sensational stories, covered by various western scholars and journalists, about atrocities that were performed during the war in Yugoslavia (Slapšak 2012) surely evoked such reactions among their readers and to further classifications

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of people from the Balkans as inherently bad and violent (Todorova 2009). I too feel disgusted by the crimes committed in the name of the nation and by the wide support the perpetrators had among the public. But rather than ascribing their actions to inferiority I see historical patterns of powers that play on people’s deepest fears.

While I will refrain from presenting any universal explanation for why the Balkans as a geopolitical region has been ravaged by war so often throughout history I do have an intention to discuss some ideas around it. Rather than ignoring the fact that it is indeed a region with a turbulent history and leaving it for simplistic and stigmatizing interpretations I wish to problematize this heritage with a greater sensitivity for the geopolitical and geohistorical context. Bakic-Hayden (1999) argues that regions such as the Balkans, that are geographically positioned in the borderland of different imperial powers, are particularly sensitive towards radical societal changes. The frequent reappearance of war within the geo-political region of former Yugoslavia seem to have left marks on us all. I feel them on my own body and I could sense them in the stories that my interviewees shared with me. Fear and hope fuel political reaction (Adams et al. 2009). The fear that has been deeply ingrained in every pore through war memories, both personal and those inherited by family members, is certainly crucial for grasping the course of history but also for understanding the motives behind political activism. Moreover, the relatively recent presence of war in the ex-Yugoslav context is an important aspect that differentiate the context from many other post-socialist ones.

4.13 The Term Post-Socialism and its Relevance

During the interviews, where the Serbian feminists were asked to talk about post-socialism and post-socialist feminism, I found it interesting that the very term ‘post-socialism’ was only used once by one of the interviewees. As I know that the concept is used widely within academic feminism, I wonder whether the lack of usage of the word among my informants could indicate a divergence between feminist theory and feminist activism. The controversy around the word post-socialism put me in dilemma. My intention to examine the lived experiences of my interviewees and my point of departure in geopolitics and bodypolitics of knowledge is perhaps irreconcilable with my insistence of the utilisation of the term post-socialism as the interviewees themselves did not use it.
Other terminologies such as ‘post-war system’ [post-ratni sistem] was used at some occasions. ‘During Milosevic’ [za vreme Milosevica] was a common term that was used by several interviewees when they referred to the period when Milosevic’s regime was leading Yugoslavia. The term ‘the 90s’ was also frequently used. I find it important to clarify that ‘the 90s [devedesete] carries a specific connotation within the Serbian context. When someone utters the same word in Swedish ‘nittotalet’ my body tends to react in a completely different way. However, when pronounced in Serbo-Croatian the 90s is a notion that contains memories of a burdensome period of our shared history. There seem to be a collective consensus about that it was a time in our lives where chains of nationalism, war, criminality, sanctions, poverty, instability and separation weighed heavily around our necks.

Despite the inconsistencies between my preference of the concept and the dismissal of it among my interviewees I nonetheless find post-socialism a useful tool to engage in a theoretical discussion about the blurred lines, contradictions and ambivalence that permeate our contemporaneity. However, I want to emphasise that it is indeed a concept that have been brought into this context constituting this particular research process from my own perception of the world. As such, post-socialism should be conceptualised as a landmark of my geopolitics and bodypolitics of knowledge.

4.14 What is Our Alternative?

As Iveković (2005) have argued, it is not only the post-socialist world that is undergoing or has undergone a transition, but the complete world system has in fact changed from a bipolar world to something else. Yet in that seemingly rigid bipolar system there appeared to exist possibilities for a different option. To me the non-alignment movement that Yugoslavia was a member of, with its clear anti-colonial and pro-peace ambitions represented to some extent such a different option. How can we build an alternative path today? That is a question yet to be explored. It is moreover a question that might open up a possibility for a decolonial option. Without claiming to know the answer of the question I do dare to claim that in a globalised world coalitions need to be formed in order to sustain such a project. In line with Jasmina Tešanović’s argument, that I mentioned earlier, I believe that our globalised system requires us to think together. Perhaps the strong regional cooperation of the Yugoslav feminist movement with its international ties could serve as a source of inspiration.
By the end of the interview with Staša, she arrived at several questions that she saw as some of the most pressing issues today and as some of the major challenges for the feminist movement in Serbia today.

There is one thing that I find utterly concerning. How should we establish a bond of trust with women that are victims of the most terrible form of exploitation? How should we encourage them and help them to find a way out from that enslavement? What alternative should we offer them? It is not about that I have a notion about how workers should be, I am also from a working class family and I know what it is about. But how should they be emboldened to speak up, to not be so afraid? How can we help them to carve out that space for themselves? It is so hard, because they are completely extorted, by poverty, by state terror and by multinational corporations. [...] How will that workforce, which is not a working class workforce, how will that enslaved workforce lift up their heads. What should I offer them? What should I tell them? To go on a strike? What should I do? I am interested in how we can create those small oases that will allocate trust and strength. I need to listen to them to find out what is happening, to those enslaved working women. What is that is making them so terribly inert, so terribly frightened? 

Interestingly, Staša explicitly chooses the terms enslaved workforce to refer to the women that are subjugated by the political, social and economic system impregnating the Serbian society today. Staša’s questions about how to encourage women to step out from enslavement and what alternative that step should be towards is a highly complex matter. It is complex, because what we are dealing with is a matrix of dominance that is made out of intersecting power relations that flow between different spheres such as politics, religion, families, geographies, that all are in confluence within a neoliberal market economy.

5 Conclusions

This thesis began to take form as a reaction to the academic knowledge produced about the geopolitical region of Serbia that I have encountered during my studies in political science. More particularly, my concerns were centred around the limiting theoretical approaches to the post-socialist transition and the negligence of women’s and feminist’s roles during democratisation processes. Additionally, the thesis developed further with decolonial tools for critique that helped me recognise the foundational pillars protecting white privilege within

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knowledge production and politics. In order to challenge the power relations created from the hegemony of the white Western European perspective I aimed at turning to local and embodied knowledges, by interviewing Serbian feminist activists, instead of refuelling the hubris of the zero point.

Throughout the thesis, I have tried to situate myself in relation to the topics investigated. This has been an integral part in my contestation of the positivist research ideal that I have argued is foundational for the hegemonic academic discourse on post-socialist transitions. Furthermore, by braiding my own story with the experiences of Serbian feminists, I have aimed to challenge the privilege of epistemic perspective, in a quest for knowledge about Serbian post-socialism and its intersections with feminist activism. By letting marginalised perspectives define their own experiences of the features of post-socialism and its implications for women and feminism, I have also worked against the ontological privilege of Western research.

The stories my interviewees shared with me indicate deep concerns about the present situation in Serbia. I will argue that it is about time that the lamentations, fears and the desperation, found among post-socialist subjects, are taken seriously. Grand narratives of western progress stories can not longer be used to mask or justify the hardships on the way towards the asserted end station of the post-socialist transition. Against the backdrop of the difficulties of our contemporaneity, the teleological privilege of Western research, in terms of its self-proclaimed right to define our course of transition as the only viable option, could and should be questioned.

A general misery and a democratic deficit have been detected by my interviewees and myself as some of the greatest socio-political challenges in post-socialist Serbia. At the same time, the feminist struggle for finding an alternative to the alarming situation seems to be impeded in a system where the future is already written. At several points in the thesis, I have emphasised that the deterministic characteristics of the hegemonic theories about transitions muddy our vision and limit our anticipation of a different future scenario. Staša further defined this very issue as one of the most pressing tasks for feminist activists in Serbia today. She argued that we need to try to find an alternative to offer women, who constitute what she calls the enslaved workforce of contemporary Serbia.

Apart from bringing pain and suffering to Serbia, wartimes and poverty have, according to my interviewees, strengthened women in the region. However, some of them also argue that this
vital female energy is threatened by disunion in the feminist movement. Several interviewees experienced a professionalization and fragmentation of feminism in Serbia as serious problems endangering the political influence of feminist activism and making the feminist movement dependent on foreign donations. Their experiences of fragmentation, competition and profit orientation within a feminist movement that has become an assemblage of NGO’s, indicate traces of neoliberal governance.

I have argued that Western mainstream studies of political science that focus on the post-socialist transition, depart from an epistemological vantage point which is detached from marginalised perspectives. The invisibility of feminist activism in studies of transitions and democratisation processes has been pointed out as one particular problem that this vantage point entails. While scholars of political science tend to focus on political elites and on the formal domains of politics such as the government and the parliament, women’s activism in Serbia has been mainly positioned within parallel political spheres. Despite being excluded from the formal political arenas, feminists in Serbia have nevertheless been important actors in the democratisation process that the country has undergone since the end of communism. Due to the marginalisation of women’s perspectives within the elected parliament and government, feminist activists have made sure to constantly put a pressure on the political elites to incorporate gender dimensions in the new democratic policies that have been generated.

Moreover, I have shown that the theoretical conceptualisation of the post-socialist transition as an in-between space between different political and economic systems, created in discourses of political science, is reflected also in geopolitics. Serbia has become something that I in my analysis have compared to a buffer zone. The in-between space as a buffer zone serves a particular role in a wider context of global politics. It represents an intersection of racism, flows of capital and flows of refugees and it poses new challenges for the feminist movement in Serbia. In the critical situation of being surrounded by the fences of the European Union and dependent on Western donations, my interviewees disagreed on how the global migration streams should be handled from a feminist standpoint.

Post-socialism, as both Iveković (2005) and Tešanović argue, indicates not only changes in the local geopolitical landscapes but also on a global level. Perhaps if we pay more attention to local knowledges all over the world we could together discuss the very different approaches to and implications of the complex contemporaneity we live in. Feminists from different
geopolitical locations must, as Nadežda emphasises, listen to each other, due to our embeddedness in different spatio-temporal locations. If we want to challenge global structures of power relations we might need to create platforms where we can tune in to geopolitics and bodopolitics of knowledge and challenge the Western hegemonic position that I have argued encompasses *the right to define with authority* (Bauman 2001: 250).

Discrepancies between lived experiences and concepts or ideals have been identified by my interviewees as a defining feature of Serbian post-socialism. Yet, the interviewees did not tend to use the term ‘post-socialism’ themselves when talking about their experiences of our shared contemporaneity. Therefore, I have discussed whether even that very concept constitutes a discrepancy between the field of academic feminism and the real-life experiences of women in Serbia.

Despite the efforts within studies of comparative politics to make the post-socialist transition a project of anticipation for a more ‘progressive’ future, the women I interviewed showed many signs of an orientation towards the past. Childhood memories, recollections from socialist times and from the wars transpired in the interviews as having a constitutive function of the experiences of the contemporary condition. Apart from my attempts in the analysis to figure out what these fragments of the past might mean I wonder if it can be used to create a better future. Perhaps we could, by studying the history of our feminist legacy, by learning about past mistakes as well as previous successes, find inspiration to fight the demons of our contemporaneity. As a recourse to local knowledges it could, I will argue, represent an alternative to the convention of using Western theory to determine our place and possibilities in this particular historical moment.

One of the major problems found in hegemonic discourses on post-socialist transitions is the inability to recognise that the Western ‘yardstick’, or the location of zero-point epistemology, are not indisputable and perpetual vantage points. If we, however, as it has been suggested in this thesis, acknowledge the balkanisation and transformation of the Western hegemonic system, then we must also reconfigure our conceptualisation of post-socialist transitions. The post-socialist transition becomes *a transition to nothing* in a global context where the Western neoliberal democratic system is falling apart. I have proposed that we should seize this insight as an opportunity, to envision and create a future that is true and fair to our bodies and our
location in time and space. Let us reconstruct, not another endpoint of our journey, but a new beginning.

5.1 Suggestions for Further Research

Due to narrow time and space frames, the focus of this thesis has been on Serbian feminists that are situated in Belgrade. I recognise this to be a limitation for my research project with reference to my ambition to describe an analyse Serbian post-socialism. The socio-political situation and feminist activism diverge considerably between different parts of the country, especially between the capital Belgrade and rural areas. Nonetheless, as I have explained in my thesis, it has not been my endeavour to make any generalising conclusions about Serbian post-socialism and hence the results of my research should be understood in terms of a collection of personal narratives of a certain condition. In a future research project, however, it would be interesting to include more varied perspectives and also to broaden the framework to incorporate the whole region of former Yugoslavia.

My analysis contains a variety of different topics that emerged as patterns in the interviews I conducted. As such, the analysis has generated an overview of post-socialism and feminism in Serbia today. In future research projects, however, it would be interesting to focus merely one or a few of the topics covered in this thesis in order to attain a more in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon in post-socialist Serbia.
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Appendix – Interview Quotes in Original Language: Serbo-Croatian

Nadežda Radović

N1
I ja nju zaustavim i dam joj žene za žene na engleskom sto smo mi napravile, znači proteste koje su beogradske feministkinje, i kažem joj: Nećeš da vam kažem šta sve nije tačno u vašem izlaganju ali ima jako mnogo grešaka i to ne bi ni srednjoškolski profesor kod nas ni slučajno te greške napravio. Ali samo da znate, taj zaključak koji ste izveli, ako sutra budu padale bombe na Beograd, padaće i na ove žene koje su ovo napravile.

N2

N3
Mislim da su žene bile ona razumnija strana Srbije sve vreme ovih ratova. Mi smo stajale, pljuvale su nas, cepali nam transparente, svašta nam govorili, kao žene u crnom, prvo ispred SKC-a posle na trgu republike. Ali mi smo sve to izdržale, stajale i dalje, iako nas je bilo malo.

N4
Kad je krenulo to sa nevladinim organizacijama, ja sam bila protiv toga. Zapravo je tako ženski pokret ugušen, to je jedan način na koji se stavlja pod kontrolu ta energija pokreta i mi sad imamo gomilu tih razmrvljenih ženskih organizacija koje su jedna protiv druge, jedna druga konkurišu za neke bedne male grantove i mi nemamo solidaran ženski pokret. Naravno, većina žena nije bila saglasna sa tim što sam ja mislila jer su videle perspektivu da se zaposle u ženskim organizacijama. Dobro je što postoje, što žene mogu da zaradjuju neke plate na feminizmu i to.
Ali slabo se pomeraju ženska prava na taj način. To je jedan vrlo lukav način kako se energija promene stavlja pod kontrolu, taj nevladin sektor

N5

N6

N7
Pa znate kako, pošto sam ja živela i u drugačijem sistemu, znači, poražavajuće je da smo došli do ove tačke. I nekako, svaki dan vas nešto razočara, kako to ide. To je prvo krenulo devedesetih sa tim ratovima koji su bili strašni, nesvesti da mi pravimo ratove, da smo mi agens koji proizvodi, i da se neke budale dogovaraju a ginu stvarni ljudi, mislim deca koju znamo i to. Pa onda sa gubljenjem prava mislim koja smo imale, jer na tom opštem formu egalitarizma žene su ovde imale vrlo velika prava. Ne kažem ja da su sve žene ta prava koristile, ali, niko nije mogao javno da vas vrednu. U medijima da plasira seksističke priče. Sve se to odjednom pojavilo. Zakoni su počeli da degradiraju žene. Odjednom se pojavio taj zakon o stanovanju koji je ženama uzeo njihovo pravo, jer dok su imali stanarsko pravo vi ste mogli samo da podelite to stanarsko pravo sa mužem, a kad je on postao vlasnik stana, mogao je da vas izbaci i da nema nikakvih posledica od toga. Pa mislim, bilo je, razlika u platama, ali moglo se i buniti protiv toga. A više nije, postalo je normalno da se ženi da mnogo manja plata nego muškarciu. A onda se sva prava vezana za radjanje, odjednom su počela da se detruiraju, odjednom se tu pojavila crkva sa njenim budalesinjama i patrijarh i ostali. I mislim tu je odigrao ženski pokret jako veliku ulogu, mi se tu nismo dale, mi smo stajale sa transparentima ispod patrijarhovog prozora, gledao je on odozgo, a pisalo je ‘manje crkve vise prezervativa’. I to je stvarno lepotica držala u rukama haha.
N8

Koliko prava je izgubljeno. Jer šta se dešava, sav taj kapital koji ulazi u zemlju, strani i koji jedini zapošljava, jer je ovde sve uništeno, delimično bombardovanjem a delimično zahtevima koje je medjunarodni monetarni fond postavljao i finansijske institucije, da se ugase fabrike i to. Znači, ovi koji dolaze, oni ne dolaze sa pregrštom ljudskih prava i sa radničkim pravima. Oni dolaze zato sto ovde nema garantovanih radničkih prava i sto oni mogu da ucenjuju, da nešto što moraju da plate hiljadu i nešto evra u svojoj zemlji mogu za trista dobiju ovde. A preko čije grbače? Preko grbače radnika, koji će jedva preživeti, i on i porodica od onog sto bude dobio. I još biti zahvalan sto ima neki posao, jer većina nema posao. Fantastične fabrike su nestale koje su odlično radile, imale tržište, imale kvalitet i tu ima dosta putara na glavi Demokratska stranka. Tu su pravljeni razni ustupci stranom kapitalom i to su koruptivne priče iza toga, i dugo će trebati da radnici dodu do tačke na kojoj su bili pre nego sto se Jugoslavija raspala, garantovanih nekih prava. Sva prava su se urušila počevši od prava na zdravlje, prava na edukaciju, i tako dalje.

Lina Vušković

L1

Nisu mogli da nas uhvate. Zato ti kažem ni reč nije bilo o pokretu, mislim to je grupa, nisu znali ni koliko nas je, a bilo nas je stvarno malo, mislim, i domen naš je bio nikakav. Te tribine je najviše, ja kako se secam, i to baš kad je bilo, dve teme su bile, bilo kakva seksualnost tema, i ovaj, psihanaliza. To je strašno privlačilo publiku. Tu je bilo maksimum 100 i nešto ljudi. Tako da, znaš, ne možeš govoriti koliko je bilo ali na neki način se uticaj tako širio.

L2


L3

Pa nije, ovaj sistem nije ništja. Ovaj sistem nema pojma ni šta je. U tome i jeste stvar, što su, ovo sve kao postratni sistemi. To je kad bagra obična izadje na površinu i govna, izvini,

L4
I to je sad, krenule su te izbeglice, krenuo je rat krenule su izbeglice […] ja sam ih naterala da se registruju. Na mojoj adresi su se registrovali, zato što je to, na neki način te čuva, i tako da nama u stvari nisu mogli ništa, ovaj Milošević je puštao, posto smo bili sitni. Tako da moglo je to da funkcioniše.

L5
Pa tako sto ulaziš u žensku ulogu, sad ti brineš o nezbrinutima. Znaš brineš staraš, tamo im nešto čak ova […] ide tamo nešto im čisti, pa šta im čistiš bre, daj im metle neka čiste sami. Ja jesam za to apsolutno da se oni politički podrže i sve to redom, u redu, ali ovo.. Ali neki tu jednostavno ne vide gde im je problem, ja problem vidim u tom patrijarhalnom odelu.

L6
Na neki način, što nije zasluga feministkinja, tokom ovih ratova, se ta samosvest i podigla kod zena uopšte. Zato što su muškarci, pogotovo u Srbiji na neki način poniženi, jer je taj rat izgubljen pa oni to sad tako osećaju. Tako da su uvek gundjali o tome, a ekonomski je siromaštvo a to onda naravno zene izvlače i prave pitu od ničega. One izvlače, hrane i izvlače od ničega. I tu su na neki način ja smatram one ojačale. Sad to je tvoje istraživanje da vidiš da li je tačno.

L7
Odvratan, odvratan. Mislim, stvarno nema dostojanstva. Ja stvarno duboko osećam tu opasnost. Nama se drastično život promenio sa dolaskom Miloševića, prosto lični životi su nam se promenili, to se uvučlo, ta da kažem politika u lične živote. To su postale primarne teme za druženja. I meni sad kad dodjem u situaciju da se priča o nečem sasvim drugom, o umetnosti, filozofiji, to me vrati u sećanje, u dalekih sećanja do tamo sredine osamdesetih, dok nije on došao. Šta sam ja ličnih prijateljstava tada raskidala, pa posle toga sa ovim ratovima. To se
urušavalo. To su bile krvave svadje u društvu. A da ne kažem ovo sada, ja stvarno vidim, ja osećam strašno tu opasnost i mislim jedina, i to, evo pitaj druge ljude. Sad ne znam ovi mладji, oni se osećaju valjda beznadežno poprilično. Mene interesuje, interesuje me kakav će biti kraj ovog tipa. Mislim njegov kraj nije naš kraj. I to je pitanje sad kako će posle njega biti. I koliko će on, što duže ostane to je sve kažem sve opasnije. To je pitanje.

Staša Zajović

SZ1
Hoću da kažem da je ta politika evropske unije krajnje opasna za Evropu i za Balkan, ja moram da kažem da je to stvarno na najvišem nivou zabrinutosti. Mi s jedne strane imamo to jedino kao jednu mogućnost, ja moram da verujem da je to mogućnost, ali sa ovakvom vrstom politike i nesposobnosti evropske unije, mislim birokratije evropske koje je sve prodala, je apsolutno strašno, koja rezime ove na Balkanu apsolutno podržava u najgorem potezima. Može sve da nas ubije Vučić, apsolutno ih ne zanima.

SZ2
To je moja Jugoslavija. Ne država, ne armija, ne partija, ništa. Nego to je ta Jugoslavija, tih ljudi koji su imali najdužbe poverenje u to da će tu da se stvara jedan svijet pravednih, solidarnih, internacionalizma i eto to su obični ljudi kojima je to značilo, obični ljudi, muškarci i žene, jer su žene iz jednog feudalnog iz jednog strašno patrijarhalnog okruženja, to su žene iz Crne gore koje su mene okruživalo, moja babe te tete, strine one su to jako ozbiljno švalale. One su jako ozbiljno švalale da je došlo neko novo doba i da je AFŽ jedan važan prostor, i bile su očajne kad je ukinut AFŽ, tako da je to nekako za njih socijalizam nije bio ni partija, ni armija nit je bilo neko zadobijanje neko da kažem položaja u društvu, nego je bila promena sebe, promena odnosa u porodici, promena mislim, doživljaja i predstave o sebi, predstava da ne moraju da se udaju ako neće da se udaju, da mogu da rade, i najvažnije je bilo to izgleda žena u svet rada i da imaju svoju autonomiju u kretanju i tako. Eto to je taj lik žena koje su mene užasno oblikovale.

SZ3
Stalno sam osećala taj bes, strašni bes. Zašto socijalizam nije učinio mnogo više da se, uz zakonsku regulativu, uz izvanredne zakone, da se u školi i svuda, i preko te njihove partije. Zato sam uvek bila besna. Kako se preko njihove partije, to je njihova partija to nije moja partija. Mislim kako se preko te partije i mogućnosti uticaja nije činilo da se patrijarhalne predstave o
ženi, o porodici menjaju. To je strašno bilo, koja je to vrsta bila retracionalizacije već u socijalizmu odavno, odavno. A s druge strane teško je bilo da se menjaju te predstave zato što je bio ogromni raskorak izmedju tog idealnog, tog normativnog, i faktičkog. Tako da je jedna ta šizofrenija, ta jedna laž, ta jedna provalija koja deli ono zakonsko, normativno i realno potpuno strašno do današnjeg dana. I mislim da su posledice strašne toga. Dakle učene na malim nogu, da nije bitno to što ti pričaš, to ne moraš da radiš uopšte, to nema nikakve veze. Tako da je bila ta jedna izreka, jedno misliš, drugo radiš, treće govoriš. To je jedna ogromna laž, kreirana, odražena, i do današnjeg dana je tako. I to je jedan ogroman problem u ovoj zemlji.

SZ4
Pa dobro, da su žene u Srbiji preuzele najveći teret održavanja ne samo porodične ekonomije nego čitavog režima preko svog nevidljivog, neplaćenog rada pokupujući socijalni mir svojih porodica, baveći se švercem one su održavale režim mislim. I to je ta velika drama mislim, održavale smo, održale su režim. Održavale smo režim time sto smo isle u izbegličke kampove mislim, jer oni su proizvodile te žrtve, a mi smo te žrtve hranile.

SZ5
Pa ja ne znam šta …. Ja imam taj strašni osećaj sto živim u društvu koje je mislim ogrezlo u nepriznavanju zločina, to je meni problem. U društvu koje neće da, a to postsocijalističko to me manje zanima, meni je to teško, u kome se slave ratni zločinci u kome se ne priznaju patnje drugih, u kome nema mesta za druge, u kome se ne priznaju, ne znam, to mi je teško. Zato što su to neki drugi ljudi koji su sanjali o socijalizmu. Žene Srebrenice u Bosnu su sanjale o socijalizmu i one su do zadnjeg momenta, mnogo više od mene, verovali u to, jer nisu znale žene. Ali evo to je jedno društvo koje nekako nema mesto za druge, za saosećanje, za solidarnost. Toga me je strah najviše. Strah me, kad sinoć odem tu ove hangare, i nema naših ljudi. Samo stranci. E toga me je strah.


Sramno je da post-socijalističke zemlje su toliko anti-semitske, da su toliko rasističke, da su toliko ogrezle u klerofašizmu, da danas nema, danas se ponose time Poljska jednog izbeglicu

SZ6

Sofija Trivunac
S1
Oni su bili šokirani kad ja kažem da smo imali i feminizam i da smo imali godinu dana paid maternity leave, tri godine ako vam je dete bolesno. Da sam imala uvek godišnji odmor paid. Oni to nisu verovali, oni su mislili da sam ja neki agent koji njima govori nešto o socijalizmu.
Moja mama je na primer imigrant. Ona jeste rodjena u Srbiji ali njeni su izbeglice grci koji su pobegli od genocida u maloj Aziji sadašnjoj Turskoj. Ono vreme kad je jermenski genocid bio, u isto vreme bio je i grčki. I sad moj deda je bio mobilisan u turskoj armiji da se bori protiv Albanaca, uvek ista priča. I onda je pobegao u Srbiju, jer je bio pravoslavan, i pobegao je jer je bila slobodna od Turske. I onda je doveo moju baku, i znači ona je bila tu. I ona je imala petoro dece, milion trudnoće, jedna mučna priča, mnogo ratova, mnogo zatvora, mnogo svega. Ali imigranti, znači oni su bili turski državljani jako dugo. I svaki put kad su bili balkanski ratovi dedu su hapsili, sklanjali i šta jaz znam dok se to nekako nije regulisalo. I za vreme drugog svetskog rata, dva deteta su mu bila u ratu i to.

Feminizam je postao profesija, to je tragedija. Kao sto je tragedija kad health postane profit oriented, hrana postane profit oriented, škola postane profit oriented, društvo odlazi dodjavola. To nije znate kad vam naprave industrijsku hranu ne može da bude kao hrana koja se kuva. Tako isto ako vi Feminizam, znači vašu prirodnu potrebu da se borite za poboljšanje života žena ili ne znam celog društva, pretvorite u profesiju, to onda, vi ste na milost i ne milost donora. Znači donora iz Švedske, donora iz ovoga, donora iz onoga.

Žene koje su bile herojke, koje su bile heroine od vajkada do sada koje su iznele na svojim ledjima u Srbiji i u celoj Jugoslaviji, ali naročito u Srbiji i Bosni, tu gde je bilo i bombardovanje i gladovanje i sankcija, one su iznele tu bedu i sve te ratove na svojim ledjima ovde, obične žene koje su radile po tri posla, prale, idu po kućama. Ja znam žene koje su visoko školski obrazovane koje peru gaće drugim ljudima da bi mogla njihova deca da prežive. Tako je, beda je velika, nemaju šta da jedu. Moja drugarice koje su 40 godina radile nemaju za hranu jer moraju da plate kiriju, nemaju za hranu. Ili imaju za vrlo malo hrane i tako dalje. Znači jedna opšta beda, a mi pričamo o gay paradi. Mislim, generacije su uništene sa ovim bombardovanjem Generacije. Vi ne znate koliko je procenat raka ovde, to se ne može zamisliti. I naravno najviše ima žena mladih, koje umiru ko kiša. I muškarci koji ne mogu, nemaju, spermatozoidi ne rade, i niko neće da kaže da je to od bombardovanja.
Pa znate šta, ja sam srećna i presrećna, ja volim da budem ovde jer ja sam, ja mislim da ljudi nisu stvreni za savršenstvo znači meni vise prija što je ovde sve ovako haotično nego naj onako urednija ona Amerika. Ali to je možda nostalgija. Ah kako je živeti, ipak ima više slobode nego u Americi. Evo ja ću to da vam kažem, ipak ima, uprkos tome sto smo kolonija i što smo opljačkani, i što smo poniženi i depresivni i ovakvi i onakvi. Ipak ovde ima na ličnom nivou više slobode nego u najrazvijenijim društvu. Ja apsolutno stojim na tome. I to nije samo moj utisak, to je i mojih prijatelja koji su se vratili ili se nisu vratili.
This thesis represents an attempt to challenge power hierarchies infusing white Western European academic and political fields. It constitutes a project, built on decolonial critique of privileges of research, that aims at attending to local and marginalised feminist perspectives in order to reach a deeper understanding for a complex and ambivalent Serbian post-socialist reality. A critical scrutiny of previous research conducted within the field of Comparative Politics and post-socialist feminist critique of academic knowledge, has led to the identification of problematic results of unequal distributions of power within politics and the academia. Moreover, through a historical overview of the geopolitical context and the feminist legacy of the region, the importance of contextualisation and the necessity of an epistemological and ontological shift within knowledge production has further been emphasised. Lastly, with a combining approach of qualitative interviews and autoethnography, lived experiences of post-socialism and its intersections with feminism have been sought and analysed. By highlighting women’s activism in democratisation processes and the severe socio-political problems facing contemporary Serbia, these experiences problematize the hegemonic Western projections of a post-socialist transition as an elite project towards ‘progress’ and Europeanisation.

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Keywords
Post-socialism, feminist activism, transition, democratisation, decoloniality, bodypolitics and geopolitics of knowledge.