Europe’s Outsourced Refugees: Contextualizing NGO work in the “Calais of the Balkans”

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Europe’s Outsourced Refugees
Contextualizing NGO work in the “Calais of the Balkans”

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an Honors Thesis in the Bates College
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Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to the people on the move. It is written in solidarity with the displaced thousands who are searching for safety and stability thousands of miles away from their homes. From the borderlands of the European Union to the banks of the Rio Grande, people are fighting desperately for their rights to safe passage, security, and asylum. It is our duty to stand in solidarity with them.

Writing this was not a solitary effort. It goes without saying that thesis this could not have been made without the support, guidance, and friendship offered to me by my academic advisor Jim Richter. I am similarly in debt to the opportunities offered to me by Bates College’s Center for World Learning and SIT’s Peace and Conflict in the Balkans program for offering me the opportunity to conduct qualitative research at the undergraduate level. Of course I must also recognize the help of my friends and family for the smiles that we’ve exchanged along the way, without which I would live in a much grayer world. Finally, I’d like to say thanks to Louise who has reminded me, time and again, of the importance of perspective.
Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze the ways in which refugee assistance organizations operate and develop their operational strategies in light of a changing work landscape. Moreover, it contextualizes these strategies within the greater context of the organizational field (conceived of as the range of resource flows and political opportunities which come together to shape the organizational structures and methods of operation in an NGO field) in order to develop an understanding of how state and international institutions influence the actions and decisions of NGOs. Using the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia between 2016 and 2017, the work puts forth several conclusions. First, it identifies four distinct patterns of organizational structure within the case study. Second, it argues that the organizational field presents certain incentives which mediate organizational activity. This is observed in particular through the tendency of organizations to professionalize in response to dynamics surrounding funding opportunities and access to camps. Finally, this thesis ties the moderating characteristics of the organizational field to a rationality of governance that strategically utilizes NGO-work to accomplish goals. Through the soft mechanisms of organizational influence a dynamic is produced wherein NGOs function not only as subjects of governance but also as participants of governance. Importantly, this field of influence is both enabled and constrained by powerful institutions; it has finite boundaries of control against which it is possible for organizations to navigate and push back.
Introduction

For many refugees and migrants in Serbia during the winter of 2016-2017, their time in the country was one of stagnation. Although not subject to the aggression and violence that defined the experience of many refugees in neighboring Bulgaria and Hungary, refugees and migrants within Serbia have become increasingly vulnerable as a result of their inability to either return home or progress towards Western Europe.¹ In the face of poorly-defined legal statuses, many described feeling a loss of control in their lives, which they experience within the context of poverty and social exclusion in their host communities. Their pervasive boredom, and the inability to progress towards their intended destinations, each became significant contributors to the deteriorating mental health of many.²

During the winter of 2017 in Belgrade, the health conditions of the refugees and migrants living in squats were thrust into serious uncertainty as they faced particularly harsh weather without adequate supplies. Foremost amongst these was an abandoned factory complex in downtown Belgrade, colloquially known as the Barracks, which housed around 1,500 residents during the coldest months of 2017. In these informal camps, the residents faced persistent problems with scabies, frostbite, body lice, and skin infections. (Gardos, 2017) While those staying in the government’s reception and asylum centers experienced a higher degree of safety and security, many were afraid that staying in these state-run camps would compromise their ability to continue towards their intended destination countries. Although the majority of those staying in the official camps and squats did not plan to stay in Serbia permanently, data shows a growing number who

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¹ Although hundreds of thousands have passed through Serbia on the way to Western Europe, the UNHCR estimates the number of refugees in Serbia at around 7,400, of which most are living in one of the 16 official asylum centers in the country or residing in short-term and often vulnerable living arrangements (“Serbian Centres”, 2017).
² In addition to my own observations, this sentiment among refugees has been recorded in a variety of refugee camps in Serbia, Greece, and the FYROM. For more information one might look to In the Loop’s Special Edition #35 entitled Refugee Voices on Integration.
have decided to embark on the path towards long term integration. (James, 2017) The number remains small for the moment, but as border controls intensify, it is likely that more may begin to opt for long term integration despite the weaker economic prospects that Serbia holds, in comparison to finding a new life within the EU.

The situation continues to evolve rapidly. However, an uncomfortable dynamic has been created as the European Union refuses refugees and migrants at Serbia’s EU borders, while simultaneously providing a well of funding to assist them while they stay in Serbia. This is part of a broader shift towards an external border policy meant to export, or at least offset, some of the perceived burden of migration away from the EU (El-Anany, 2013; Attina, 2016). Within this context, a diverse community of groups that ranges from UN bodies to large international organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières to smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Refugee Aid Miksalište are currently engaged in assisting these refugees and migrants.

As migration becomes an increasingly present fixture in public and political debates throughout the world, it is essential to critically analyze the institutions that are engaging with the movement of people towards more stable and developed regions. This thesis sheds light on how refugee assistance organizations manage and develop their operational strategies in light of an evolving work landscape. Moreover, it develops an understanding of how state and international institutions exert pressure on the actions and organizational structure of NGOs. Informed by these issues, this thesis studies the humanitarian assistance provided to refugees and migrants by NGOs in Serbia in the period between June 2016 and June 2017.

This is an important area of research not only because there has been relatively little scholarship done on the impact of the migration crisis on the behavior of NGOs, but also because
it informs the broader discussion on the strategies humanitarian NGOs deploy in contentious environments to accomplish their goals. More broadly, it will also shed light on the overall role state and international institutions play in NGO work. As such, this paper explores strategies of solidarity, advocacy, institutional engagement, and direct assistance in the realm of NGO work in Serbia’s place in the refugee crisis. I have conducted the bulk of this research through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with more than twenty figures from the community of NGOs that are providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. This data is supplemented by a comprehensive analysis of media reports, NGO publications, social media posts, field observations, and UNHCR briefings which help construct a thorough understanding of the case study.

The first chapter provides an overview of the literature relating to NGO work in the field of migration. I begin by outlining the definitions and terms important to this field. Next, I provide an overview of the current literature on the relationship of NGOs and IGOs as it relates to migration and refugee assistance. Finally I highlight existing frameworks for understanding the goals and organizational strategies of migration NGOs, and suggest a methodology for analyzing the NGOs in my case study which is reminiscent of Henry’s (2011) work on the environmental NGO-field in Russia.

The second chapter details the progression of the refugee and migrant situation in Serbia. First, I review key developments that emerged in Serbia prior to March, 2016. Then, I provide an in-depth overview of the refugee crisis in Serbia between March, 2016 and May, 2017. In particular, I identify three important events in this time period which significantly altered the situation of refugees and migrants around Belgrade by affecting the assistance which they were provided. These were the border closures of March, 2016, the Open Letter of November 2016, and
finally, the demolition of the Belgrade Barracks in May, 2017.

The third and fourth chapters cover the presentation and analysis of my data. In the third chapter, I argue that there are four distinct patterns of organizational structure that exist within the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. These ideal organization types are referred to as independent organizations, international organizations, institutional domestic organizations, and non-institutional domestic organizations. These four categories provide a way of characterizing the general management structure and project focus of organizations. It is recognized, however, that within these ideal types, organizational activities vary widely. I use in-depth case organizations to both demonstrate this variety and to highlight the underlying characteristic of each group. Then, in the fourth chapter, I overview the institutional pressures at play within my case study. Specifically, I detail how the organizational field presents certain institutional factors that mediate organizational activity. Primary among these factors is the field’s funding landscape as well as the interests and behavior of three groups of institutional actors: the Serbian state, the EU, and international institutions like the UNHCR. These groups influence the organizational field in a multitude of ways. In particular, I highlight how their involvement provides incentives for organizations to professionalize. I how this is accomplished through funding opportunities and the control over camp access.

In the final chapter, I develop some conclusions from this body of work. Specifically, I argue that despite the diversity of ways in which organizations mediate structural factors, the organizational field creates powerful incentives for NGOs to structure themselves in ways which help further the interests and obligations of the state. In this way, institutional pressure serves to reinforce the role of NGOs in humanitarian work as both objects and subjects of governance. In terms of the refugee crisis in Serbia, the constraints and pressures applied to refugee assistance
organizations work, broadly speaking, towards the interest of the Serbian state, the European Union, and international institutions. Refugee assistance organizations provide humanitarian support in cases where the state does not or cannot provide support. This relationship is blurred, however, in the cases of refugee assistance organizations which work in direct contention with the state. The local No Borders group and, to a lesser extent, solidarity groups like No Name Kitchen present a challenge to this relationship due to their interests in engaging in activities such as contentious political protests or illegal border crossings which run in direct contrast with the European Union’s border regime. Their avoidance of traditional funding models further insulates them from this influence.

To this end, this paper contributes to the recent yet growing field of academic research on the work of European civil society in the assistance of refugees and migrants. Of particular relevance is the information this paper holds on the work of independent solidarity organizations in Serbia. These organizations, primarily staffed by young volunteers, have played a constant role in the provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants in Europe over the last decade. Faced with the increased securitization of asylum and migration in developed countries around the world, it will be necessary to expand our understanding of the effects that these sorts of organizations have as agents of assistance as well as change.
I - Literature Review

Given that the this paper analyzes how refugee assistance organizations manage and develop their operational strategies, it is important to first contextualize this analysis within the existing academic literature on refugee assistance organizations and the concurrent roles played by host states and donor entities. This previous research provides important insight into how NGOs organize themselves in relation to institutional influences. In the following chapter, I will present a brief overview of the terminology that I have elected to use for this paper before providing an overview of several key debates which allow me to contextualize my analysis.

Previous attempts to categorize and delineate the patterns of organizational structure that exist within communities of NGOs provide a useful point of reference for this research. In
particular, I review the work of Laura Henry (2011) in which she taxonomizes environmental NGOs in Russia. Following this, I utilize the work of scholars such as Duda (2017) and Milan & Pirro (2018) who are active in the field of NGO work in the European refugee crisis to provide added context. This previous scholarship provides a practical framework to analyze refugee assistance work by NGOs in Serbia.

Of additional importance is the academic discussion concerning the relationship between NGOs and the state. Previous authors highlight the symbiosis that has emerged between humanitarian NGOs and the state, paying particular attention to the role that these organizations play in the greater state objectives of developmental assistance and security. Overall, many observe the levels of interdependency that characterizes the work of NGOs and governing institutions in recent time. To this end, the work of Sending and Neumann (2006) on the role that NGOs play in governance is of great value. They develop a rationality of government in which “political power operates through rather than on civil society. Governing is performed through autonomous subjects, not on passive objects” (669). In this section I will outline the practical implications which authors observe arising from this interdependence of these actors in general before unpacking writing specific to the case of refugee assistance. Finally, I analyze the previous work on the effect of governance and institutional norms on NGO activity. In particular, I highlight two relevant themes from this wider discussion: the effect of funding on humanitarian NGOs and the effect of state controlled access to refugee camps.

Definitions

Defining NGOs

This paper explores the broader dynamics of civil society. Accordingly, it is important to first delineate and define the specific terms I will use. Civil society can be described as all
associations and networks between the household and the state (and international institutions) “in which membership and activities are ‘voluntary’ – formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labor unions, political parties, churches and other religious groups, professional and business associations, community and self-help groups, social movements and independent media” (Edwards 2009, p. 20). Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) are organizations, “characterized primarily by humanitarianism or cooperation, rather than commercial objectives, that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” among other things (World Bank 1989). Unlike sports clubs, professional organizations or neighborhood associations, NGOs are almost always problem-oriented. Also, unlike voluntary organizations, NGOs usually hire professional staff and do not just rely on membership fees. Thus, an average NGO might define their constituencies more broadly than membership organizations (Fisher 1998).

In her work on civil society and environmental movements in Russia, Laura Henry argues that upholding the “…distinctions between social movements, interest groups, NGOs and political parties is often untenable…” and adopts a broader classification of social movement organizations (SMOs) for the organizations she studies. While I agree with Henry’s argument, I choose not to

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3 This is slightly more elaborate than other definitions where civil society is viewed primarily as a mechanism to empower democratization and development efforts and is simply defined as “the voluntary associational realm that lies between the family and the state and is autonomous from the state.” (Ottaway and Chung, 1999; 106)

4 I conceive of humanitarianism, in part, as “an array of particular embodied, situated practices emanating from the humanitarian desire to alleviate suffering of others”. (Redfield, 2005, p. 330) This withstanding, I also agree with the argument posed by Fassin (2007) that “critical thinking can and must emerge from within the analysis of these practices and this desire.” (p. 202) In other words, while the desire to alleviate the suffering of others, within the context of humanitarianism, is often relegated to assistance during times of crisis, long-lasting efforts to alter the paradigm of suffering must also be considered a mandate of humanitarian activity.

5 Henry (2011) uses the term social movement organization to refer to a wide swath of self-organizing, non-governmental, and not-for-profit groups.
adopt her classificatory scheme, for two reasons. First, the term NGO in Serbia is widely
established and understood whereas SMO is not (Grødeland, 2006). By relying on NGO, I avoid
bringing undue complexity to my cross-cultural communication. Additionally, various authors
argue that some NGOs are actively dissuaded from participating in contentious social movements
by donors and other external factors (Waal & Omaar, 1994; Reiff, 1999; Manji & O’Coill, 2002).
Should this be the case, it seems disingenuous to extend the title of SMO to organizations who
shirk engagement in social movements. Nonetheless, I remain cognizant of Henry’s (2011) point
that it is important to keep an open mind as to what, exactly, constitutes an organization. To this
end, for the purpose of my paper, I extend the definition of NGO to organizations without dedicated
payrolls or employees, a distinction others might omit. (World Bank 1989)

At a narrower level, it is also important to identify and define the different types of
organizations which fall under the purview of “non-governmental” in my case study. Some authors
tend to make a heavy distinction between traditional humanitarian organizations and more
politicized human rights organizations (Chandler, 2001). The most common distinction between
these two types of organizations is that between service-provision and human-rights advocacy. On
the one hand, humanitarian NGOs are seen as service-providers of desperately needed goods or
services to vulnerable populations, in ways meant to help ease the distress of these populations.
Some authors even use the term “relief” or “disaster-relief” organization as interchangeable with
humanitarian organization. (Waal & Omaar, 1994; Chandler, 2001; Duda, 2017) Humanitarian aid
also tends to imply assistance in the short term; it is viewed as crisis assistance meant to be
controlled and contained. Human-rights NGOs, on the other hand, typically entertain a much wider
call to action within their popular conception. Human-rights organizations such as Human Rights
Watch, Amnesty International, or the Children’s Defense Fund are more activist-based,
continually advocating in situations where their mandate allows. Their typical focus is accountability, advocacy, information-gathering, and policy-influencing which entitles them to a certain universality that humanitarian organizations may not enjoy; they can be active anywhere in the world where human-rights are being abrogated.

In general, the distinction between human-rights NGOs and humanitarian NGOs is problematic as it allows for the faulty assumption that humanitarian disasters are short term crises that can be addressed in a relatively limited timeframe by outside actors who might soon move on to other crises. Many within the literature have pointed to this fallacy and advocate for a mediated approach which seeks to address causal mechanisms that can underlie humanitarian emergencies. This is an important argument which will feature broadly throughout this paper.

There are different levels of organization that can be observed when looking at various NGOs. The most organized organizations tend to be established, large, international NGOs which often have offices in multiple locations, and in addition to their field work, are also grantors to smaller NGOs (Autesserre, 2011). In the middle are established, domestic NGOs which also tend to focus their activities at the national level. They may or may not receive funding from state or international donors. Finally, there are the younger, more specialized organizations that tend to be organized around a specific task or purpose and operate predominantly at the local level. The majority of the existing literature tends to focus on the political, transnational, and organizational operations of NGOs which work at the national and international level, due to their comparatively higher exposure and accessibility. Nonetheless, there is small, yet important body of work which explores the work of grassroots, local-level organizations (Panda 2007; Spires, 2011; Duda; 2017).

Of particular interest in the application of assistance to refugees and migrants on the Balkan route is the emergence of what Duda (2017) has dubbed “non-governmental, non-professional
humanitarian aid.” These non-professional, non-governmental aid organizations are most often spontaneous and self-organized which marks a drastic departure, in many ways, from the sorts of organizations normally active in such situations. Spontaneous, solidarity mobilizations, such as the No Borders⁶ collective represent a new way of providing assistance to refugees and migrants. As Cantat (2013) argues, these sorts of groups are particularly present within the European migration landscape where they were created “specifically to address issues engendered by the Europeanisation of migration frameworks” (p. 16).

It should be noted that there is an historical precedent for these non-professional, non-governmental aid organizations. Omaar & de Waal (1994) point to the existence of local solidarity organization in East Africa during the 1990s, such as the Eritrean Relief Organization and Relief Society of Tigray. They dub these organizations “community-implemented relief organizations”. The relevance of these sorts of organizations to my Serbian case study is dubious, however, due to the fact that they were typically organized around lines of ethnic solidarity. All the same, their identity as non-professional, grassroots NGOs provides an interesting framework for understanding how these sort of organizations function. Omaar & de Waal (1994) additionally identify the Bosnian War as an effective turning point in the structuring of humanitarian NGOs as it saw the widespread emergence of a new breed of NGOs in Bosnia created specifically in response to the disasters there.

The impact of these new organizations in the current refugee crisis is yet untested although Duda (2017) is developing an interesting set of research on the matter. Nonetheless, the possibility

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⁶ No Borders is as much a decentralized, transnational movement as it is a collective of people interested in the assistance of refugees and migrants. “Many No Border activists consider ‘No Border’ as a label that can be claimed by anyone subscribing to such politics, which tacitly implies a strong anarchist affiliation” (Cantat, 2013, p. 27). In addition to Calais, No Borders affiliates have been active throughout Germany, Greece, and Serbia over the past several years engaged in contentious forms of solidarity and refugee assistance.
of their effect is interesting when the organizational approach to activism, developed by Laura Henry (2010), is considered. She writes that “grievance identification, resource flows, political access and issue framing are not independent factors but rather interrelated and often mutually reinforcing” (p. 7). To this end, she argues for a “nuanced perspective on the role of resources in supporting activism, highlighting the fact that monetary and nonmonetary resources are inextricably tied to particular cultures of activism.” (Henry, 2010, p. 7) In other words, the resources and political access afforded to an organization is closely tied and interrelated with the ideology and workplace culture associated with a given NGO. Thus, where an NGO gets its money from, how the money is used, where the NGO works, who it works with, and who works for it all depend, in part, on the distinct culture and ideology behind the group. To this end, analyzing the effect of non-professional NGOs on the refugee situation in Serbia will contribute valuable information to our understanding of how NGOs work.

This directly relates to Henry’s concept of the “organizational field” which seeks to contextualize the environment and opportunities that define NGOs. An understanding of this term will be an important tool with which to analyze the dynamics affecting NGOs in Serbia. The organizational field, as Henry (2010) conceives it, is the range of grievances, resource flows, political opportunities, and cultural framings which come together to shape the particular context of NGO work. Subsequently, this field is shaped by leadership’s perceptions and preferences and is then moderated by a limited number of organizational forms (Henry, 2010, p. 27). The overall importance of this concept lies in the way that the organizational field mediates and informs the habits of a given NGO. Henry remarks that within a context

“Of scarce resources, organizations are likely to seek funders with a similar view of the problems they address and to develop dependencies on critical funders. Grievances matter for social mobilization because they stimulate different constituencies, activating the ideas, tactics, and resources of certain groups and not others. Therefore, it is the source, not just
the level, of critical resources that shape social organizations’ development. Dependent organizations will try to manage these relationships in order to achieve beneficial terms, but they cannot avoid being profoundly shaped by the organization field.” (2010, p. 234)

It is important to take several things away from this concept. In short, the dissemination of the organizational field creates particular cultures and fields of activism which in turn mediates the action of NGOs. This understanding counters the claim that resource dependence is a corrupting factor on the effectiveness of NGOs by assuming that particular organizations will naturally engage themselves with actors which accommodate or further their goals. To this end, the notion that “resource dependence does not necessarily pose a problem for organizations, in fact, it is inevitable” can perhaps be seen as mediated by the concept that “an erratic or unreliable stream of resources from key actors can threaten organizational survival” (Henry, 2010, p. 234).

That being said, the pressure to demonstrate legitimacy within an organizational field can be high, given the control over grant projects and camp access which institutional actors may possess. In response to these pressures, many NGOs develop structures and behaviors to respond to and fend off claims of illegitimacy. As Ron (1997) suggests, “over time, organizations learn what types of response to audits are legitimate and what types of external structure they should adopt to maintain the proper aura of respectability” (p. 277).

This is an important point as it underscores the soft, implicit power that an organizational field can exert. In a period of flux, this power can be witnessed in full as changing dynamics of control and funding incentivize organizations to reorder their activities. Ron writes that “as the environment changes, some forms of behavior become stigmatized while others become acceptable. Actors seeking to boost their reputations will want to reflect the new criteria for evaluation, even if they do not believe in the substantive value of the new symbols themselves” (Ron, 1997, p. 279). Importantly, as Ann Swidler (1995) writes, "what governs action in this case
is not individuals' internalized beliefs, but their knowledge of what meanings their actions have for others” (p. 8).

**Labels in the “Refugee Crisis”**

Categorizing people within the refugee crisis is difficult as it requires navigating what are often conflicting political, personal, and legal interests. This is particularly true in Serbia. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify my understanding of these terms as they relate to migration and migration work specifically. With this in mind, I choose a more generalized term - “refugees and migrants” - to account for the difficulties associated with distinguishing identities in transit situations. Similar to Arsenijević et. al. (2017), I use the term to refer, in general, to the refugees and migrants now in Serbia or formerly in transit along the Western Balkan migration route.

To refer to certain people as “asylum seekers” in Serbia and others as “refugees and migrants”, solely on the basis of their declared intent to seek asylum in Serbia, is flawed. The work of Lukić (2016), as well as data from the UNHCR, has shown that the vast majority of those who have declared asylum in Serbia have subsequently left the country for other sites of refuge, predominantly Western Europe. Likewise, the term “refugee” is ill-equipped in its common understanding to describe those moving along the Balkan route given the highly discrepant and political nature in which countries grant refugee status. While those fleeing violence in Syria and Iraq are afforded widespread recognition as refugees by European countries, those fleeing similar violence or persecution in Afghanistan or Pakistan are not considered refugees in many countries (Shea, 2017). Finally, the use of the term migrant and its ensuing descriptive iterations (undocumented, legal, economic or forced) is muddled by the term’s inconsistent use in political rhetoric. “Economic migrant”, in particular, is a term often used to deride the eligibility of a
person-in-transit’s right to integrate or their right to asylum. Furthermore, the use of the term is complicated by the entwined nature of economic, political, and oppressive migration motivations, particularly within the context of the lasting effects of aggressive Western foreign policy actions abroad (Qazi, 2017). Although far from perfect in its designation of the myriad groups of people in transit along the Balkan route, the blanket term “refugees and migrants” allows me to avoid much of the confusion and misidentification that is attached to a single legal term to qualify this population.

Framework for Analysis

This paper looks across different types of organizations as they deal with coordinating and managing issues with diverse requirements. This being the case, it is of use to delineate how organizations may differ in their structural, organization, or ideological approaches. To this end, Laura Henry’s (2011) proposition that all social organizations attempt to achieve three general goals is useful to envision. First, organizations attempt to find the resources needed to sustain the organization. These are their internal goals. Second, organizations will attempt to institute more favorable state policies on the particular issues which concern their mission. These are their substantive goals. Finally, organizations attempt to create a political and social environment more suitable to the future activities of their organization. These can be thought of as their transformational goals (Henry, 2011, p. 7).

This paper will also look at the ways in which professional and grassroots approaches are deployed within the NGO field. As argued by Marquez (2016), understanding the organizational approaches puts us in a better position to predict the different functional outcomes of NGOs in the field. Grassroots organizations typically engage in diverse projects, their activities are directly
related to the interests and needs of local populations (Henry, 2010, p. 147). Conversely professional organizations often reflect an affinity for lobbying and bargaining with decision-making authorities at different platforms, obtaining support from government actors, building up pressures through various campaign mechanisms, and actively engaging in institutional advocacy activities (Panda, p. 261). They often pursue multiple goals and projects at a time, and rely heavily on foreign funding. Overall, they are also more likely to tackle issues of national significance and to communicate and cooperate with higher level government officials and transnational actors. Finally, they are also less likely to engage in protest or contentious forms of activism (Henry, 2010, p. 147).

In terms of attaching certain organizational behaviors to different functional approaches, Panda (2007) posits that we may conceive of three categories of NGOs: 1) those that follow a purely bottom-up approach; 2) those that follow a purely top-down approach; 3) and those that follow a combination of both. Importantly, within those that are exclusively and partially bottom-up oriented, Panda develops a further level of categorization to accommodate the finer complexities of organizational structures. Thus we might delineate between radical, conformist, and proactive structures. First, a radical organization is “one where NGOs basically mobilize people to take up the violent forms of collective action, for example, strikes, demonstrations, protests, etc. to meet their demands.” One example of these groups might be ideologically anti-establishment NGOs (Panda, 2007, p. 268). Other such organizations have been identified as the sorts of migrant-solidarity groups, such as No Borders, which have gained prominence within the context of Europe’s informally squatted refugee camps (Milner, 2011). Second, are conformist organizations which encourage and engage people “in project activities, that is, project formulation, implementation and maintenance, without necessarily being anti-establishment.
These NGOs believe in functioning based on cooperation” (Panda, 2007, p 268). Finally, proactive organizations utilize

A form of bottom-up approach that advocates prompt and sweeping action. It encourages people to stage protests, demonstrations, strikes, etc., but not in a violent way. Creating awareness is another important strategy for a proactive bottom-up approach. Awareness building mechanisms such as street plays, padyatras, poster/banner/postcard campaigning, etc. can be seen as a part of a proactive strategy. These NGOs show no hesitation to obtain help from government organisations, and believe in making a louder and sustained impact by involving people in large numbers in their activities. (Panda, 2007, p 268)

Although the differences between conformist and proactive organizations may not be initially clear, the distinguishing characteristic is that the former is more deeply involved in local level cooperation to enact local level change whereas the latter may be more engaged in local level cooperation to enact change at the higher level.

These categories provide a solid framework for understanding the structures of various NGOs. All the same, it is important to keep in mind that, despite the appearance or rhetoric put forth by various NGOs, these organizations all must remain dynamic in order to survive and therefore must draw out their strategies accordingly. Thus, Panda stresses that it is extremely unlikely for an NGO to follow a completely top-down approach given the incentives to also take support and help from the existing people’s institutions in the areas of their operation. Conversely, it is similarly unlikely to function as an exclusively bottom-up organization because assistance from local governments become inevitable in some form or the other from time to time (Panda, 2007, p. 273). Thus, although it is difficult to generalize NGOs on the basis of their strategy and approach to a tee, the framework provided by previous scholars remains useful to taxonomize NGOs from an organizational perspective.

Following Henry, I will look at different independent variables which may affect an organization’s approaches and behavior namely their sources of funding, size, the makeup of their
volunteer/work force (i.e. local or international), and their organizational culture and history. Then as dependent variables, I will look at organizational strategies in terms of Henry’s (2010) methods for categorizing organizational pursuits.

1) What are their strategies for pursuing internal goals?
2) What are strategies for pursuing substantive goals?
3) What are strategies for pursuing transformational goals?

This framework for analysis will in turn help answer the sub-questions that will occur from my research. Are organizations that are heavily dependent on foreign money from EU, as opposed to the crowd-funding, for example, more likely to have top-down strategies? Are they more likely to offer services in a less political way as far as substantive issues, and are they likely not to look at transformational issues? Will they be more likely to be top-down, demobilize, or associate their mission in terms of security/EU alignment? If the organizations are composed of predominantly local people relying on local funds, will they be more concerned with internal and substantive goals than transformational goals? Will they be more bottom-up and less security minded?

**Relationship between NGOs, IGOs, and the State**

Previous work on the relationship between states, donors and humanitarian NGOs tends to stress the increasing tendency for these actors to rely, or cooperate, with each other to accomplish their respective goals. This has been observed with particular interest in the field of migration-assistance. Thus, it is important to understand what exactly migration NGOs have to do with humanitarianism, developmental assistance and security through their relationship with state and international institutions. Additionally, in this section I will outline the practical implications which authors observe arising from this interdependence of these actors in general before unpacking writing specific to the case of refugee assistance.
Interdependency and the State

In the last 30 years, many authors have noted increasing levels of interdependency in the relationship between humanitarian NGOs and the states that they work within. Furthermore, they characterize this relationship as having subtle yet widespread tensions. In particular, many identify humanitarian organizations as engaging in a broader human rights discourse and increasing their demand for neutral humanitarian spaces within the last several decades (Waal & Omaar, 1994; Helton & Lavenex, 1999; Barnett & Weiss, 2011). Weiss and Gordenker (2002) add to this framework by stressing how the explosive growth within the NGO sector has resulted in the increased use of NGOs during humanitarian emergencies and as a resource to impact policy.

Many authors tend to point to the presence of suspicion and bias between NGO and state actors, particularly in democratizing or recently democratized countries (Dupuy et. al., 2015; Mikuš, 2015; Groeland, 2005). Seemingly incongruous to this sentiment, a wide array of research has emerged which argues for the existence of increasing levels of cooperation and interdependence between the two sides. What is important to understand here, however, is the possibility for rising levels of cooperation to exist between state and non-state entities in spite of contentious relationships. As Irrera (2013) stresses, interactions between NGOs and institutional actors “are increasingly interdependent and have produced constant tensions” between the powerful bureaucratic institutions and the flexible NGOs (p. 135). The question that naturally arises from this understanding is what the motivations behind this increased cooperation are?

While the literature is nearly unanimous in viewing NGOs as subjects of governance, it is also important to consider how NGOs may also exist as participants of governance. This argument is rooted in Foucault's concept of governmentality which refers to an “indirect form of power exerted upon a population through a configuration of institutions, ideas, routines and procedures
to induce individual subjects to govern themselves” (Richter, 2008, p. 1). According to Foucault, modern political institutions do not exert power over society; they exert power through society. They act upon the “field of possibilities” of others’ actions to construct subjects who govern themselves (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Importantly, government in this sense is not limited to the formal institutions and policies of the state, but refers to the entire repertoire of institutions, procedures, analytical techniques, strategies and practices configured to shape human behavior towards a particular end (Richter, 2008 on Foucault, 1994a: 220).

As Richter (2008) writes, “this mechanism of indirect rule is particularly important in the analysis of liberal regimes. Liberalism presents economic markets and civil society as natural self-regulating mechanisms that exist prior to and independently from states.” Theorists of governmentality, by contrast, do not regard these mechanisms as operating independently from the state. Rather, “state and civil society represent two mutually constitutive, intertwined spheres of the same governance regime” (Richter, 2008, p. 2).

Sending and Neumann (2006) explore this concept by studying the sociopolitical functions and logics of governance, and in doing so generate the realization that “the role of nonstate actors in shaping and carrying out global governance-functions is not an instance of transfer of power from the state to non-state actors” (p. 652). Rather, they argue, the role of NGOs in carrying out global governance functions is expressive of a changing rationality, or logic, of governance “by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of government to be acted upon into an entity that is both an object and a subject of government” (Sending & Neumann, 2008, p. 658). In this reconfigured logic of governance the “self-association and political will-formation characteristic of civil society and non-state actors do not stand in opposition to the political power of the state, but is a most central feature of how power, understood as government, operates in late modern
Sapoch, 25

Sapoch, 25

Sending and Neumann leave two lasting conclusions from this reoriented perspective on governance. First, they suggest that different logics of governance produce different approaches from NGOs: “The transformation in governmental rationality implied in the increased emphasis on governing through free and autonomous subjects generates new types of NGOs and new action-orientations of existing ones” (Sending & Neumann, 2008, p. 667). Thus, in a period of increased state reliance on non-state actors to accomplish governance, we might expect to witness the emergence of new and autonomous non-state actors within the sphere of humanitarian assistance. Second, they suggest it is actually the ability of civil society to act as reliable sources of expertise, as opposed to traditional state institutions, that render central participants in such processes of governance” (Sending & Neumann, 2008, p. 667). To this end, the authors highlight the desire of the state to professionalize and institutionalize these non-state organizations to an extent, while simultaneously emphasizing their autonomous and flexible capacities.

To this end, interdependence comes as a result of a dynamic in which institutional actors require the unique skill-sets and adaptability of NGOs to further their policy goals, whereas NGOs require the monetary assistance, access, and legitimacy that cooperation with IGOs and state institutions afford. In doing so, NGOs become both subjects, limited by access and funding constraints, and objects of governance.

**Humanitarianism, the State, and Security**

Importantly, the current period of humanitarian assistance, from the perspective of the state, is closely linked with upholding international norms. In particular, Helton & Lavenex (1999) identify humanitarianism, developmental assistance, and securitization as the three main tenets of the post-Cold War migration rhetoric of developed states. Given the pervasive nature of these
concepts, they become root issues through which NGOs assisting refugees and migrants are forced to navigate. The metrics of all three terms provides an interesting lens within which migration-related NGO work can viewed.

As opposed to humanitarianism, developmental assistance can be understood as aid, most often originating from a developed state or donor, which is targeted at building the institutions and infrastructure of the benefactor. In the context of migration, developmental assistance is most often observed in two manners, both of which serve the purpose of furthering securitization and humanitarian efforts. On the one hand, developmental assistance can be observed as a tool that developed states use to diminish the “push-factors” that force people out of migrant-producing states. The European Union Trust Fund for Africa, in particular, has been heavily involved in this sort of migration-related developmental assistance in the Sahel and Lake Chad region (European Commission, 2016).7 On the other hand, developmental assistance is also used as a tool that developed states use to incentivize the cooperation of transit countries in the securitization of migration. The EU, for instance promised 5 billion EUR in aid to Turkey in 2015 in exchange for its cooperation in refugee matters (Kanter and Higgins, 2015). This stresses how enmeshed the rhetorical promises of developmental assistance humanitarian aid, and securitization often are.

Framing their support as developmental assistance, or humanitarian aid, developed countries boost the capacity of actors to accommodate or control the assistance of migrants and refugees within transit-country borders. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, provides developmental assistance to the Serbian state through projects which aim to develop the water utilities in communities which are currently accommodating refugee centers

7 The effectiveness of this sort of developmental aid is dubious at best. Clemens and Postel (2017) provide evidence that this sort of aid generally fails to target the “root causes” of migration as it purports to do and as a result finds that its overall capacity to deter migration is small at best. Rather, it is seen that successful development in almost all formerly-poor countries has produced an increase in emigration.
(Update July-August 2017, 2017). Similarly, the EU has provided millions of dollars of assistance to Serbia through the course of the refugee crisis, which it frames as humanitarian aid, which in some cases has consisted of the deployment of officers from FRONTEX, the EU’s border agency, to the Serbian-Bulgarian border (Inter-agency Update October 2016, 2016). Thus, humanitarian assistance and developmental assistance in this sense can be viewed as an effort to further securitization as it is also a means of halting further human movement.

Thus securitization offers a vital perspective in understanding state policy on migration issues, especially in regards to the dynamics of refugee assistance in Serbia. Over the past several decades, there has been an observable trend towards a cohesive refugee regime within the European Union and many identify securitization of migration as the next natural conclusion of this process. Broadly, the concept of securitization was developed by the Copenhagen school in the late 1990s which treated the term as the “the linguistic construction of a security problem” (Balzacq, 2005, p. 172). This approach towards defining securitization has since been criticized by those who advocate for a more holistic conception of the term which accommodates the actions of institutions, rather than just their public discourse (Balzacq, 2005; Leonard, 2010). They argue that securitization can be manifested in actions that do not otherwise mirror the public rhetoric of state actors. This tendency can be seen repeatedly in the migration regimes of developed countries which publicly frame refugee issues as humanitarian while simultaneously enacting legislation which limits their movement and opportunities.

Securitization features heavily in most analyses of contemporary migration policy in developed countries, with a particular focus on the EU. Sarah Leonard (2010) defines the

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8 Lavenex (1999) described the EU refugee regime, as follows: “By cooperating in asylum and immigration matters, EU member states have developed a new set of institutions and norms for handling asylum claims which redefine the traditional approach of the international refugee regime and establish a distinct regional system of international cooperation amongst European countries referred to here as the European refugee regime.” (p. 161)
securitization of migration as “the extreme politicisation of migration and its presentation as a security threat” (p. 231). Accordingly, she develops an argument for how the actions of FRONTEX have furthered the process of securitizing migration within the EU. This trend is widely seen to have a heavily external dimension to it. That is, over the past several decades, the migration policy of the EU has been increasingly externalized, and, increasingly securitized (Burlyuk, 2017; Reslow, 2017; Hernández-Carretero, 2009; Guild et. al., 2008; Guild and Baldaccini, 2007; Helton & Lavenex, 1999). Between the Dublin Agreement, which effectively restricts the ability of an individual to claim asylum in a country of their choice, and bilateral agreements with transit countries like Turkey and Libya that further restrict access to EU countries, the EU border regime is increasingly strict and increasingly external.

Less apparent, however, is the level of involvement, complicity, or resistance, NGOs have exhibited in response to the EU’s march towards migration securitization. Ford and Lyons (2013), writing on the increasing involvement of NGOs in the field of migration management, observe that

The increasing securitization of border regulation and migration management has seen immigration officials overwhelmingly preoccupied with enforcement issues rather than information and service provision. This gap has been filled by churches, trade unions, and NGOs that provide legal services and education/information programmes. (p. 220)

Throughout the refugee assistance field, the linkages between NGO-work and state migration policy are apparent and this has been especially true in the countries dotted along the Balkan route.  

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9 In fact, the official position of the EU’s migration policy has sought to utilize external partners and management, to an increasing amount, since the 1999 Tampere convention. (Helton & Lavenex, 1999) All the same, less clear within the EU’s official rhetoric is to what extent this policy shift has been precipitated on the securitization of migration and its borders.
(“Integration in Serbia, 2017). To this end, one could observe that NGOs involved in migration constitute, perhaps unwillingly, a crucial component of state migration policy. Approaching the subject from a different angle, Cabot (2013) writes on the performative nature of eligibility within the application of NGO aid to asylum seekers in Greece; in subtle ways, the hegemonic images of deservedness are reinforced by some NGOs actors, and then refused by others. Significantly, authors continue to question the linkages between NGO work with migrants and refugees and the securitization efforts of developed states. These linkages are seen not as explicit links but as tacit connections between assistance and securitization, allowing the state to better perform its goal of exclusion.

Although the previous writing offers a useful footing for conceiving of the interest of state institutions in refugee assistance, the question still remains as to the extent which NGOs serve as conduits for state and international institutions interested in securitizing migration. This is a vital consideration for the case of Serbia where refugees, migrants, NGO organizations, and the state are actors entwined in the broader debate on migration and asylum policy in Europe. A goal of this research, then, is to better inform this debate.

**NGOs, Funding, and Access**

As alluded to previously, there is little debate that NGOs have become influential participants in humanitarian and migration affairs. Weiss and Gordenker (2002) stress that as actors within the policy and administrative processes of UN organizations, the extent of their participation has progressively deepened. Irrera (2013) also observes that NGOs, as integral parts of the humanitarian system, have a growing impact on the "transformation of the structure and process of world politics” (Irrera, 2013, p. 2). Importantly, he takes the position that “relations with political power - in either positive or negative terms - have been an essential part of NGO
development and implementation over the years.” (Irrera, 2013, p. 134). As for migration NGOs, or those which assist refugees and migrants, Schnyder (2016) details how this field has flourished with increased cooperation between both state institutions, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and other NGOs. We can observe this directly in the case of Serbia where NGOs have provided invaluable emergency relief and psycho-social support, approved by the Serbian state, in instances where the government was unable or less equipped to carry out these duties (Integration in Serbia, 2017). To this end, one might observe the increasing reliance of state institutions on civil society to accomplish humanitarian policy objectives. Accordingly, it is important to understand how this interdependent relationship functions from a NGO’s perspective. In the following section I will review two main arguments within the literature on the effects of institutional pressure on NGOs: funding pressures and a control over access.

**Funding**

First, many authors write on the perceived influence which institutional actors exert on NGOs through funding. On the one hand, some scholars argue for an enabling effect of government funding, one which has a positive effect on NGO political activity. On the other hand, there are arguments for a demobilizing, or depoliticizing, effect of government funding on the capacity and willingness of NGOs to engage in political activity. The purpose of this study is not to provide new data on the question of the effect of funding on NGOs’ political activities. Nonetheless, it will be necessary to evaluate and analyze the potential effect of funding at the grassroots level. Understanding this debate is crucial for any analysis of NGO work in the refugee crisis where a divide can often be seen between ECHO and state-funded NGOs on the one hand and independent NGOs on the other.¹⁰

¹⁰ A recent update posted on the website of an independent NGO currently operating on Chios in Greece presents an example of this divide. At the end of July this past year the Greek government announced that it would begin taking
Kelly Oliver (2017) provides a compelling discursive analysis of the prevailing complacency of institutions on migration issues. She frames humanitarian NGOs as an important lifeline for refugees and migrants forced into vulnerable situations by state action, but also highlights how this very assistance shifts blame and responsibility away from the state. That being said, it is important to note how Oliver approaches the issue as a political philosopher. To this end, the claim that humanitarian NGOs remain complacent and dependent on government agencies for funding and access to spaces should be contextualized with other sources and experiences. Within the academic literature on the relationship between institutional interest and NGO activity, there is an ongoing debate over the effect of government or institutionally-linked funding on the political activity of nonprofits. In the broader context of my thesis paper, this literature can shed light on the tacit and hard forms of influence that institutional interests take in the field.

There are ample voices within the literature which argue against demobilization theories. These are arguments which see little to no negative effect from institutional funding (Lecy & Van Slyke 2012). Through this analysis, government or institutional funding positively enables NGOs to effect change at little to no impact to their capacity to be politically active. Císař & Vráblíková (2012) argue that, at least in the case of the Czech Republic, “Sufficient EU funding facilitates transnational protest activities by social movement organizations as well as public persuasion strategies such as networking” (p. 142). Similarly writing on the effect of EU funding on NGOs, Sanchez Salgado (2013) takes the stance that “the EU helps sustain, but does not significantly constrain, the development of European CSOs” (p. 339). The opportunities that EU funding affords over the funding, selection and management of support services to the Vial and Souda camps on Chios, which was previously unrestricted. This in turn sparked the withdrawal of NGOs funded by the European Commission from the camps. This group then took used this post to clarify that despite the withdrawal of ECHO-funded NGOs, they, as a “fiercely independent organisation, powered by the solidarity shown by independent donors” would be unaffected by the ECHO withdrawal.” https://actionfromswitzerland.ch/protection/were-not-going-anywhere/
to under-funded NGOs in accomplishing their goals, especially those operating in countries with underdeveloped civil societies such as Serbia, is crucial to the argument for the efficacy of EU patronage. Chaves et. al. (2004) similarly find either a positive or non-existent relationship between government funding and nonprofit political activity. Thus, their position is clear: government funding does not suppress nonprofit political activity.

Nonetheless, demobilization authors provide robust evidence for their argument, these are authors who identify a negative effect of institutional funding on NGOs. Most recently, Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire (2017) caution that “even when governments are motivated by honorable intentions, their financial assistance...” may have “...the (unintended) effect of dampening NGO political activity” (p. 401). They base this argument on two findings in their research. First, they find that since “donors are known to discipline NGOs via implicit or explicit threats to withdraw funding should their activity become too radical; increased funding thus moderates NGO political activity” (p. 401). Second, to a lesser extent they observe that, “organizations wishing to engage in radical activities are less willing to accept government funding as this might limit their activities.” (p. 402). EU funding, in these cases, has a self-selecting tendency to mitigate contentious political action from beneficiary NGOs. In other words, politically moderate NGOs are more likely to seek out funding. The roots of the demobilization theorist can perhaps be traced as far back as Doug McAdam’s seminal work *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* which supported the assumption that relatively few elites control the wealth of power in the political sphere and have the power to tightly control the dissemination of these funds into the civic sphere. He argued that institutions select and support moderate groups
to prevent or discourage radicalization (Armato and Caren, 2002).11

It is important to note is that within the existing literature on the impact of EU funding there are two substantial gaps with relevance to my case study. First, there is very little substantive work within this literature which studies the effect of EU funding on NGOs based outside of the union12. Second, a very limited selection of these case studies are concerned with migration-based NGOs. Chaves et. al. (2004), for example, analyze the political activity from a national sample of US religious organizations, on the one hand, and a longitudinal sample of Minneapolis based non-profits on the other. This is far from the dynamics at play in the application of assistance to refugees travelling along the Balkan route and accordingly should be viewed with caution as to its applicability this case study.

While some authors may not recognize a direct dampening effect of government funding on NGO political activity, many still identify subtle and tangential ways in which government funding affects the efficacy of NGOs. Chaves et. al. (2004) admit that institutional funding could have a subtle effect through the encouragement of resource dependence and requirement of navigating complex legal structures in order to access funds. Anheier et. al. (1997) similarly find that state dependent NGOs tend to exhibit more “state-oriented behavior” than their third-party payment dependent counterparts. Perhaps most importantly, Child & Grønbjerg (2007) find that substantial government funding tends to have a limiting effect on the political advocacy of NGOs due to its tendency to institutionalize, or professionalize formerly contentious organizations. This

11 Importantly, McAdam suggested that excluded groups do have the capacity to bring about structural change, an outcome dependent on status three elements: the structure of political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength and cognitive liberation.

12 The work of Bruszt and Vedres (2012) provides one exception to this, although it should be noted that their research focused on the effect of the European Union regional development programs in Eastern Europe, where the EU spent close to a decade establishing “local developmental agency”. Specifically they analyzed the post-accession position of organizations which participated in pre-accession assistance programs, finding an overall positive correlation.
is an important point which serves to stress the implicit influence that institutional actors can exert onto NGOs. As Ron (1997), the move towards enhanced legitimacy, within the borders of the organizational field, is both enabling and constraining. Professional organizational practices facilitate better funding possibilities and increased positive exposure. On the other hand, newly professionalized groups may also find their range of acceptable behaviors to be constrained alongside a new and increased reliance on traditional funding channels.

Finally, in evaluating the ways in which states may influence the activity and efficacy of NGOs, we must also consider cases of administrative and institutional influence. Chaudhry (2017), for instance, argues that states generally perceive NGOs to be costly due to their ability to challenge a state’s economic and security interests, aid in domestic mobilization, and influence electoral politics. Repression, in a general sense, can be understood as

The actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions. (Goldstein 1978, p. xxvii).

Political repression is a well-established concept in political theory but, regarding its application to the relationship between NGOs and state institutions, it is most often seen in writing on authoritarian or non-democratic states. Most of the writing which relates repression to NGOs focuses on violent oppressive tactics. Chaudhry (2017), however contests this notion by introducing the term *administrative crackdown* to contrast the otherwise violent tactics that a state might use to limit NGO activity. This sort of administrative repression, she explains, can be conceived of as the enacting of legal restrictions to create barriers to entry, funding, and advocacy by NGOs (Chaudhry, 2017).

Being a democratizing state attempting to join the EU, it is not in the interest of the Serbian state or the EU to utilize violent repressive techniques against the NGOs operating under its
purview, despite the fact that their work may go against the interests of the state. The same cannot be said of their treatment of refugees and migrants. What we cannot say, at a cursory glance, however, is the extent to which the Serbian state or the EU have used “soft” repression tactics against the organizations working in the context of the refugee crisis in Serbia. That is, whether or not the allure of funding, legal restrictions or barriers to entry have influenced the political activities of organizations.

Access

Second, and specific to the case of migration and humanitarianism, is the politics of access. On this point, Oliver (2017) takes a combative stance in arguing that humanitarian aid is both the poison and the cure to humanitarian crises given its over reliance on state institutions for access to beneficiaries. Her logic identifies carceral humanitarianism, a paradox which creates the motivating conditions for refugee movement, while at the same time criminalizing the very act as the dominant force behind modern day humanitarian actions. Within this order, she highlights NGOs as an important lifeline for refugees and migrants forced into vulnerable situations by state action, but also highlights how this very assistance shifts blame and responsibility away from the state.13 She stresses that aid, for the most part, remains dependent on government agencies for funding and access to spaces and additionally on military forces to protect their aid workers, thus making it a self-perpetuating dynamic. This is a point that Irrera (2013) mirrors when observing that the effectiveness of NGOs continues to depend on the access granted to them by state governments and IGOs. This is a particularly important consideration for my analysis. The closing of informal refugee living situations within Serbia in favor of state run camps and centers has

13 As a point of interest, the rhetorical roots of this argument can be found in the initial skepticism that Florence Nightingale voiced towards the creation of the ICRC which, she argued, would take the humanitarian burden of caring for the victims of war away from the states waging conflict therefor making the decision to go to war less taxing.
resulted in the increased institutionalization of humanitarian access to refugees.

For decades, refugee camps and border regions have been the traditional setting where humanitarian actors have performed assistance. These areas are typically highly securitized spaces overseen by state and institutional actors which have the power to control access into and out of the camps. This stasis, however, has been challenged somewhat in Europe in particular by the proliferation of independent groups which assist refugees and migrants who exist outside of the system in transit corridors, in border towns, and in squats. Whereas “camp logics instrumentally contain and control mobility so that care can be administered,” solidarity-based, humanitarian borderwork breeds a different identity (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016).

Nonetheless, through the course of the European refugee crisis, humanitarian work has been observed as undertaking increasingly state-like responsibilities. In particular, authors such as del Valle (2016) and Attina (2017) identify humanitarian actors as joining more traditional border actors, such as border police, national Coast Guards, or FRONTEX, in practices of search and rescue in the Mediterranean. It should be understood that this cooperation does not, by its very nature, uphold the restrictive border regime of the European Union, quite the opposite in fact, given that this sort of assistance seeks to save lives in cases where institutional actors would not be able to or would not want to. That being said, this cooperation does result in practices which serve to legitimize the border policy of the EU and its member countries. As Pallister-Wilkins (2017) writes,

> Humanitarian action, with its claims to de-territorialize universalism and challenge sovereign power over life and death, actually reterritorializes and consolidates sovereignty in practice. SAR operations expand the zones of possible intervention into international waters and are reliant on the permission and guidance of sovereign authorities, while on land the creation of transit spaces along transport routes are in continuous negotiation with local political actors and national authorities. (p. 6)

Thus, through activity which helps to consolidate the sovereignty of state actors over migratory
practices, NGOs become participants within the wider state-based migration regime.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a brief overview of the terminology and academic work directly relevant from to this thesis. Accordingly, I reviewed the work of Laura Henry (2011) as well as other scholars such as Duda (2017) and Milan & Pirro (2018) who are active in the field of NGO work in the European refugee crisis, to contextualize the sorts of organizational structures that are found in NGO communities. This previous scholarship provides a practical framework to analyze refugee assistance work by NGOs in Serbia. Additionally, I overviewed the debate on governmentality as it relates to NGOs and the state. Previous authors highlight the symbiosis that has emerged between humanitarian NGOs and the state, paying particular attention to the role that these organizations play in the processes of governance and security. To this end, the work of Sending and Neumann (2006) on the role that NGOs play in governance is of great value. They develop a rationality of government in which “political power operates through rather than on civil society. Governing is performed through autonomous subjects, not on passive objects” (669). Finally, the previous work on the effect of governance on NGO activity was reviewed. In particular, two relevant themes were highlighted from this wider discussion - the effect of funding on humanitarian NGOs and the effect of state controlled access to refugee camps.
II - Detailing the Crisis

"Serbia has not put up fences or barbed wire. It would be easy for us [to do so], while you in the
EU were silent, when the fence was being erected.”

- Alexandar Vučić, 2015

“In this regard, assistance and support in the form of food, clothing, footwear, encouraging
migrants to reside outside the designated permanent asylum centers and transit reception centers
are [no] longer acceptable, this [particularly] on the territory of the Belgrade city municipality.”

- Serbian Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs,
Open Letter, 2016

In the past several years Serbia, as an important transit point for refugees and migrants
working their way towards intended destinations in Western Europe, has witnessed the movement
of hundreds of thousands of people across its borders ("Serbian Centres", 2017). This is a situation
that has developed in accordance with the country’s location as a key transit country for refugees
travelling on the Western Balkan route, in the context of a broader period of human movement
commonly called the European refugee crisis. In the following section I will provide an in-depth
overview of the progression of this situation in Serbia. First I will review some key developments
that emerged in Serbia prior to March, 2016, contextualizing the key elements that came into play
during this time. Next, I will provide an in-depth overview of the refugee crisis in Serbia between
March, 2016 and May, 2017, paying particular focus to three key events: 1) the closure of the EU
borders around Serbia in March, 2016; 2) the issuance of an open letter by the Serbian government
to refugee assistance organizations; and 3) the demolition of the Barracks squat in downtown
Belgrade which housed more than a thousand refugees and migrants.

Refugees fleeing the wars in Syria and Iraq are the most high profile of these cases,
however many people in Serbia have left Afghanistan and Pakistan in the face of a surge in Taliban
activity as well as increasingly dismal economic prospects in these countries. Although subject to
fluctuation, the UNHCR estimates the number of refugees in Serbia at around 7,400, most of which
are living in one of the 16 official asylum centers in the country or residing in short-term and often vulnerable living arrangements ("Serbian Centres", 2017). With this in mind, my research concentrates primarily on the dynamics affecting and informing the provision of assistance to refugees and migrants by Serbian NGOs in and around Belgrade.

This research looks at the time period between March, 2016 and May, 2017. In particular, I identify three key events through the course of the time period which significantly altered the situation of refugees and migrants around Belgrade and the assistance which they were provided. The period starts near the peak of refugee movement on the Balkan route when thousands of refugees were entering and exiting Serbia each day on their way towards their Western European destinations. This was at the point when the borders were still, for the most part, open and receptive to refugee movement. The relative ease of human movement was curbed when many EU borders began to close in March, 2016, kick-starting a state of stagnation in the refugee crisis in Belgrade. This dynamic was again challenged later in the year when Serbia’s Office of the Commissariat published an open letter in November forbidding NGOs from distributing humanitarian assistance to individuals outside of state-run reception centers (Zaba, 2016). The end of the time period, early May, 2017, marks the demolition of the Belgrade Barracks and the removal of its hundreds of residents to state-run camps outside the city (AYS 10/05, 2017; Goddard, 2017).¹⁴ This event largely triggered the cessation of NGO assistance to migrants and refugees outside the sphere of state management in Belgrade. Analyzing the current situation of refugees and migrants in Belgrade, and the NGOs which have provided their services in this context, requires a

¹⁴The majority of the refugees living in informal arrangements in the winter of 2016/2017 were situated inside the abandoned factories behind Belgrade’s main train station, colloquially referred to as “the Barracks” by both refugees and NGO workers. Although this is a term that may be unfamiliar to residents of Belgrade who are not personally involved with refugee assistance in the city, it is the term that I will opt to use in my research given the lack of a standardized alternative.
comprehensive understanding of the history and progression of this situation. In this next section, I will provide an in-depth overview of the refugee crisis in Serbia, and its surrounding context, while paying particular attention to the three events mentioned above.

**Prelude to a Crisis**

Between May 2015 and March 2016, over 920,000 refugees traveled through Serbia as they made their way to Hungary and Croatia and onwards to Western Europe (ECHO, Factsheet, 2017). This influx in such a short period of time put unprecedented strain on the EU’s established asylum and migration systems, which soon created tension in the broader cultural and political debates throughout the region. Anti-immigration stances gained currency in many EU countries that had been receiving or observing large numbers of refugees and migrants pass through their borders. Hungary, as a key transit country along the Balkan route, is particularly noteworthy for how it integrated anti-immigration discourse into its governmental procedures. As early as June, 2015, the government began developing plans to build a four-meter high fence along its 110-mile border with Serbia (Kingsley, 2015).

Growing tension across the EU began to inform the political debates on immigration and refugees. Initially, much of the discourse on migration and refugees ranged from slightly apathetic to positive. Countries like Germany, Sweden, and Austria were early supporters of the movement to open Europe’s doors to the conflict-affected refugees pouring into the region from North Africa and the Middle East. Officially, the EU establishment supported this move from a human-rights standpoint as well. In early September, 2015 the President of the EU’s executive wing, the European Commission (EC), Jean-Claude Juncker addressed Europe in a speech saying that “Today it is Europe that is sought as a place of refuge and exile...That is something to be proud of
and not something to fear” (European Commission, 2015). This rhetoric, ostensibly, sought to quell the growing tensions beginning to plague many EU countries concerning the rising numbers of displaced persons seeking refuge in Europe. At a more subtle level, however, the speech also revealed the tension beginning to show between transit and destination countries in the region. At the time, the EC was being faced with threats from Germany and other countries which were receiving the bulk of refugees, to re-establish national border controls within the Schengen area unless countries began to accept equitable sharing of the new arrivals (Traynor, 2015). Juncker went on to announce that the EC was asking national governments to agree to distribute 160,000 refugees currently in Italy, Greece and Hungary on a binding and not voluntary basis. “It has to be done and it will be done,” he said (Traynor, 2015). Thus, Juncker proposed a new and more geographically dispersed system of refugee integration, stressing that the Schengen zone would not be sacrificed while he remained in charge of the commission.15 Framing the effective management of migration as consistent with the effective management of the Schengen zone demonstrates the growing strain between transit countries within the EU. For example Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, and Bulgaria all allowed refugees and migrants through their territories in 2015 with the understanding that they would continue on towards the wealthier countries of Western Europe.

Speaking of “common” and “united” refugee and asylum policies, Juncker said they had to “be permanently anchored in our policy approach and our rules” (Traynor, 2015). This rhetoric was presented as one of humanitarian concern, but at a deeper level one can also identify the

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15 The Schengen zone is a key component of the EU’s migration regime and its rise signified the solidification of a broader process of externalizing European borders. The Schengen zone guarantees freedom of movement for all signatory countries however its pairing with the Dublin Agreement, which props up the rule of first entry for asylum seekers, ensures that legally speaking it is the responsibility of member states the EU borders to examine asylum claims (Lavenex, 1999).
security concerns beginning to emerge. A little more than one month after making these comments, Juncker would begin pushing for the negotiated EU-Turkey deal as a measure to ensure that Turkey’s more than two million refugees stayed within the country which has, in many ways, proven itself incapable of ensuring basic human-rights to this population (Connolly, Traynor, & Letsch, 2015). At its heart, this was a bid to move refugees away from Western Europe.

Unlike the more developed destination countries of Western European countries, Serbia functioned as a transit country for refugees and migrants until spring of 2016. This afforded the Serbian state a sense of assuredness and security in the midst of the crisis where refugees and migrants were often seen as some other country’s problem. Granted, there were hundreds and sometimes even thousands of refugees and migrants entering Serbia daily from Macedonia and Bulgaria, but all the government had to do was provide them the means to leave and they would pass right through. In January of 2016, a winter month which typically sees smaller numbers of people in transit, more than 58,000 people passed through Serbia. Thus, the Serbian situation wasn’t seen as a permanent crisis; for the moment most were just passing through, rarely spending more than a few days in the country as they progressed onwards to their intended destinations. Some spent time in the government reception centers, which only had the capacity to accommodate around 4,000 individuals, for a week or two to recuperate, but few saw Serbia as their final destination (Lukić, 2016). In many ways Serbia was witnessing a very different side of the refugee crisis than countries like Italy, Germany, or France where long-term integration was seen as more viable.

Interestingly, the Serbian state began to capitalize on its position by framing itself as acting more in line with the EU’s humanitarian policies than the EU itself. In September of 2015, current president Aleksandar Vučić, the Prime Minister at the time, said in a speech that in contrast to
Hungary, “Serbia has not put up fences or barbed wire. It would be easy for us [to do so], while you in the EU were silent, when the fence was being erected.” Elaborating in a later social media post, Vučić further praised Serbia’s response to its refugee situation by stating that "Serbia will receive a certain number of migrants. This makes us more European than some member states. We don't build fences"\textsuperscript{16} (Avramović & Jovanović, 2015). Within this dynamic, the public rhetoric of Vučić is detached from considerations of political gain or posturing. This is reflected in his response to the closure of the Balkan route: “Serbia did not want to gain political points, neither at home nor abroad, like many other, primarily EU countries, did” (Avramović & Jovanović, 2015).

The validity of this humanitarian framing is questionable however, due to conflicting statements made by the Serbian state and through their cooperation with the other states on securitization measures. Rather, one could make the argument that the proper management of the refugee situation is seen as a means of advancing towards EU membership. Even Aleksandar Vučić has framed the Austrian assistance provided to Serbia in its management of the refugees in Serbia as “‘considerable support’ to Serbia on its way to the EU, which he described as a national strategic goal” (Tanjug, 2017). Likewise, there has been support for this maneuvering within some of the more institutional NGO-circles in Serbia. A representative of Grupa 484, in a public statement outlined how the goals of the Policy Advocacy Group (PAG) coalition in 2015 would be “monitoring the adoption and implementation of the Action Plan for Chapter 24 in the areas of migration, asylum and border control” (“Policy Advocacy”, 2015). This was a move to help facilitate the alignment of Serbian state policy in the area of migration with that of the EU, a prerequisite for the path towards accession.

\textsuperscript{16} Interestingly, rhetorical framing of Serbia as being "more European" than other European states is an established tool used in Serbian politics, dating back to at least the rule of Slobodan Milosević who famously stated that ---------
The Border Closures of March, 2016

The situation in Serbia changed drastically in March of 2016 due to two large developments in the EU. First, EU governments in the Western Balkans began announcing the effective closures of their borders to migrants and refugees at the beginning of the month in rapid succession. While the Hungarian border with Serbia had already been securitized for the better part of a year, thanks to Hungary’s new wall, migrants had been able to still use the Balkan route towards Europe by instead travelling from Serbia to Croatia and then onwards to either Hungary or Slovenia. This ceased to be a viable option when, on March 9th, the Slovenian state announced that they would be closing their borders, an announcement quickly followed by governments in Croatia and Macedonia. Hundreds of thousands then faced the prospect of becoming trapped in Greece, Turkey, and to a lesser extent, Serbia (Kingsley, 2016). Despite the collective fears from refugees and migrants, European politicians voiced satisfaction and optimism on the implications of these actions. Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, claimed that “irregular flows of migrants along western Balkans route have come to an end” while Slovenia’s prime minister, Miro Cerar, said that the “so-called western Balkan route for irregular migrants is no more” (Kingsley, 2016).

The second monumental action of this month was the deal between Turkey and the EU announced on March 20th. The EU-Turkey deal, as it is known, saw Turkey receive up to $6.8 billion in aid, visa-free travel to Europe for its citizens, and renewed EU membership talks in return for the country agreeing to take back refugees and migrants who cross over to Greece (Mohdin, 2016). From the beginning, this deal was criticized by human-rights groups who voiced concerns that it would put refugees in harm's way, usurp their human rights, and incentivize their return to war zones. The effect of the EU-Turkey deal was immediate. Within a month, arrivals to Greece
dropped by a staggering 90% (Mohdin, 2017). This made Serbia an increasingly attractive option for attempting to enter the EU; refugees stuck in Turkey could bypass Greece easily by leaving Turkey for Bulgaria and then move on to Serbia.

These securitizing moves would go on to have severe implications. According to one MSF report, despite the “humanitarian and legal obligations of Europe to treat migrants/refugees with dignity and provide safe havens and asylum” during this time period, “what followed was the institution of restrictive migration policies which were often characterized by the building of razor wire border fences and border closures along the Balkan route” (Arsenijević et. al., 2017, p. 2). This would result in increased dangers for refugees and migrants as government camps were inadequate to accommodate the increased number of longer-term stays in Serbia. (Inter-agency Report August, 2016). Accordingly, Belgrade would begin to fill up with hundreds of refugees and migrants who stayed for months at a time, compared to days previously, where they would be exposed to the dangers associated with smugglers, mental health, food insecurity, and illness.

Since the closure of the borders and the stagnation of the refugee crisis, mental health emerged as one of the most immediate and severe concerns facing refugees and migrants in non-permanent arrangements. This includes both the populations living outside state asylum and transit centers and those accommodated waiting for their legal status to be decided on. Problems with PTSD and depression have been identified en masse through research on similar situations in camps in Greece. (Tsagkari, 2017) A report compiled by MSF doctors conducting research in the field in Serbia returned important results showing that the “lack of alternatives for people to migrate and seek asylum in an organized manner, including policies of refoulement, push people into the hands of smugglers and make migratory journeys far more dangerous.” (Arsenijević et. al., 2017, p. 8) Regarding mental health, it also presented data suggesting that “due to long stays
and traumatic events, the initial acute reaction if distress experienced by migrants/refugees gradually turns to more complex mental health disorders/psychopathology, which is difficult to manage.” (Arsenijević et. al., 2017, p. 2017) One of the other most concerning developments of the situation in Serbia has also been the significant population of what the UNHCR refers to as unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Mental health problems disproportionately affect UASCs, who additionally face a plethora of other concerns as an extremely vulnerable population in the crisis (Tsagkari, 2017). Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) became particularly vulnerable to a variety of concerns as they began flocking into Belgrade in large numbers, comprising somewhere around 15% of all refugees and migrants (Inter-agency Report February, 2017).

A diverse community of groups had emerged in the previous months tasking themselves with the assistance of refugees and migrants in Serbia, however the closures of March 2016 changed the nature of this assistance drastically and, further, started to bring new NGOs into the fold. These ranged from UN bodies (most prominently the UNHCR and UNICEF) to large international organizations (MSF, ICRC, and IRC, for example) to smaller NGOs. These smaller NGOs, in turn, were mainly divided between local, Serbian organizations on the one hand, like Refugee Aid Miksalište or the Crisis Policy Response Center, and then small independent, international NGOs like the Rigardu on the other hand.

Of course, one of the most important players in this time period has been the Serbian state whose most immediate involvement has been provided through the Commissariat for Refugees (KIRS). They too, faced a shifting dynamic following the closures of the EU borders in March, 2016, forcing longer stays for refugees and migrants within the country, thus increasing the need for, and management of, state run asylum and transit centers. To a lesser extent, the Ministry of
the Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) have been involved in the management and assistance of refugees and migrants in Serbia.

Nonetheless, state assistance has also been informed by the state policy-making infrastructure. Although the office of the Commissariat has been the most visible agency involved in the refugee crisis in Serbia, the official policy on refugees and migration has been largely set by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (MoLESVA) under its influential minister Aleksandar Vulin. Current President Aleksandar Vučić, whose controversial clout as a firm leader in Serbian politics has grown steadily over the years, has also been crucial to setting migration policy in the country.

The EU also emerged as key player informing the engagement of refugees in Serbia. The ongoing negotiation between the Serbian state and the EU, regarding its membership application, has been identified by a number of academics and politicians alike as affecting the state’s commitment and involvement with certain issues and it is likely that the refugee crisis is no different (Anastasakis & Bechev; Tomić, 2013). The EU provides a critical role in the management of the refugee situation in Serbia, most of which has gone to the UNHCR and Commissariat or the Serbian government. In total, more than $80 million has been financed, through different EU financial mechanisms, towards Serbia for the management of the migration situation since 2015. According to the EC, this money has been allocated “to ensure the accommodation of migrants and refugees in accommodation centers; to support the delivery of health and other primary services to refugees, migrants and host communities; and to reinforce its border control capabilities

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17 Minister Vulin was the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran, and Social Policy in Serbia between April 2014 and June 2017 before taking the position of Minister of Defense. The current Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran, and Social Policy is Zoran Đorđević although thus far his influence in the position seems to be somewhat more muted. (Inter-agency Report June, 2017)
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(EC Press Release, 2017). Other funding, has gone to a collection of ECHO-funded NGOs like the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Still, when one follows the movement of this money it becomes clear that EU money in this context has a much wider net of benefactors. First, one must consider the subsidiary grants that organizations like the UNHCR and DRC give out to smaller organizations to accomplish their projects. Additionally, the non-humanitarian assistance which the Serbian state has received is often overlooked by reporters and academics alike. Serbia has received millions of dollars in direct security assistance from the EU in the past several years (Inter-agency Report October, 2016). Thus, it is true that the Serbian government has had close ties to the EU in its management of the refugee situation, but it must also be understood that these ties extend towards the NGO field as well.18

The summer of 2016 progressed with increased congestion in Belgrade and mounting numbers of refugees and migrants at key transit points on the borders of Croatia and Hungary, primarily around the Serbian towns of Šid and Subotica. There tended to be somewhere around 1000 people who lived in informal arrangements in the center of Belgrade while groups of approximately 200 camped out around Šid and Subotica respectively (Inter-agency Report September, 2016). These developments, predictably, were effects of the closed borders. Around this time, several Serbian journalists conducted interviews on the situation in Belgrade and observed as early as September that a lack of resources and attention was precipitating a serious humanitarian crisis amongst the growing refugee population living in increasingly precarious conditions. The population had become, almost wholly reliant on smugglers to leave (Obradovic-Wochnik & Mitrović, 2016). Considering the state of official accommodation for refugees and

18 Funding from the EU alone has reached more than 20 million EUR for humanitarian aid and at least 24 million EUR in pre-accession support for migration control since the beginning of the refugee situation. Importantly, the EU and these other international institutions are funding both the Serbian state and NGO community. For more information one might look here: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/serbia_en.pdf
migrants at the time, in addition to the lasting fears of pushbacks, it made sense that an increasing number of people were sleeping rough in the city center.\textsuperscript{19}

There were a number of important Serbian NGOs who were providing service-provision and informational services to refugees and migrants at the time. Info Park, in particular, emerged as a key player in this arena as it operated a small informational kiosk in Bristol Park, where many were sleeping at the time. It provided daily updates to refugees and migrants about the situation at the borders, and services available in Belgrade, including translation services. Miksalište also emerged as an important provider of similar services. It was situated in the close by Savamala district until it was displaced from its location as part of the controversial, UAE-funded Belgrade Waterfront project (Zaba, 2016). The Serbian state forced the operation out in late April, 2016, by reclaiming the land and giving the organization one day to move out to a new location before destroying the building entirely. Admittedly, the organization had no property claims on its previous residency however the contentious and immediate nature in which they were forced to move to a new place underscores the tensions between the state and NGOs at the time.

During this time, refugees and migrants in Serbia were active, to varying degrees of success, in their own advocacy. This has been best seen through two means of mobilization: marches and graffiti. In late July, state officials began agitating for the “reoccupation” of Bristol Park and Luka Celović Park which had been serving as a key meeting a rest point for refugees and migrants in the months prior. Arguing that the grass needed to be replanted, both parks were dug up, and previously grassy areas were covered with an orange plastic fence making any more

\textsuperscript{19} The term pushback is a key component of the situation that unfolded in Serbia in 2016 and 2017 and is a term used to describe the informal expulsions of asylum seekers without due process, a tactic often used alongside violence and beatings. All of the states on the Western Balkan route have been guilty of pushbacks, Serbia included, however Croatia and Hungary in particular came notorious during this period for the brutality of their measures which routinely involved the use of attack dogs and batons which resulted in many broken bones, open wounds, and smashed phones. (Nallu, Pushbacks, 2017) It has, in effect, become an important part, if unofficial, part of the migration regimes of these EU countries.
cycling in the park effectively impossible (Obradović-Wochnik & Mitrović, 2016). People were forced to find new accommodation and many people flocked to the abandoned factory close by, behind the train station, which would go on to become one of the most important and contentious places of the refugee crisis in Serbia (Greetings, 2016). These actions were followed by a large joint action between the police and the Serbian Commissariat during which they attempted to evacuate the park by ushering everyone they found on buses, “reportedly threatening people with deportation and prison” to the nearby Krnjača asylum center. Reportedly, however, when reaching the camp, authorities were faced with the prospect that there was not enough space for everyone, resulting in some being sent away by camp personnel and others deciding for themselves to leave and return to the Barracks (Greetings, 2016). Although the ability for these parks to function as overnight accommodations was removed, they would continue to function as informal meeting and information points.

These actions catalyzed an increase in protests led by refugees and migrants in Belgrade... Responding to rumors about their impending eviction from the park, a group of about 150 refugees and migrants began a hunger strike on July 22nd in protest of the situation on the Hungarian border, the perceived threat of deportation, and the lack of food. In the hopes drawing media attention to their predicament and hopes of crossing into the European Union, they started a march out of Belgrade and toward Hungarian border in the north (B92, 2016).20 A representative from Info Park said in a news interview that "Just as we were about to start a distribution of the breakfast this morning, a large group of refugees in the park gathered in the central square in the park," adding that the refugees were "refusing to take any food though Caritas and Info Park had 1,200

20 It is unclear exactly how many people took part in this protest although the numbers range somewhere between 150 and 300. B92, the main Serbian media source who covered these events and originally put the number at 150 although within a week revised their original estimates to around 300. (B92, 2016; B92, 2016b)
breakfast portions ready " (B92, 2016). The group moved on foot from Belgrade as far as Sremski Karlovci, about 60 miles away, before opting to move by train to the border, due to exhaustion (B92, 2017b). Here, it would appear the group began to dissipate, with those who continued the hunger strike being mostly men from Afghanistan and Pakistan, who were particularly vulnerable to the EU’s austere migration regime (B92, 2017b).

While it is important not to take away the agency of this vulnerable group in their own self-advocacy, it should be noted that that, in many cases, this political action has been catalyzed or supported by the work of several, predominantly independent and international, NGOs. Serbian media, for instance, accused activists from Germany of catalyzing the protest actions conducted by refugees and migrants in July of 2016 by claiming that activists arrived several days prior to discuss the “protest with the migrants" (B92, 2016). Likewise, NGO activists provided materials for some of the graffiti work which began popping up around the Barracks complex which contained poignant and simple messages decrying the situation faced by the residents of this space.

The Open Letter of November, 2016

A moment that appears to have strongly informed the current status of NGO/state relations in the provision of refugee assistance in Belgrade was certainly the issuance of an open letter to all applicable NGOs in Serbia by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs (MoLEVSA) on November 4, 2016. A portion of it reads as follows:

...we inform you that, in order to ensure humane living conditions for migrant populations in the Republic of Serbia the stay within the transit reception centers for migrants and permanent centers for asylum in which all necessary assistance is available (food, shelter, clothing, medicine, psychosocial and health care) in the best interest of migrants. In this regard, assistance and support in the form of food, clothing, footwear, encouraging migrants to reside outside the designated permanent asylum centers and transit reception centers are [no] longer acceptable, this [particularly] on the territory of the Belgrade city municipality. (Border Monitoring Serbia, 2016)
The “Open Letter”, as was referred to colloquially by those in the field, came amidst a period of growing pressure on the state to address the worsening conditions of the refugees and migrants living in squats close to the train station in downtown Belgrade. The letter asked NGOs in the city to cease the distribution of direct aid, such as food and clothing, to refugees and migrants in these situations, arguing that they should register in the reception camps where “all necessary assistance is available (food, shelter, clothing, medicine, psychosocial and health care)” (“Serbia asks volunteers”, 2016). In the previous week the state had also forced at least two Serbian NGOs, Refugee Aid Miksalište and Info Park, to cease the distribution of food to those sleeping rough in the city center. (Inter-agency Update November, 2016; Serbia Update 31 Oct-02 Nov, 2016) The move to freeze assistance was an ostensible attempt to incentivize the movement of these people to reception camps around the country, from Krnjača to Preševo, which the government declared sufficient to accommodate the incoming influx. Previous work points to the presence of a sustained tension between the state and NGOs in Serbia, dating back to Milosević era, and it is possible that they heavy handed nature of this call to cease assistance was a manifestation of this lasting unease. (Grødeland, 2005; Mikus, 2015).

There was always confusion amongst the refugees and NGOs operating in Serbia about the availability of space in these camps. Tijana Sijarić, an activist working for Info Park, was quoted remarking on the foolishness of the state thinking that “if food and clothes aren’t distributed, there will be no migrants in the park, it doesn’t work that way.” Rather, she reflected “the problem is that all camps are full, and these people have nowhere to go, so this decision didn’t solve anything. People keep coming, the problem remains the same, the difference is that many of them are now both homeless and hungry” (Zaba, Survival, 2016). Remarking on the situation emerging at the time where Hungary kept to its strict quotas while Belgrade became a pitfall for refugees with no
way out, Sijarić said that “The ‘no food, no migrants’ policy is not working. They were hoping people would stop coming if we didn’t help them. But look now – there’s no food and people still keep coming” (Zaba, Survival, 2016). Meanwhile, at the same time authorities were adamantly claiming the opposite, that the state camps had sufficient space to accommodate all who wanted entrance, and derided those who would choose to stay on the streets. Ivan Gerginov, a representative from the Commissariat said at the time that “Those people don’t want to start the asylum procedure, that’s why they stay where they stay. Most probably because they think that this way it will be easier for them to leave Serbia...As I said, I represent the state body that deals with this problem and I confirm I can accept all of those people” (Zaba, Survival, 2016).

The legal process approach towards asylum and refugee movement in Serbia has always been confusing, however generally speaking it requires a refugee or migrant to register with police within 48 hours of arriving in the country. Understandably, given the Dublin agreement and the widespread misinformation surrounding the agreement, many refugees and migrants were extremely skeptical of officially registering with the Serbian authorities, especially those whose original countries have been deemed as safe or those who may have failed to register upon their arrival to the country.\(^{21}\) Nonetheless, the official position of the Serbian government at the time was that even migrants who did not meet the deadline to register themselves in Serbia, or who did not show up in a camp after registering at the local police station, could still be accommodated in collective centers, registered under any names and surnames. Pointing to the fears of many in registering in centers, a representative of the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants remarked in the aftermath of the open letter that “What is crucial about this situation is the fact that they [migrants] don’t want to leave their fingerprints during the registration, because they fear

\(^{21}\) The Dublin Regulation “obliges refugees to seek asylum in the first EU country that they reach - and is designed to stop states on the edge of the EU from passing on migrants elsewhere.” (Milekić, 2017)
possibly being turned away from an EU country [once they get there]” (Zaba, Survival, 2016).

Figure 2. Residents of the Barracks line up to receive meals from an independent NGO in February, 2017 (Sapoch, 2017)

Many NGOs and donors took this moment to align themselves, at least publicly, with the Serbian state. Immediately after the open letter was issued the UNHCR-led Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG) gathered “over 70 representatives of authorities, UN agencies, other agencies and NGOs and donors/diplomatic missions” to discuss the Open Letter as well as their announcement to plan relocation into several camps (Serbia Update 03-06 November, 2016). The group then followed through on November 7th by sending a letter to the Inter-ministerial Working Group on Mixed Migration of the Government of Serbia suggesting how and which UN and civil society organizations would be willing to assist authorities in the relocation of refugees and
migrants from Belgrade to governmental centers (Serbia Update 07-09 November, 2016).

Many in the NGO community voiced skepticism about the actual merit and intent of the open letter. One respondent summarized her interpretation of the event as such: [It] was a letter from the state which says that we can’t do distribution, the only centers where distribution is allowed are state camps because they are the state, and they are the only ones who can provide this kind of humanitarian aid to the refugees. But we still do it, unofficially, unofficially we still do distribution (T. J., personal communication, April 25, 2017). Thus, in a relationship of tacit allowance from the Serbian state, a number of independent NGOs began to operate in the Barracks despite its apparent condemnation by the authorities. Other NGOs, however, continued to be discouraged from operating in the Barracks.22

Despite the repeated claims by the state that there were no disincentivizing factors from registering in a state run camp, the refugees and migrants sleeping rough around Belgrade and in the country’s North remained hesitant. In the broad push to sequester refugees and migrants in state-run camps in early November, 2016 only 110 out of the close to 1500 people in informal sleeping situations chose to enter a state camp. Those 110 who did so as a group on the morning of November 10th were collectively transferred to the closed Preševo Reception Center in the far south of the country, reportedly without informing them of their destination prior (S.T., personal communication, April 17, 2017). Developments like this proved to be an extremely contentious issue for the residents of the Barracks, who almost entirely, were all planning to continue on to Western Europe through Hungary or Croatia. Moving a group of people, who willingly entered themselves within state system, all the way to the south of the country where such progression

22During the winter and spring of 2017 independent, generally non-Serbian, organizations such as Hot Food Idomeni, SoulWelders, and No Name Kitchen were not stopped from distributing humanitarian aid to the refugees and migrants in the Barracks while other organizations were forced to cease operations within the informal camp after the open letter was issued.
would be impossible, served to diminish the already tenuous bonds of trust of many with the Serbian state. The repercussions of these actions were further compounded by reports that “a group of 41 asylum-seekers, including families with children from refugee-producing countries, who had registered for asylum in Nis on November [5th] and received referral letters to Tutin Temporary Asylum Centre were illegally expelled” to Macedonia (Serbia Update 10-13 November, 2016).

Tellingly, this period in early November also saw an upsurge in political actions among residents of the Barracks in Belgrade. On 11 November, around 130 refugees and migrants, mostly men from Afghanistan and Pakistan, set out on a protest march from Belgrade to the Croatian border (Serbia Update 10-13 November, 2016). While a few decided to return to Belgrade due to cold and exhaustion, the others continued and reached Šid by train on 13 November. In the morning on 14 November, some 30-40 remained near the border crossing at Šid, refusing to relocate to government facilities despite government offers, instead maintaining that they would wait until they were allowed to proceed to Western Europe. Ultimately, the march ended peacefully later that day. After being prevented by Serbian and Croatian authorities from crossing into Croatia at Šid, they decided to return to Belgrade by train, refusing the SCRM offer for transport to government facilities (Serbia Update 14-16 November, 2016).

From November into the depths of winter, the situation for refugees and migrants in Belgrade would only worsen from an area of humanitarian concern to one verging on a crisis. The winter of 2016/2017 was a particularly harsh one and the refugees and migrants sleeping rough in the Barracks began being presented months of freezing temperatures, outbreaks of scabies and body lice, food insecurity, and serious concerns associated with the carcinogenic plastics and railroading material they were forced to burn for warmth. In this time period, Reuters reported
cases of self-prostitution from minors in the Barracks. An unaccompanied minor living in the Barracks remarked that “They come here and target the foolish ones...They ask how much money you need. They pay and they go, but they do bad things with them,” explaining how some men offer up to 2,000 Serbian dinars ($17) to have sex with the boys. (Taylor and Cardi, 2017)

It is important to understand why many would choose to stay in the Barracks and other informal settlements around Serbia despite the lack of government assistance, the adverse conditions, and the promise of a more stable day-to-day living environment. The fear of being put in the system and ultimately being tied to Serbia was a fear of many refugees and migrants in the country. This fear was born from general confusion about the EU’s country-of-first-entry rule, the Dublin Protocol, and the EU-Turkey ultimately served to push many away from state-run centers. Additionally, staying in the Barracks or the informal refugee camps in Subotica and Šid significantly eased the means in which one could attempt to enter the EU irregularly with a smuggler or with a group. This is an angle with which the Serbian media and state sources often brought attention to however it is important to recognize the other compelling reasons for which many did not seek out state centers. For many, the Barracks offered an established community of support and solidarity. In this way, some sacrificed the safety and comfort of beds in state-run asylum centers for the independent, community support found in the Barracks. Independent NGO workers certainly provided a role in this dynamic not only through their provision of assistance, but through the genuine friendship, support, and solidarity that they offered to the residents of the Barracks.

Nonetheless, the winter took its toll on many and through the course of the season there were a number of large exoduses from the Barracks to government center, particularly once the Obrenovac Transit Center opened up on January 17, 2017 as an ECHO-funded emergency measure
These actions provided accommodations for almost 800 refugees and migrants over the winter, who would fill up the center in the following months, however a steady stream of new arrivals from Macedonia and Bulgaria ensured that hundreds would continue living rough in the center of Belgrade through the winter (Inter-agency Report April, 2017). *Time* magazine described this dynamic as

A political game, where Europe points its finger at Serbia for its management of refugees, UNHCR suggests not considering Serbia a safe country, Serbia replies that it doesn’t want to enact extreme measures like Europe has done, that it doesn’t want to use force to make people go to camps. Both sides seem to think they are doing better than the other. (*Time*, “Migrants”, 2017)

This complex entwinement of securitization and humanitarian aid is what has led some journalists to refer to those trapped in Serbia as “Europe’s outsourced refugees” (Nallu, 2017).

**The Demolition of the Barracks in May, 2017**

In early May, 2017 the Barracks, which housed more than a thousand refugees and migrants through the course of the previous winter, began to be cleared by authorities. Videos surfaced on May 10th of a Serbian government worker in full chemical protection gear spraying down the buildings of the complex with a chemical substance later claimed to be pesticide. He paid no attention to the refugees and their belongings, spraying them with the chemicals as well. One NGO volunteer who observed the event remarked that “it was done with no regard to their humanity at all. They just came into everybody’s rooms and started spraying what could have been a dangerous toxic substance. They just sprayed it over what little belongings they have, it was scary and rude and undignified.” Inhabitants of the Barracks were reportedly given five minutes before the chemical spraying began (Goddard, 2017).
Contradicting these videos, the Serbian Commissariat denied any role in the use of insecticide, saying it is “not mandated with any kind of spraying” and adding that it could not confirm who carried out the spraying (Goddard, 2017). On the morning of the next day the remaining residents were woken up and began being pushed out of the Barracks. Most were loaded up onto buses and dispersed throughout the country in state centers, many without prior knowledge of their destination, before the demolition process began later that day.

In the days following the long-threatened eviction, the Serbian state and NGOs sent mixed signals about the success of the clearing and demolition of the Barracks. On the one hand, the Serbian state triumphed the success of this operation, claiming that the refugees were “transported in an organised manner in buses to the reception and asylum centres” and the whole process went “without slightest incident or unwanted action” (Goddard, 2017). Ivan Mišković, a representative
from the Serbian Commissariat remarked that the moving out of migrants from the Barracks and other public spaces in the Belgrade city center was carried out in a highly human and proper manner, at the same time taking into account migrants’ human rights...All the migrants, more than 900, were properly informed a week in advance and provided with information on free beds in reception and asylum centers managed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia. Also, they were given an option to apply themselves and to choose where to be accommodated. (Goddard, 2017)

Presenting the eviction as a matter of voluntary choice, the representative went on to say that “It is our impression that they themselves realized that living in the Barracks in question was no longer sustainable for many reasons. And, of which is more important, by moving them from those places we protect them from smugglers and other forms of abuse” (Goddard, 2017).

This narrative was disputed on the other hand by a number of predominantly independent NGOs. One long-term volunteer with the group SolidariTea remarked how her and her organization “were shocked at how inhumane and disorganized the eviction was...The commissariat came into the Barracks where people were sleeping at 7am, waking people up by hitting them with tent poles, dismantling their tents while people still slept inside and not giving anyone time to gather their meagre belongings” (Goddard, 2017). Another independent group, SoulWelders, documented the eviction of the residents in a video released on their Facebook page that stressed the disordered, poorly informed, and inhumane nature of the eviction (SouldWelders, 2017). Nonetheless, while some local aid workers reported chaos, other organizations, many of them UNHCR-affiliated, described the evacuation as a “remarkably smooth operation” (Goddard, 2017).

Since most of the previous 1,500 residents of this space were relocated to state centers across Serbia, this development profoundly affected how assistance was provided to refugees and migrants in Belgrade. Arguably, it also signaled the end of an era of the refugee crisis in Serbia with more and more of the refugee and migrant population being contained in state run asylum
and transit centers. This presented new obstacles to the state and NGO community. With over 95% of the refugees and migrants in Serbia now accommodated in state-run centers, the engagement of NGOs in assistance work largely relies on the approval of the Serbian state, opening up increased possibilities for the differential treatment of NGOs engaged in contentious political advocacy (Inter-agency Report May, 2017).

In some ways, this event highlighted new points of tension as well. On May 5th there was a meeting called by the Commissioner of the Commissariat and held in the downtown Miksalište building amongst representatives of a number of prominent NGOs involved in refugee assistance in the city. The ostensible purpose of this meeting was to outline the Commissariat plans to move forward with the long expected closure of the informal Barracks camp in downtown Belgrade and begin the conversation on the role that these groups would play in this period of transition. Just how this role has progressed is up for debate. It has been frustrated, in some ways, by contradicting behavior by the state. Despite telling NGOs they gathered for the meeting on the Barracks that the clearing process would take place over a month, they instead cleared and destroyed the site within a week (A.S., personal communication, May 8th, 2017). Additionally, a Croatian blog designed to inform independent volunteers and workers operating in the refugee crisis wrote of “reports of officials softening their attitudes towards groups that had been assisting refugees in the Barracks," which had been previously been fraught. They tempered this observation, however, by additionally reflecting that officials were trying to “bargain with volunteers and grassroots organizations, dangling the idea of camp access” in exchange for cooperation, “when this doesn’t work, force is

While life in the Barracks was in many ways a harsh and trying experience for its inhabitants, it was an important space for many as well. Speaking on this feeling, Ahmed, a 24-year-old refugee from Afghanistan who had been moved to a state center, remarked to a reporter that he had not wanted to leave the Barracks because although the conditions were adverse they had become his home. He remarked that “in these camps we’re not free, we live like animals...We’re fed and then we sleep and that’s all we do. In the Barracks we had a good life; we were all living together here and we were free” (Goddard, 2017). In many ways, the closure of the Barracks signaled the conclusion of a period of human movement which had first begun to be constrained a year prior during the closure of the EU borders around Serbia. The new period that
these changes heralded have, at this point, been defined by the restricted movement of refugees and migrants and an increased scrutiny on the nature of their prolonging stay in Serbia.

The Barracks were ultimately cleared due to its place in the plans of the multi-billion dollar Belgrade Waterfront development project, which when finished, will include skyscrapers, luxury penthouse apartments, shopping malls, hotels and parks (Goddard, 2017). The irony of this Emirati-funded project had been, for many months, apparent as skyscrapers slowly rose next to the squalor of the Barracks.

Conclusion

Analyzing the political dynamics of NGO work assisting refugees and migrants in Belgrade is a challenging case study. The current refugee situation in Serbia is still quite young, less than three years old. On top of that, the situation is constantly evolving as international circumstances change. There is comparatively little precedent for such a complicated and evolving environment that engages state actors, international institutions, aid providers (both local and international), and people in various states of displacement. On top of all of this, the situation is situated within the context of Serbia which is itself a post-conflict society. All the same, this chapter has attempted to outline these factors and situate them within the political and historical context of Serbia. As one NGO worker put it, a “situation, which is as highly tense as the refugee crisis in Serbia, brings out so much [sic] things that are in the carpet when everything is okay” (J. B., personal communication, April 26, 2017). While these dynamics may not define every aspect of the assistance provided to refugees and migrants in Serbia, they certainly inform its manifestation.
III - Organizational Structures and Their Applications

The problem is, you know, Serbia is weird, Serbia is strange, Serbia is different, the Balkans [were] different, you can do things here differently. We are using it to our advantage, unfortunately Europe is also using it, and the whole system is using it...that is how it is right now and looks like it is going to be how it is for a long time, and we need to be here

- B.A.

This paper sheds light on how refugee assistance organizations operate and develop their operational strategies in the context of the changing environment in which they work. I argue that despite the diversity of ways these organizations mediate structural factors, the organizational field creates powerful incentives for NGOs to structure themselves in ways which help further the interests and obligations of the state. In this way, institutional pressure serves to reinforce the role of NGOs in humanitarian work as both objects and subjects of governance. In terms of the refugee crisis in Serbia, the constraints and pressures applied to refugee assistance organizations work, broadly speaking and in no particular order, towards the interest of the Serbian state, the European Union, and international institutions. It should be understood that while these three entities have overlapping interests in governance, they are by no means identical. This is rooted in Foucault's concept of governmentality which refers to an “indirect form of power exerted upon a population through a configuration of institutions, ideas, routines and procedures to induce individual subjects to govern themselves” (Richter, 2008, p. 1). Importantly, government in this sense is not limited to the formal institutions and policies of the state, but refers to the entire repertoire of institutions, procedures, analytical techniques, strategies and practices configured to shape human behavior towards a particular end (Richter, 2008 on Foucault, 1994a: 220).

Several questions are born from this consideration. How do NGOs structure themselves to best secure funding and beneficiaries? What sorts of projects do they engage in? Who else do they
work with? Important to this analysis is understanding how the organizational field influences the ways that organizations navigate these questions. To this end, it is important to account for the funding structures and political institutions which exert influence on these groups. Understanding these questions allows us to better account for the considerable variation of organizational structures within the field as well as shed light on the overall role that these organizations have in the assistance of refugees and migrants.

Accordingly, this chapter outlines four distinct patterns of organizational structure that exist within the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. These ideal organization types are referred to as independent, international, institutional domestic, and non-institutional domestic. The four categories provide a way of characterizing the general management structure and project focus of organizations; however, it is recognized that within these ideal-types, organizational activities vary widely. I use case studies of several organizations from each category to demonstrate this as well as to highlight the underlying characteristic of each group. The evidence from these examples illustrates a broader picture of organizational structure and activity which are malleable to the changing landscape of assistance in Serbia.

**Methodology**

This research is based on information gathered over the course of two separate periods of data collection in Serbia during 2017. To identify the participants of this study, I used the contacts and relationships which I formed through my volunteer work with Hot Food Idomeni, a humanitarian NGO, as well as my semester in SIT’s Peace and Conflict in the Balkans program. My data consists of 20 semi-structured interviews which were conducted with participants from 14 different non-governmental organizations which were engaged in the assistance of refugees and migrants in Serbia between 2016 and 2017. In addition, I conducted several more interviews...
through email and Skype to supplement the information obtained in my initial rounds of data collection.

The affiliation of the participants to their organizations varied to a certain extent as some held paid positions while others did not and others held high-ranking roles within their groups while others held lower positions. For the purposes of this study, it did not make sense to limit the scope of these interviews to individuals financially employed by their organizations as this would have diminished the important and sizeable work done by volunteer and independent organizations which disproportionately rely on pro-bono work. All the same, the parameters of this study required that the participants were involved for a minimum of four months with the organization. In the presentation of my findings I have made sure to protect the personal identities of the participants through the use of pseudonyms. It should be noted, however, that with the consent of my participants I have included the names of some of the organizations for which they work. This move was designed to better demonstrate the finer details of the NGO community within Serbia.

Importantly, this study holds a wide range of perspectives from Serbia’s NGO community. In order to include and present potentially different perspectives in my research I also interviewed individuals from the Commissariat for Refugees. The organizations I interacted with for the purpose of this project were either based around Belgrade or Šid; however many had projects located in other parts of the country. The demographic makeup of my participants varied widely. Of the 21 participants that I formally interviewed, 12 were Serbian citizens. The rest were international workers or volunteers from the EU, the United States, or Australia. Slightly more than half were female. Roughly a quarter were from international and independent organizations respectively. The rest of my participants were from domestic, Serbian NGOs. Of these domestic
organizations, slightly over half were newer, less institutionalized organizations and the rest were more established and professionalized organizations.

In these semi-structured interviews, I asked participants a number of questions about their organizational strategies and approaches to refugee assistance and activism. I inquired about their primary methods of funding and whether or not their organization had experienced any particular competition for funding within the field. Additionally, I asked them about their relationship the Serbian state and the EU, as well as their experience with several key events during the course of the Serbian refugee crisis.

**Organization Types**

A group of heavy-smoking, Spanish-speaking, twenty-somethings living together in a small house on the border of Serbia and Croatia. Eight well-dressed intellectuals typing together silently in a second-floor office on a sleepy Belgrade street. An international hodge-podge of doctors and program managers in a noisy clinic ringing with a handful of different languages. A pair of bonafide backpackers-turned-volunteers chopping wood together outside an old industrial building. What do these groups of people share in common? Despite their immediate differences, they are brought together through their engagement in the assistance of refugees and migrants in Serbia. Motivated by different reasons, working towards various goals with varying degrees of efficacy, these groups form the basis of an organizational field centered on the assistance of refugees and migrants within the country. They are brought together under this loose banner of identity.

While working in this field, each group must answer several fundamental questions. Where will they find funding to conduct their work? Where will they engage with the people that they
assist? How will they assist them? For how long will they assist them? Will the group find volunteers or paid staff to accomplish their mission?

For some, the answers to these questions are self-explanatory. MSF’s mission in Belgrade will get funding from their international headquarters. Hot Food Idomeni, as per their name, will provide hot nutritious food to hungry refugees and migrants. The Belgrade Initiative for Human Rights, as it has done for the past 30 years, will assist in the litigation and defense of human rights issues affecting vulnerable people within the country. As for the future goals, institutional Serbian organizations will continue to do the best that they can for vulnerable people within the country, regardless of whether or not they are refugees.

Similar to Laura Henry’s (2010) description of the Russian green movement, the humanitarian assistance community that developed around Serbia has been by its very nature heterogeneous and divisive. In part, this has been because the humanitarian assistance of refugees is a broad concept which encompasses a wide array of needs including, to name a few, access to food, access to psychosocial services, human rights, human movement, and legal advocacy. To this end, the single overarching and unifying goal that the community works towards is muddled by a grey area of intentionality. In the Serbian case in particular, the general heterogeneity of the community is compounded further by the unique positionality of the country within the broader European refugee crisis. As a key transit country on the Western Balkan route towards Western Europe, Serbia saw hundreds of thousands of people move through its borders between 2014 and 2016, with few rarely staying for more than several days. The EU border closures and increasingly negative populist attitudes towards migrants in EU countries resulted in Serbia becoming an important strategic holding point as the last barrier of entry for migration-weary Schengen-zone countries. Since then, despite the absence of any sustainable asylum procedures, refugees and
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migrants stay in the country longer without any clear solutions for their future. Thus, this has resulted in the development of a unique field of organizational assistance with established civil society organizations, new domestic organizations, international institutions, and international solidarity groups all stepping in to facilitate the assistance of refugees and migrants within Serbia, most of whom have aspirations of leaving the country for wealthier Western Europe.

Broadly speaking, four distinct patterns of organizational structure exist within the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. These ideal organization types are referred to as independent, international, institutional domestic, and non-institutional domestic organizations. Given that these are constructed categories, this is not a perfect method for delineating the considerable variety of organizations active in Serbia, nonetheless these ideal types serve as a general road map of organizational structure and strategy. Within the distinct patterns of organizational structure, groups vary can significantly.

**Independent groups** tend to be spontaneous mobilizations. Most are relatively young organizations and non-professional with very few, if any, paid positions within the organizations. Currently, these groups are comprised of almost exclusively of young, international, volunteers although it should be noted that the landscape of independent groups has changed over time. During the beginning of the refugee crisis, during the summer of 2015, the sorts of solidarity mobilizations consistent with independent NGOs were almost exclusively domestic Serbian initiatives. Milan and Pirro (2018) identify Refugee Aid Miksalište and Info Park as two of the most important independent organizations during this period. It is of note that in the time frame of my study, between March, 2016 and June, 2017, these two Serbian organizations had professionalized into established NGOs.
These groups often derive a bulk of their funding from individual donations and other crowdfunding initiatives. Their smaller size and non-professional nature also correspond with a horizontal organizational structure. Seldom do these groups have the hallmarks of professionalized organizations, including a board of directors or dedicated email accounts.

The goals of independent groups are stratified on two highly divergent levels. On the one hand, these groups seek to provide for the most immediate and direct needs of refugees and migrants within Serbia. To this end, independent groups are likely to engage in the distribution of food and non-food items (NFIs) like shoes or coats, and engage in person-to-person socialization. On the other hand, a large number of these groups have backgrounds rooted in activism and solidarity movements which result in an awareness of the systemic and institutional factors at play in the mistreatment of refugees and migrants on the Balkan route. Given their lack of a highly visible platform to spread awareness or engage in political advocacy, these groups tend to play to their strengths by mobilizing their sizeable solidarity networks, engaging in “witnessing” activities, or simply engaging in politically contentious forms of assistance.

These independent groups most often have affiliations with other independent volunteer groups either in the country or abroad. Nonetheless, it is not rare to have working relationships with international groups and the sorts of non-institutional and younger domestic NGOs operating within the country. The international aid organization Médecins Sans Frontieres is notable for its engagement and working relationship with a wide variety of independent groups in Serbia. However, apart from this, cooperation between independent and international organizations is minimal. Representatives from various independent groups active in Belgrade during the spring of 2017 would meet weekly in a cafe in the city’s central train station close by to the Barracks to discuss strategies for cooperation and activism (B.A., personal communication, December 20,
2017). Additionally, there were a number of Facebook pages and message groups dedicated to sharing information between independent groups.\textsuperscript{23}

Importantly, they often work, to some capacity, outside of state-run transit and asylum centers. The Belgrade Barracks as well as squats in Subotica, Šid, Horgoš, and Sombor have all been regions of sustained activity from independent organizations.

\textit{Non-institutional Domestic groups} are typically less professionalized and have been formed in the context of the refugee crisis. Thus, they are younger and their staffing and organizational decisions tend to reflect this as well. Most started out as civic or grassroots initiatives at the beginning of the refugee crisis which then grew into more structured organizations as time progressed. Non-institutional groups may have a paid staff and a hierarchical organizational structure, however this tends to be held to a looser standard. These groups often have close contact with independent organizations.

Similar to institutional domestic groups, the non-institutional Serbian organizations often conduct projects which address deep-seeded Serbian problems but typically operate at a lower, more-on-the-ground capacity. To this end, these groups often provide help with the initial stages of the asylum procedures, general informational debriefs about the situation in Serbia, educational activities, referrals, initial receptions, and to a less extent, the direct distribution of NFIs.

These organizations are often affiliated as partner organizations with international institutions or international NGOs and serve as a source of referrals for established, institutional NGOS. At the field level, these groups often have close and personal relationships with

\textsuperscript{23} The most prominent social media page used by independent NGO volunteers and workers was the Information Point for Belgrade Volunteers group which had more than 700 members and was started by long-term volunteers from Refugee Aid Serbia and Hot Food Idomeni. The page was based off of similarly-named groups targeted at foreign volunteers working in Greece and Turkey.
independent organizations and, similar to these organizations, benefit from the work and assistance of foreign volunteers. Overall, they tend to exhibit similar traits to other domestic groups but are made distinct through their relatively young staff and recent roots as civic initiatives. They tend to be less professional than other Serbian groups yet, importantly, have become much more professional in comparison to their initial identities at the beginning of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015. Indicative of this shift is the substantial staffing changes that many of these groups have experienced over the past several years; as brought up to me by Chiara Milan who interviewed figures from these organizations in 2015, “both organizations relied on local and foreign volunteers at first, and they also changed over time” (Chiara Milan, personal correspondence, March 7, 2018). To this end, the early iterations of Refugee Aid Miksalište and Info Park were not staffed by the same people as they are currently. They now both have paid employees who were hired from within the professional assistance community. Accordingly, it is likely that their workplace cultures have evolved as well.

The level of political contention with which non-institutional domestic groups are willing to engage in varied. Many of these former civic initiatives secured established international partners as they began to professionalize. Some groups oriented their behavior to reflect this partnership, by adopting similar stances to their partner organizations, while others leveraged their relationships to better accomplish their own organizational goals, paying less regard to the interests of their partner organizations. With that being said, it appears that nearly all non-institutional domestic groups have had to think carefully about their relationship with the Serbian state. Their status as new organizations which disproportionately engaged in the direct assistance of recently arrived refugees and migrants put them in an uncomfortable position after the Serbian government issued the Open Letter. Accordingly, these organizations responded in a variety of ways.
Institutional Domestic groups are highly “professionalized”, a word used here to describe the emulation of a Western organizational style. They often have paid staff, a dedicated bank account, a heavily hierarchical organizational structure, a board of directors, and a rented office space. For the purposes of this study, I consider institutional domestic groups to be organizations which either existed prior to the refugee crisis as a professionalized organization or were professionalized from their conception.

The goals of these organizations tend to be centered on addressing issues surrounding refugees and migrants in Serbia from a professional standpoint. These groups offer specific services at specific times and places, most often in rented or owned offices. They tend to have established relationships with relevant state institutions, such as the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants or the Belgrade City Center for Social Work. These previous relationships, or perhaps their established role within Serbian civil society, may also explain why many of these organizations are granted access to work state-run asylum and transit centers. Only international institutions are granted access more frequently. This work is often lobbying or consultation on national migration issues, producing reports on the situation, providing psychosocial, legal, or educational support to asylum seekers. To this end, these groups function as the local foot soldiers of the neoliberal assistance model. From a professional standpoint, they assist refugees and migrants in ways that the government cannot and work to build up the capacity of the Serbian state to align their asylum and migration system with that of the EU.

In the Serbian case, institutional domestic groups interact with each other in a number of professional capacities such as the Policy Advocacy Group (PAG) which is a coalition of established NGOs, such as Praxis and Grupa 484, which deal with migration issues on the policy
side. The PAG was formed in 2011 with help from the Norwegian Embassy, one worker within this network described it as a group of civil society organizations which “work together on monitoring the policy framework situation on the field when it comes to access to rights of migrants and different categories of migrants” (G. G., personal communication, May 3, 2017).

To this end, these NGOs often engage in lobbying and bargaining with decision-making authorities at different platforms, obtaining support from government actors, building up pressures through various campaign mechanisms, and actively engaging in institutional advocacy activities (Panda, p. 261). They are often affiliated partners with international institutions, such as the UNHCR or Embassy funds, and work closely with state institutions and international NGOs. They are often organizations of referral for newer, domestic NGOs or independent groups. Moreover, they often pursue multiple goals and projects at a time and rely heavily on foreign funding. Importantly, similar to Henry’s (2010) findings, they are also less likely to engage in protest or contentious forms of activism (p. 147).
International groups, by their very nature, are the local project or initiative of a larger organization based outside of the country. They often have a close relationship with state agencies and are funded by their organizational headquarters and, to a lesser extent, from grants from powerful donors. The Danish Refugee Council, for example, received a large amount of funding from the European Union’s ECHO fund in support of a projects such as its “Enhancing Protection and Humanitarian Aid in FYROM and Serbia” project (DRC, 2017). They have all of the hallmarks of a professionalized organization - a bank account, a hierarchical organizational structure, a board of directors, a dedicated office space, and professional public relations materials.
The goals of these organizations are most often derived from the general interests of the organization’s headquarters, which is often mediated by the project leaders within the country. Given that most of these organizations are devoted to crisis response, humanitarian response, or refugee assistance, their presence in the state of Serbia is largely dependent on the existence of beneficiaries. As one employee of MSF said,

"We need to understand that to be in Serbia and Europe today for MSF, it is a big choice, this context is not typical context in which MSF operates, it is not a conflict, like active conflict ongoing, and there is [sic] no natural disasters, so the other option for MSF to intervene in certain contact is to have a choice. (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017)"

This perhaps points to the mitigation of a burden to act in accordance with the political norms of the host country. The lack of an established imperative to “remain” in the country lowers the potential damages of “not playing by the rules”

These organizations tend to have well-developed relationships with actors across the spectrum, perhaps due to their international clout. To this end, these groups often have working relationships with state agencies and institutional, domestic NGOs. Additionally, for international NGOs with a deep well of funding to draw upon typically have close, established connections with smaller sub-funded domestic or independent organizations.

**Strategies of Refugee Assistance**

The following section builds off of the previously developed taxonomy of organization types by presenting a series of in-depth case studies of several organizations from each category to demonstrate their underlying characteristics. Importantly, these case studies also serve to stress the differences that exist within these organizational categories. The evidence from these
examples illustrates a heterogeneous community of NGOs which has been made malleable by the changing landscape of assistance in Serbia.

**Independent**

*No Name Kitchen* - No Name Kitchen is a predominantly Spanish organization which describes itself as a group of independent people from around the world dedicated to helping provide food and nutrition to those in need. This entirely volunteer run solidarity group formed spontaneously in the Belgrade Barracks in the winter of 2017 after a group of six volunteers from Greece came to the city to deliver humanitarian supplies to refugees and migrants. Several of the volunteers ended up staying and began organizing a volunteer-based network within the Barracks.

No Name Kitchen’s website contains a self-proclaimed manifesto which outlines its core ideals. Emphasizing this structural independence, the organization identifies itself as “a group of independent people organized with an horizontal structure” (No Name Kitchen, MANIFESTO). Continuing, the manifesto reads as follows:

> Our project is based on the idea of covering one of the most basic and universal needs: *food*.

We were born from the profound indignation that we feel towards the inequality and injustice that capitalist and [sic] racist system creates. This system segregates people depending on their original country and doesn’t respect the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, such as the right of movement (article 13) or right for food or medical or for a home (article 25).

We escape from the paternalist models and from vertical charity models. We want to show solidarity to our equals, and practice civil disobedience. We want to engage with the vulnerable situation that some people are in, cooperating together to provide food to the
people that need it. Our values are integration, a nondiscriminatory approach and mutual aid. (No Name Kitchen, MANIFESTO)

Elaborating on the idea of rejecting a vertical charity model, a member of No Name Kitchen explained that “we speak with each other weekly, and we sit down and we get decisions, between all of us…we choose what we do and how we do it...we are all at the same level” (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017).

The group’s organizational culture is influenced, to some extent, by the cultures of activism and ideology reminiscent of anarchist solidarity collectives active in Greece and Western Europe. It is important to note that while a number of participants in this study characterized the members of this organization as being “anarchists”, the organization does not necessarily identify with that label. That being said, the group engages in activities which are clearly derived from the traditions of anarchist solidarity groups like No Borders, particularly in their dedication to “witnessing”, or self-reporting acts of border violence. Along with several other independent organizations active in Serbia, No Name Kitchen helped launch a website called borderviolence.eu which maps and “documents illegal push-backs and police violence inflicted by EU member state authorities, in the EU borderlands surrounding Serbia” (Border Violence Monitoring, 2018). Rather than relying on traditional media or institutional outlets, which are often unable or uninterested in reporting these human rights abuses, this initiative enables groups like No Name Kitchen to self-report and document the crimes they witness on a daily basis.

Self-definition can be a hard thing for the sorts of humanitarian groups which fall outside the lines of the traditional NGO framework. To this end, “independent” has become a unifying way of describing these sorts of organizations although it is interesting to see where and when certain descriptions are deployed. No Name Kitchen is a registered non-governmental organization in Spain. However when asked the question over whether or not the self-identified as an NGO, a
member of the team gave a more reserved response: “NGO? I don't know, we don't even know what we are. We are just a group of friends, that we believe in something, and we just gather with each other, we just get money from different people” (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017).

Within a year the organization went from being an impromptu supply delivery mission to being a legally registered NGO. It went from having six active volunteers to over 40 in the summertime. It went from providing a single daily meal distribution to providing additional services such as a medical clinic and a free clothes market. Thus, although the ideological differences between NNK and traditional NGOs may be great, NNK is by all means a rapidly expanding organization with a strong possibility of institutionalizing further within the next year.

**Hot Food Idomeni** - Hot Food Idomeni started as an independent, volunteer-based response to the overcrowded transit camp in Idomeni on the Greek-Macedonian border in early 2016. As word spread of the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Belgrade Barracks, the organization made the decision to open up a new project in the city providing hot meals with high nutritional value to the refugees and migrants sleeping rough outside of the state asylum system. Importantly, the group’s decision to continue providing this service to the residents of the Barracks after the issuance of the Open Letter, was surrounded by a large amount of uncertainty. Leveraging their identity as an independent group of foreigners, and framing their activities as crisis response, they were tacitly permitted by the Serbian state to continue this work. According to one long-term volunteer,

The guy who runs the group, he was emailing the Commissariat and all the people in the authorities each day to say what we were doing, what time we would be at the squat, how many meals we were gonna be providing, to keep them informed…on the basis that it was an emergency response and the authorities kinda turned a blind eye to so we were able to carry on. (A.R., personal communication, April 15, 2017)
This project gradually expanded and by the time the Serbian government opened the Obrenovac Transit Center in an attempt to relocate the residents of the Barracks, they were asked to provide food services in the camp as well.

Hot Food Idomeni engaged in what was arguably some of the most visible and media friendly activities amongst the community of independent volunteer groups in Serbia. Their activities, the production and distribution of nutritious and warm meals, were easy for an outsider to understand. Further, the lines which formed in the Barracks for this service were loosely controlled by volunteer line-herders which kept a semblance of order to a single file line for food that numbered in the hundreds. Thus, this service drew the inhabitants of the Barracks, who were often inside the structures or passing time elsewhere in town, into a single space at a relatively predictable time every day. This resulted in a high degree of media attention to the group’s distributions and accordingly the group as well. Looking back to the media coverage of the situation in the Barracks, which peaked around January or February of 2017, a high proportion of these images feature Hot Food Idomeni food line.

Perhaps as a result of this, the organization benefited from a positive reputation both internationally, as a place for potential volunteers, and domestically, within the Serbian government, as a mostly non-political independent group willing to feed the population of the Barracks who otherwise may go hungry. Accordingly, when the Serbian government opened up their transit camp in nearby Obrenovac, a move designed to attract the residents of the Barracks into state-run centers, the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants invited the group to provide the camp’s lunches.

One of the most significant decisions that Hot Food Idomeni made was their decision to cease their activities in Belgrade and effectively immobilize their solidarity network. This was an
act finalized in early May, 2017, only several weeks before the demolition of the Belgrade Barracks. Importantly, the group did not pull out of the country due to funding constraints or for a lack of support. Rather, it was a decision made on the basis that the situation in the Barracks has stabilized to a point that it no longer constituted an immediate crisis. Their decision to effectively demobilize, gifting the majority of their equipment to other organizations, without plans for any immediate future activities is interesting for the way in which it subverts traditional assumptions about the self-preservation tendencies of NGOs.

**Belgraid - Belgraid** is an independent, volunteer-based organization which primarily provides meals to refugees and migrants within state-run asylum or transit camps. The primary project of the organization consists of providing food to the predominantly young men staying in Obrenovac transit center. They took over the operations of Hot Food Idomeni in the spring of 2017 once that group decided to cease its operations within Serbia after deciding that, as a self-described emergency response organization, the situation in Belgrade had stabilized to a point which rendered their mission fulfilled. According to an employee at the organization

> The founder [of our organization] saw the need for there to be some kind of independent platform for volunteers to come and work in Serbia, starting in the Barracks when those were still a thing, and...started bringing volunteers in and then became a registered Serbian NGO in April [of 2017]. (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017)

Perhaps symbolic of this transfer of activity, the Belgrade Barracks were evicted and demolished little more than a week after Belgraid began running its operations independently in Serbia. Accordingly, the bulk of its organizational effort became centered in the state-run Obrenovac transit center.

In the following months, however, the group would begin managing other small projects, such as humanitarian support to unregistered refugees and migrants in the border town of Subotica.
Another project has been the distribution of NFIs to refugees and migrants around Belgrade who are outside of the system. Interestingly, the manner of funding these individual projects seems to be, on some level, the product of strategic framing. One figure from the organization remarked that

> For our food program, the main source of funding is Oxfam Italia, they cover all of the food ingredients and also all food related costs like fuel for our vans when we do deliveries, gas for the kitchen and stuff like that. We do hygiene distributions, those are often funded by an organization's called Help Refugees, based in the UK, and then we have a bunch of private donors who cover other things such as our operations in Subotica and other distributions we do that don’t follow under hygiene. (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017)

Thus, the most contentious organizational activities have been funded through private donations and crowdfunding whereas more traditional methods of assistance, such as food distributions in state-run camps, has been funded by established funders like Oxfam.

Similar to other groups receiving crowdfunded and other private donations, Belgraid discussed the increased flexibility with which this funding approach offers: “Funding has sort of just happened in a really interesting way because people who have come and volunteered with us and loved what we do and want to support it, we are pretty flexible” (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017). Situating his organization in comparison to established institutional actors, the participant went on to remark that “While [Belgraid has] grown and we do have some established projects, we have some more flexibility than some of the established larger partners. Oxfam has very little freedom to just go in and do something, in the same way that we can” (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017). Thus, Belgraid serves as an example of an independent organization which seeks to leverage the unique organizational opportunities that its independent status allows, while also taking advantage of more institutional funding structures to accomplish its goals.
International

**JRS - Serbia** - Jesuit Refugee Service is an international organization with programs in more than 50 countries including Serbia. The organization as a whole was formed by the head of the Jesuit Order of the Catholic Church in response to the population of Vietnamese refugees who became notorious as the “boat people” for the method of leaving the country. The organization established an office in Serbia during the Yugoslav wars however this office closed in 2001. Their current mission in Serbia has been active since the EU borders closed around Serbia in March of 2016. Although initially involved in short-term relief operations, mainly in an informational provider and distributor of donated NFIs, their projects have gradually shifted towards the role of a long-term service provider. Currently, the organization is devoting most the majority of its resources in Serbia towards its Pedro Arrupe House project which provides shelter and custody services to unaccompanied and separated children going through the asylum process in Serbia.

JRS Serbia should be viewed as indicative of a certain type of international organization active within Serbia. On the one hand, it leverages its international identity by highlighting its organizational advantages:

> The international dimension of JRS (we are present in 18 EU countries) allows us to be aware of the different asylum systems, legal frameworks and integrations praxis. Exchanging our experiences with other countries helps us find the best and fastest solutions to help to the people we serve (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2017)

On the other hand, the Serbian offices are relatively small, with only five full-time employees, most of whom are Serbian. Arguably, the organizational makeup helps explain its strategic approach to handling the refugee crisis.

Like many organizations active in Serbia over the past several years, JRS initially provided direct assistance to refugees and migrants. After the Serbian state issued its Open Letter in November, and the situation became protracted, the organization began to shift its focus to long-
term care. Interesting, this shift prompted the mediation of several interests. On the one hand, the organizations still wanted to provide assistance to refugees and migrants living outside of the system in Serbia. On the other hand, it didn’t wish to jeopardize its relationship with the Serbian state in doing so. As one figure from the organization remarked:

I think most of the NGOs were doing it like this, so we are doing it, we are giving it to them but we just don’t want the police of the Commissariat to see us. So it was, we didn’t do it as much as some others, we were mostly giving money to other organizations to buy whatever they need so we had this stuff in the storage that we needed to distribute and after that we didn’t do it because we wanted to open this house and for this we needed a [lot of] cooperation from the government and we didn’t want to [sic] make anything that can be getting on their bad side. (V.M., personal communication, December 11, 2017)

In this way, JRS followed a similar track to many international and domestic NGOs active in Serbia between 2016 and 2017. Although initially engaged in the direct assistance of refugees and migrants during the transit period, the group slowly began to shift their focus towards long term integration support for those seeking asylum within the country. Accordingly, the group began to craft strategic decisions in regards to their organizational activities and their working relationship with the Serbian government.

**MSF** - Médecins Sans Frontières is an internationally renowned humanitarian organization which has been providing medical and psychosocial assistance to refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers within Serbia since 2014. They have their country headquarters in Belgrade but have also conducted projects around the country, specifically in the border towns of Šid, Preševo, and Subotica. MSF holds a significant amount of clout with their mission and has taken this standing to publish materials and engage in activities which directly confronts human rights issues in the country. In the fall, the organization published a report entitled *Games of Violence: Unaccompanied Children and Young People Repeatedly Abused by EU Member State Border Authorities* which condemned the EU’s illegal approach to border security (Médecins Sans
Frontières, 2017). Additionally, the organization is unique as it one of the only institutional organizations, domestic or international, to have engaged in the direct assistance of refugees and migrants in areas which have been grey-listed by the Serbian state. To this end, MSF staff opened up a small station within the Barracks in the winter of 2017 to treat the squat’s vulnerable population. At the time, institutional NGOs organizations tended not to engage this population directly except through either field workers who would in turn refer potential beneficiaries to the proper NGO, or through outreach from office spaces close by to the Barracks.

In addition to conducting contentious medical assistance, MSF repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to engage with independent groups considered as controversial or “anarchist” by other organizations. Perhaps benefiting from an organization culture which has historically valued contentious forms of assistance, the Serbian MSF office has taken steps to engage with non-traditional independent groups active in the field. As on figure from the organization mentioned:

An alternative response can be efficient rather than investing so much money in an institutional response, I'm not saying that the two things cannot cooperate together, I'm just saying that we have to recognize the role all of the non-traditional actors, especially in this context. (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017)

The logistical and economic cooperation between MSF and independent groups was largely born out of the willingness of these organizations to engage in the direct assistance of refugees and migrants who were living outside of the system. Thus, this demonstrates how converging interests, and perhaps ideological approaches to humanitarian assistance, provide the platform for cooperation between vastly different groups.

The malleability of this organization’s approach to politically contentious issues is likely rooted in several key factors. One the one hand, the historical ideology and tradition of certain groups, such as MSF, are rooted in the notion that humanitarian assistance is inherently a politically contentious process. In fact, the organization was formed as a result of a group of
doctors’ resistance to the apolitical stance that the Red Cross has historically prescribed itself. As a result, a workplace culture has developed inside of MSF over the years which accepts a certain amount of “political script deviation” from its project managers and employees which other organizations might shy away from. Additionally, the group benefits from its international and recognizable character; an internationally recognized group like MSF can ‘get away’ with more than smaller, domestic groups which lack the platform of MSF. Further, as an organization which is only temporarily engaged with the refugee situation in Serbia, their group escapes some of the intense pressure which domestic groups face to preserve their relationship with state actors.

**Institutional Domestic**

**Grupa 484** - Grupa 484 has been a civil society organization assisting refugees and migrants in Serbia since 1995. Their mission statement reads as follows:

Through its activities in Serbia and the region of Southeast Europe, Group 484, together with migrants, local population, and especially with youth, and in cooperation with organisations and individuals that foster similar values – has been building up a society in which diversity and rights of everyone are respected. (Group 484, 2017)

The initial context of work centered on the assistance of 484 families who fled to Serbia following the forced displacement campaign of the Croatian government’s Operation Storm. Later, these efforts would expand to include refugees arriving from Kosovo during the late 1990’s. The majority of their efforts have now shifted to the more contemporary case of refugees and migrants arriving in the country from outside the immediate region. The organization has been a fixture in the Serbia NGO community for decades and has deep connections with state institutions as well. They have a diverse array of projects ranging from psychosocial services, integration efforts, to legal advocacy and involved in the development of the Serbian state’s migration policy and its alignment with EU principles.
Currently, the organization employs a number of highly educated, highly qualified, Serbian professionals who work in a variety of capacities. Some of this work falls within their Center for Migration, which seeks to “influence the development of policies and legislation that enable the full realization of the rights and potentials of migrants, and to encourage interest in the professional and general public in Serbia for the issue of migrations.” This work is framed as being significant for the development of Serbian society, especially within the context of EU accession. Other projects ranges from integration support to psychosocial services offered in Bogovada Asylum Centre to an initiative which attempts to strengthen the network of civil society organizations active within the field in the region through grants funded by the Norwegian Embassy. This final project has benefited primarily Serbian NGOs and international religious organizations engaged in work in the country’s asylum centers.

**CRPC** - The Crisis Response and Policy Center is a domestic affiliate of the UNHCR and functions as the latter’s “eyes and ears” on the ground in Serbia. Its informational material frames itself as an organization “formed as a voluntary, non-party and non-profit citizen association” interested in protecting human rights and promoting human rights awareness, specifically in terms of the “protection of vulnerable individuals and groups, their identification, needs assessment and advocacy of their rights.” The group is an offshoot organization of an earlier project called Asylum Info Centre and is formed from the core staff of this previous joint initiative which was active during the transit period of migration in Serbia in 2015. CRPC was formed in 2016, around the same time as the EU borders around Serbia began to close.

An employee of Crisis and Policy Response Center chose to distance his organization's activities from a political angle, but still brought up organizational projects which might be construed by some as activism:
“We don’t care to speak up politically. We don’t delve into politics. We have just, we are trying to raise awareness of inclusion of the refugees within Serbian society and...we are trying to help the government, state, in providing assistance to them regarding any that [sic] inclusion of refugees and stuff, cultural, what we basically do is cultural mediation and that comprises of, for example we tried to, how should I say it, close the gap between domestic society and the refugees themselves…” (Z. M., personal communication, December 12, 2017)

It should be noted however, that this group was characterized by several actors within the NGO community in terms of its close connections to the UNHCR and the Serbia state. To this end, it would most likely not behoove CRPC to self-identify as being active in contentious political advocacy. The organization was also criticized for being overly interested in professionalizing. To this end, one criticism was that they over reported the numbers of beneficiaries they have. On their website, the group claims to have assisted “more than 100,000 beneficiaries from 50 countries of the world”. Nonetheless, the desire to detach the organizational activities of humanitarian organizations from explicitly political actions was a common theme amongst participants of all styles of organizations.

**PIN** - The Psychosocial Innovation Network is an organization which describes itself as a “non-partisan, non-political and non-profit association” which strives to “achieve various goals in the field of psychological science and practice” (PIN, 2018). It has been active in Serbia for the past two years in which time it has engaged primarily in psychosocial support for asylum seekers within the country as well as producing research on psychological challenges facing this population. Additionally, the group has engaged in several other projects of interest, particularly one seeking to mitigate the second-hand trauma experienced by responders to the humanitarian crisis in Serbia. The organization’s projects that engage with asylum seekers is largely funded through the UNHCR. Aside from the relationship, the organization has established connections with many of the established, Serbian-staffed, refugee assistance organizations active within the city of
Belgrade. They provide psychosocial support to refugees and migrants in their office in downtown Belgrade, most of whom come from the nearby Krnjača Asylum Center, as well as similar support to the residents in the Banja Koviljača and Bogovađa Asylum Centers.

Although it is a relatively young organization in comparison to other institutional domestic groups, PIN organizational identity as a group of professional academics with close relationships to the UNHCR and IRC reaffirms its institutional character.

**Non-Institutional**

*Info Park* - The organization Info Park has been operating in downtown Belgrade since the spring of 2015 when it began as an initiative headed by a longtime civil activist and administered by two Serbian donor organizations - the B92 Fund and Trag Foundation. For slightly over a year, the group worked out of a small wooden kiosk in downtown Belgrade’s Bristol Park which is right across from the city’s main bus station and served as a hotspot of refugee movement at the time. Before the closure of the Balkan route, the group also had similar missions in the border areas of Preševo and Dimitrovgrad. The organization frames this early iteration as being a specifically grassroots endeavor.

Info Park operated in their hut from mid-September, 2015 until October 24th, 2016 at which point it was pressured to leave by the Serbian state. About a week later, the organization began to run its operations from a small office down the street from its former location where it has an information desk, an education space, a safe space for women, a family drop in zone, and a small computer lab. It is also a base for the organization’s mobile team which reaches out to vulnerable refugees and migrants around Belgrade. Over the past year it has restructured itself as
a refugee support center which specializes in protection, information, communication, and education services alongside offering referral support, accommodation, and psychosocial services.

Currently, the organization has 8 regular staff members and is augmented by a rotating collection of volunteers. They have a broad network of partner and donor organizations consisting of IRC, MSF, Save the Children, CARE, Praxis, and CRPC. The organizations also provides support to relevant state institutions like the Belgrade City Center for Social Work whose field teams use Info Park office during the process of best interest determination for unaccompanied minors. They have had close, albeit less formal, relationships with smaller independent NGOs active in the field in Serbia, showing a rather unique willingness to work with these sorts of groups. They share information with groups like No Name Kitchen through personal communications between members of the groups. Likewise, during the spring of 2017 they were notable for their efforts, as a domestic Serbian organization, to get directly involved in the application of assistance in the Barracks. Specifically, they distributed breakfast to the residents of the Barracks in conjunction with two independent volunteer groups: the Italian group Bridge to Idomeni and the Bosnian-based MFS-EMMAUS.

It is difficult to say what accounts for this group’s mediated organizational identity. The group has professionalized within the last year and half, changing from an informal, grassroots mobilization in Bristol Park in 2015 to an established NGO with a dedicated office and paid staff. Nonetheless, throughout this time it has remained in close contact with independent organizations and regularly engages with refugees and migrants who are living outside of the system in the city. Moreover, the organization has publicly questioned the Serbian state’s management of the refugee situation through self-published news briefs. To this end, it is possible that this group’s unique
organizational identity and workplace culture has influenced the organization to engage in closer cooperation with independent groups and to engage in more contentious forms of assistance.

Refugee Aid Miksalište - Refugee Aid Miksalište is a Serbian initiative which has entertained a storied path as a key figure in the assistance of refugees and migrants in Belgrade dating back to the summer of 2015. The organization was started as an offshoot of the non-governmental organization Mikser House, a well-respected social club in the city, as “an ad-hoc public social campaign to collect humanitarian aid in the August of 2015.” Since then, however, the organization has transformed into a separate NGO which has provided assistance to more than 300,000 refugees and seen help from more than 2,000 volunteers. In other words, despite having an initial identity which might fit more in line with that of a grassroots or independent organization, the organization has navigated towards a more professionally oriented management structure.

The organization has shifted the focus of its projects since its conception to reflect both the changing nature of needs along the Balkan Route and their need for professionalization. This has meant a shift away from the distribution of food and NFIs towards medical assistance, legal and psychological support, social activities, cultural exchanges with the local community, and education. Additionally, it has also meant that the majority of its operations are now being conducted in a single location.

The group’s name and geographic location has been similarly malleable. In late April, 2016 the organization’s squatted headquarters were demolished with only brief warning by the Serbian government in accordance with its controversial Belgrade Waterfront project. Tajana Zadravec, a former employee of the organization, remarked to a local media source at the time that “We put so much effort in it, we had showers, washing machines, drying machines there, and they destroyed
everything, we needed to [re]organise everything from the very beginning” (Zaba, 2016). Since this forced removal, the organization works out of a new hub a few blocks away. The new location was briefly closed down in the summer of 2016 after disputes with local businesses and residents angry at the high number of beneficiaries crowding the surrounding area. At the time, the organization was mainly offering direct assistance to all in need. Soon after, an agreement was reached in which the organization agreed to change its assistance approach. Speaking about the resolution, an employee of the organization said that “We’ll change our focus on families with children only, currently we’re working on a sustainable strategy for Miksalište. We want to become a center for social cohesion which is not possible to achieve if you accept 600 people on a daily basis” (Zaba, 2016). This employee stated that other organizations would take care of adolescents who travelled alone and male refugees.

At the hub, the organization works alongside Save the Children, Center for Youth Integration, Crisis Response and Policy Center, UNHCR, MSF, SOS Children Village Serbia, Novi Sad Humanitarian Center, Terre des Hommes, CARE and UNICEF. The space serves as an important hub within the system as the partner organizations within the space provide services 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The hub itself derives its name, Miksalište, from the organization. Coincidentally the desire to brand the space better resulted in pressure from the other organizations for Refugee Aid Miksalište to rename itself, which it did, to Mikser Association.

The group sees its main strengths as consisting of its “flexibility, immediate responsiveness, and adaptation to new circumstances and needs of beneficiaries, including coordination with the state and international organizations.”
Conclusion

This chapter has developed four distinct organization types within the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. These ideal organization types are referred to as independent, international, institutional domestic, and non-institutional domestic organizations. Given that these are constructed categories, this is not a perfect method for delineating the considerable variety of organizations active in Serbia, nonetheless these ideal types serve as a general road map of organizational structure and strategy.

Within the distinct patterns of organizational structure, groups vary can significantly. Professional and grassroots approaches are each deployed in unique ways by organizations within the NGO field. As one might expect, certain organization types tend to rely on professional approaches more than others and vice versa. Importantly, similar to the findings of Panda (2007) and Henry (2010), many organizations adopt practices from both approaches. MSF, for instance, cooperates with closely with both professional organizations as well as independent, grassroots groups. Independent organizations, in turn, have developed strategic institutional partners with which to derive funding from and to cooperate with on a diverse array of projects. Moving forward, I will situate these organizations within the broader organizational field of assistance which presents incentives and opportunities to organizations to structure themselves professionally.
IV - The Reach of the Organizational Field

If we are not here, nobody knows about this. Since we have been here, I can tell you 4 deaths that happened within this area, 4 deaths. If we are not here, maybe nobody knows about them

- B.A.

This chapter outlines how the organizational field presents certain institutional factors that mediate organizational activity. Primary amongst these factors is the funding landscape as well as the interests and behavior of three groups of institutional actors: the Serbian state, the EU, and international institutions like the UNHCR. These institutional actors influence the organizational field in a multitude of ways, however I focus in particular on how they incentivize organizations to professionalize. I highlight two key ways in which this is accomplished: funding opportunities and camp access opportunities.

From my research, the findings are clear that despite the diverse ways organizations mediate structural factors, the organizational field creates powerful incentives for NGOs to structure themselves in ways that further the interests and obligations of governance. Institutional pressure serves to reinforce the role of NGOs in humanitarian work as both objects and subjects of governance. In terms of the refugee crisis in Serbia, the constraints and pressures applied to refugee assistance organizations work, broadly speaking, towards the interest of the Serbian state, the European Union, and international institutions. Refugee assistance organizations provide humanitarian support in cases where the state does not or cannot provide support. Where this relationship becomes more blurred, however, is in the cases of refugee assistance organizations which work in direct contention with the state. The local No Borders group and, to a lesser extent, ideologically driven solidarity groups like No Name Kitchen present a challenge to this relationship due to their ability to facilitate activities such as contentious political protests or illegal
border crossings and run in direct contrast with the European Union’s border regime. Their avoidance of traditional funding models further insulates them from this influence.

**Organizational Field**

Attempting to describe the nature of organizational activity within a given field of NGO work requires a holistic understanding of the structural environment in which this work occurs. Henry writes that “grievance identification, resource flows, political access and issue framing are not independent factors but rather interrelated and often mutually reinforcing.” (Henry, 2010, p. 7) Following this framework, I approach my Serbian case study from a “nuanced perspective on the role of resources in supporting activism, highlighting the fact that monetary and nonmonetary resources are inextricably tied to particular cultures of activism.” (Henry, 2010, p. 7) Looking at the evidence offered by the participants of this study, it would appear that powerful institutional incentives exist for organizations to moderate their behavior. Nonetheless, the behavior of organizations within the field makes it clear that the resources and political access afforded to an organization is closely tied and interrelated with the ideology and workplace culture associated with a given NGO. Thus, where an NGO gets its money from, how the money is used, where the NGO works, who it works with, and who it works for it all depend, in part, on the distinct culture and ideology behind the group.

This directly relates to Henry’s (2010) concept of the “organizational field” which seeks to contextualize the environment and opportunities that define NGOs. The organizational field describes the range of grievances, resource flows, political opportunities, and cultural framings which form the context of NGO work in a given field. The opportunity structures in this field can, in turn, mediate the organizational behavior of NGOs. That being said, Henry argues that the
incentives brought out by the organizational field only become salient after they are operationalized by leadership perceptions and preferences:

[Within a context] of scarce resources, organizations are likely to seek funders with a similar view of the problems they address and to develop dependencies on critical funders. Grievances matter for social mobilization because they stimulate different constituencies, activating the ideas, tactics, and resources of certain groups and not others. Therefore, it is the source, not just the level, of critical resources that shape social organizations’ development. Dependent organizations will try to manage these relationships in order to achieve beneficial terms, but they cannot avoid being profoundly shaped by the organization field. (Henry, 2010, p. 234)

Again, the overall importance of this concept lies in the way that the organizational field mediates and informs the habits of NGOs.

In the application of this framework to the Serbian case, it becomes possible to provide a sketch of some of the cooperating influences exerting pressure on organizational activity. In particular, I focus on the availability of funding and the impact of institutional actors (the EU and the Serbian state in particular) to develop a better understanding of the institutional forces at work.

**Funding**

Funding is an important and palpable factor which influences the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. This influence is manifested in in several important ways. There is a relatively crowded field of organizations which compete to attract the attention of a finite amount of donors. In the emergency period of the humanitarian situation in Serbia, when thousands were in direct need of daily assistance, a large amount of funding flooded the country from international donors. A particularly large amount of money began coming into the country from the EU during this time. Now that the situation has stabilized somewhat, funding flows are beginning to return to the domain of established, institutional actors. The competitive nature of this funding accordingly means that the large international donors which supply the
majority of grants to the NGO community have a degree of discretion as to where they want their money to go to. Additionally, the project-based nature of funding within the field has an influence on the long-term planning of NGOs which often have few other viable funding prospects. In this next section I will overview the funding landscape by first overviewing the important donors in the field, reviewing the influence that they have on NGOs, and then finally making some remarks about the alternative methods of funding which are present within the field.

EU Influence

In this current period of refugee and migrant movement along the Balkan route, the EU has been arguably one of the biggest international stakeholders through its hands-off management of the situation. Perhaps more than anything, the effective closure of the Balkan route in the spring of 2016 has most informed the Serbian refugees and migrant’s situation. Therefore it came as little surprise that many respondents saw the EU as having an important, top-down, effect on the refugee situation through its influence on the borders and the Serbian state. More directly, however, the EU was also seen to influence the organizational field of refugee assistance through its capacity as a donor.

There are vested interests at play within the field of refugee assistance in Serbia. Both the Serbian state and the EU have been keen to build up the capacity of the country’s reception and asylum capacities. While the Serbian state has resisted the aggressive border enforcement of its EU neighbors, it has consistently demonstrated a commitment to aligning its migration policy with the EU’s norms and interests. As a country with an underdeveloped asylum system which receives little funding from the already cash-strapped Serbian budget, the government is heavily reliant on the EU, other sovereign donors, and NGOs in the management of the refugee situation in Serbia.
One NGO worker summarized his impression of the EU funding method by emphasizing its links with the Serbian state. He reflected that

“The EU provides the most money for the refugee situation in Serbia, they provided like a lot of money because they understand that they need to help Serbia in this case. But the thing is that all this money goes to the UNHCR and Commissariat or the Serbian government...So Serbia didn’t spend any of our public money or our budget so far for the refugees. Just European Union and the other donor’s money.” (S.T. #1, personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Continuing, this Info Park employee connected the EU’s interests in the Serbian response to the refugee crisis, and their according patterns of funding, with their broader migration regime:

[The] EU probably looks at it this way...they call it the externalization of the borders...So that’s the thing, they provide support for people to be stranded. In the end you don’t need to have a strong surveillance system or the wall like Hungary, you just need to have an external border that someone can control in that sense, where you can provide support for those refugees to stay there.” (S.T. #1, personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Situating his criticism in a similar externalization discourse to that of Burlyuk (2017), Reslow (2017) and Helton & Lavenex, (1999), the participant connected the EU’s interest in providing aid to Serbia to their greater interest in keeping refugees and migrants outside of EU borders. Other NGO workers also framed their work as being heavily affected by the border policies of the European Union. Taking a more combative stance, a figure from No Name Kitchen responded saying that “Well the European Union is the one putting up the borders, the European Union is Croatia right now, these borders, the police that are beating these guys [up] is the European Union” (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017).

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to do justice in explaining the differences and connections between the EU and Serbian approaches to migration policy, for the purpose of this analysis it is safe to say that their interests converge through the practical application of assistance. They both work towards the progressive stabilization and securitization of refugees and
migrants within Serbia, particularly through the containment of this population in state-run transit and asylum centers. This is a point that I will expand upon below.

Tracing the impact and influence of the EU’s economic contributions to the refugee crisis in Serbia means combing through a complex web of direct support, contract grants, and subsidiary funding. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) fund has pumped more than 80 million Euros into Serbia over the past several years to assist in the care of refugees and migrants (EC Press Release, 2017). That being said, the extent of funding is obfuscated by the fact that the EU is also a major funder of organizations such as UNICEF, CARE, Danish Refugee Council, and OXFAM, all of which have had missions in the country. These organizations, in turn, give out subsidiary grants to others. Mapping the pattern of funding from the EU is further confused by the unitary actions of EU member states which have a repertoire of beneficiary aid organizations and targeted donations of their own. Nonetheless, it is important to attempt to nail down how this funding and influence has played out. A more practical way of doing this is tracing what kind of funding has been made available by the EU and its subsidiary institutions.

Through the course of the past several years the majority of EU funding in Serbia has gone towards strengthening and expanding the capacity of Serbian institutions to accommodate and house refugees and migrants in state centers. When Michael Davenport, the head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, met with the Serbian Minister of Labor and the head of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants along with the ambassadors of eight EU member states in February, 2017, he praised the Serbian state’s policy towards refugees and migrants. (Davenport, 2017) In his remarks, which were made at the newly opened Obrenovac Transit Center, he made no reference of the more than 1,000 refugees and migrants sleeping rough in downtown Belgrade, whom
Amnesty International characterized barely a week before as being “trapped in a dehumanizing daily struggle to find warmth and food” (Gardos, 2017). In this way, selective engagement came to define the European Union’s protocol for providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. This meant limited interest in assistance which might facilitate further “irregular crossings” into the EU from Serbia.

Thus, EU funding has been skewed towards the sorts of institutions and organizations which assist refugees and migrants who are being served within the state support system. Conversely, less traditional organizations that primarily engage with unregistered refugees and migrants, those working in the Barracks or the other squatted camps on the borders, were seen as less likely to attract institutional support. Although independent groups working with refugees and migrants outside of the state system were able to secure some funding from international donors such as Oxfam for their activities, none were able to, or in some cases were not interested in, securing funding from funding from the EU.

**Impressions from NGOs**

Given the relatively high number of refugee assistance organizations that began to work in Serbia between 2015 and 2017, and the relatively low numbers of established donor institutions, organizations must compete against other qualified groups to secure project funding. Some remarked that the competitive funding environment in Serbia is an extension of the neoliberal status quo. Capitalism, they explained, calls for competition. A number of participants held this view, particularly those who come from non-institutional organizations. One worker observed of her boss that “...sometimes she does occasionally communicate with these other organizations but you know in today’s system of capitalism and everything, you cannot ignore somebody who is ‘competition’” (T.J., personal communication, April 25, 2017). A worker of another organization
surmised that “the situation is looked at as a marketplace and not as something that we all need
take care of or coordinate better, because everyone is looking for markets, everybody wants their
share of the market” (S.T. #1, personal communication, April 17, 2017). He further related his
impression that this is a key characteristic of how organizations in the scene develop their interests.
Interestingly, he viewed this behavior to be true not only in regards to an organization’s donors,
but also towards their engagement with their beneficiaries.

Regarding the competition for funding within the NGO community in Belgrade, one
participant reflected that “It's just inevitable in neoliberal capitalism, in this system, because the
state is not enough to just provide all these things, and then these little organizations have to do it
by themselves and compete for all these international fundings that need to be used in this kind of
context” (T.J., personal communication, April 25, 2017). Another prominent NGO worker in
Belgrade echoed this opinion while speaking on the status of civil society in Serbia since the
democratization period, saying that “[I]t’s very hard for them to get funding, to survive, to get their
own space, it’s definitely not easy in that sense to operate” (A. C, personal communication, April
27, 2017).

A number of participants expressed frustration by the manner in which certain
organizations go about securing their funding. One Serbian NGO worker complained of the
existence of organizational “grant-eaters” who are basically just oriented towards projects and
fundings” and appeal to established international institutions. (S.T., personal communication,
December 12, 2017) Echoing this sentiment, another Serbian worker took the time to voice her
frustration about the existence of organizations which over-report their activities to cater to the
interests and expectations of international donors (V.M., personal communication, December 11,
2017). Overall, this behavior seems to be exhibited most often by professionalized NGOs which
competitively market themselves towards well-respected international donors. This interest in attracting foreign funding may provide incentives to overemphasize their work.

One platform to witness this behavior is the UNHCR’s monthly Inter-Agency Updates for Serbia which serves as an excellent source of information on the kinds of assistance that is being provided to refugees and migrants in Serbia. It also exists as a quasi-official forum where professional organizations send in and report statistics on the sorts of work they are engaged in. These reports, which are self-submitted by NGOs and accepted by the UNHCR so long as they are not “controversial in any way”, cover topics such as the number of beneficiaries which assisted by the given group or the number of meals or NFIs they distributed in a given month (V.D., personal communication, March 9, 2017). It is here, some suggested, that organizations take steps to overemphasize the significance or magnitude of their activities. These complaints tended to come from newer, domestic organizations and are pointed towards other domestic organizations which hold close ties with international institutions like Oxfam or the UNHCR. Thus there was a persisting perception that these “grant-eaters” were leveraging their institution connections to perpetuate their own organizations without having a vested interested in maximizing their humanitarian impact.

Furthermore, there were widespread complaints of organizational strategies being altered by the interests of donors. One participant complained of organization changing to meet the priorities of donors rather than their beneficiaries, but largely accepted the need for this to happen (V.M., personal communication, December 11, 2017). Touching on this point, another Serbian NGO worker reflected on her observation about the objectives of large international donors. She remarked that these institutions:

Are addressing specific issues and when you write a project you have to write what it says on the project, you cannot write a project for what you need. So you always have something
that is a theoretical framework of the project which you must write in order to get these funds and these projects miss a lot of important issues, you know, for example I cannot now write a project for these people (points to the young Afghani and Pakistani men outside of the window) because everyone just wants to help women and children and I know that addresses mental health, that addresses violence and stuff like that but everybody underestimates these young boys who are literally nobody’s target group because these big donors, they don’t write projects for them. (T.J. #2., personal communication, December 15, 2017)

While some study participants reported that a culture of competitiveness between NGOs was born from a lack of funding options, others were less keen to point this out. This was often the case for participants employed by organizations with relatively secure financial assets and dedicated international partners. Common international partners in Serbia are organizations like the Danish Refugee Council, the UNHCR, CARE, or the International Rescue Committee.

**Legitimacy**

One important aspect to consider across these groups is how certain work is made visible, or invisible, by the manner in which it is conducted. Nearly all organizations maintain a presence on social media to boost the visibility of their work. Likewise, larger groups may even have staff dedicated to spreading awareness to the public and to news organizations about the activities which they engage in. Established domestic groups benefit locally from their connections to national news outlets. Other groups are able to attract the attention of large media organizations with global audiences. The independent NGO Hot Food Idomeni in particular benefitted from this spotlight due to its highly visible meal distributions in downtown Belgrade.

Importantly, the visibility of assistance work also has bearing on the institutional recognition that refugee assistance NGOs can expect to receive. A UNHRC report which purported to detail “WHO is doing WHAT and WHERE” sought to detail the range of groups assisting refugees and migrants throughout Serbia, both inside state-run centers and outside. To this end, the report covers the activities of 71 different groups of which 5 were government agencies and 4
where UN-run offices. Of the 62 NGOs which comprised the rest of this list, 31 were international and 24 were institutional, domestic organizations. This left only 5 groups which might be considered to fall under the category of non-institutional domestic organizations and only 3 which could be considered independent (UNHCR, 2017). While there are relatively few groups in total which fit under the designation of non-institutional, domestic NGOs, this report does not recognize a number of independent organizations which have played an important role, albeit less visible role, in the community. Rigardu, No Name Kitchen, Fresh Response, Belgraid, and Aid Delivery Mission were all missing, to name a few. Given that these missing independent organizations do not cooperate or engage with established actors like the UNHCR, it is unlikely that these groups even took notice of their absence from this list. Nonetheless, their absence represents a lack of engagement between certain independent groups and important institutional actors. This, in turn, has bearings on the degree with which these organizations are viewed as viable partners for cooperation or funding.

Alternative Strategies for Funding

One of the standout differences between independent groups and the rest of the community is the way in which their funding structure differs from the traditional approach to NGOs and humanitarian aid. Alternatives to institutionalized donor networks exist and are perhaps more widespread in the sorts of non-traditional organizational frameworks which characterize the independent organizations active in Serbia. No Name Kitchen, for example, currently covers their operating costs with personal donations from their extensive solidarity networks and by coordinating with other grassroots groups. Their website states that as a group independent from governmental and external structures, their “funding comes from individual donations and entities that [sic] identity with our values as responsible consumers and the ecological use of resources”
Thus, No Name Kitchen obtains a bulk of their funding via their expanding solidarity network. One member explained that their funding comes mainly from volunteers and people who know volunteers, you know, some of them are fairly active, sometimes they are not so active but it is people who stay here for one week, they go back to Spain and they get lots of money and then people who have been here for 4 months, then they go back and you don't hear more from them, individual donations, concerts, basic events, different kind of events (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017).

This organizational approach to a DIY model of funding is hardly unique and can be found in a number of other organizations active in the field in Serbia. SolidariTea, a small independent group from England active in the country last year was funded primarily through support from their hometown which raised over £13,000 for the initiative through concerts, breakfasts, and collections amongst other things. They also benefited from a crowdfunding campaign which raised an additional £5,000 (R.D., personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Similarly, another small organization staffed by young international workers found a functional alternative funding model by relying on selective crowdfunding campaigns, donations, and funds from small international organizations which they fostered relationships with. Speaking on the culture of competition that she has observed between humanitarian NGOs in Belgrade, a representative from this organization remarked that

That’s a very common thought among aid organizations in Belgrade, a lot of the NGOs always competing with things like that, and I think we have just skipped on that entire thing because for whatever reason I think that we have just always been honest in what we can and can’t do (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017).

Thus, she credited her organization’s capacity to avoid the competitive traditional funding field with their ability to foster connections and stay nimble within their organizational capacity. Groups like Belgraid, Hot Food Idomeni, and even Jesuit Refugee Service also launched crowdfunding campaigns through the website GoFundMe. In this way, there is evidence of groups searching for
alternative ways of securing funding for their assistance activities which fall outside of the normal project-based donor channels.

State and Access

The Serbian State and Access

It has been observed by a number of authors that the effectiveness of NGOs continues to depend on the access granted to them by state governments and IGOs (Oliver, 2017; Irrera, 2011). For decades, refugee camps and border regions have been the traditional setting where humanitarian actors have performed assistance. These areas are typically highly securitized spaces overseen by state and institutional actors which have the power to control access into and out of the camps. This stasis, however, has been challenged somewhat by the proliferation of independent groups which assist refugees and migrants who exist outside of the system in transit corridors, border towns, and squats. Whereas “camp logics instrumentally contain and control mobility so that care can be administered,” informal refugee camps tend to allude this control (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). Accordingly, the assistance which is conducted by NGOs in these non-state areas has similarly lacked the same degree of state oversight which can be observed in state asylum or transit centers. This particularly been true in the case of organizations assisting refugees and migrants in Serbia. Over the past year and a half, however, the eradication of informal squats in favor of state run camps and centers has allowed the state, in many ways, to re-institutionalize the provision of assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. As a result, the Serbian state, along with coordinating actors like the EU, have an important platform from which to exert pressure on the organizational field of NGO assistance. In this section, I will demonstrate several of the ways in which the Serbian state and the EU exert influence on NGO actors in Serbia. Moreover I will share
the perceptions of my participants on the role of these actors.

There is a wealth of academic literature that points to the presence of a sustained tension between the state and NGOs in Serbia, dating back at least to Milosević era (Grødeland, 2005; Mikus, 2015). Conversely, there is a comparatively less developed consensus of where, and even if, these dynamics are exerting themselves in the provision of assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. Sharing their perspectives on this relationship, many participants voiced that, at least some level, elements of distrust persist in the working relationship between the two groups. Summarizing her view on the underlying dynamics at play in this relationship, one NGO worker in Belgrade made the following observation:

> Serbia has a long, let’s say, history of media coverage and politicians making a strong line between the state and NGOs. So when you listen to politicians in the last 15 years most of the thing you hear is that the state is working against NGOs and the NGO are working against the state. So if you are an NGO providing psychosocial support usually people from the state are not ready to accept it. Even if you are doing it for free, even though it can be helpful for them, because it is like we are told too many times that we should not work together. (J.B., personal communication, April 26, 2017)

From a general standpoint, there is a precedent for distrust between NGOs and the state in Serbia. Less clear, however, is how this relationship functions in the context of the refugee crisis.

Respondents within the Serbian NGO community described the status of their relationship with the state as confusing, inconsistent, and difficult. The lack of consistency in state decision-making on the refugee-migrant situation was commonly cited by these respondents as a major obstacle to effective cooperation. One employee of an NGO providing psychosocial support to refugees in Serbia expressed her frustration at the on-off nature that her organization was granted access to state-run camps, saying one week they would be allowed in and the next they would be denied with no explanation. Summarizing her frustration, she reflected that “it seems to me that the biggest problem is that we cannot really understand what is happening in their minds. There is no consistency in their decisions” (T.G, personal communication, April 25, 2017). Similarly,
another participant complained of the state’s management of the situation, relating it their lack of sensitivity and knowledge on the dynamics at play that “There was always a problem with working with the authorities because they always have their ways with how to deal with something...They decide to work [sic] people who are really not sensitive or don’t know much about the issues” (S.T., personal communication, April 17, 2017).

That being said, others voiced that their relationship with the state has gotten better over the course of the refugee crisis in Serbia. “I think it became better than it was in the beginning,” said one figure from the Crisis Response and Policy Center (Z.M., personal communication, December 12, 2017). Likewise, figures from two independent organizations remarked that the more communication that they had with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants (KIRS), the better their cooperation has become over the months. Not every group got along with KIRS, but most expressed an understanding that they were a permanent force, which you had to either cooperate with or maneuver around. A figure from Jesuit Refugee Services remarked that...

...we don’t cooperate with the Commissariat at all because they think we are stealing their jobs. With [the] Commissariat now, it is very tricky between JRS and the Commissariat, but we are cooperating with the Center for Social Welfare because they are the guardians of all our children in the house. (V.M., personal communication, December 11, 2017)

Over all, organizations that worked inside state-run centers came into contact with the state much more often than those which operated in squats like the Barracks. However, access to state-run centers is much more tightly controlled and as a result the sorts of organizations that operate in these places do so at the discretion of the government. To this end, the question of access to camps is an extremely important consideration for NGOs to keep in mind when also engaging in potentially contentious activities.

It is impossible to write on refugee assistance work inside and outside of state-run camps without touching upon how the politics of access mediates this work. This is a topic which became
particularly relevant for the organizations working to assist the refugees and migrants within the Barracks or other informal, non-state camps in Serbia during the first half of 2017.

Figure 6. Population of Refugees and Migrants in Serbia January 2016 - June 2017

As evidenced by Figure 6, there was a period of just over a year, roughly corresponding with the closures of the EU borders in March, 2016 and the demolition of the Belgrade Barracks in May, 2017, where the numbers of refugees and migrants living outside of the state system blossomed. With the demolition of the Barracks, alongside an increased level of pressure for refugees and migrants to formalize their presence in the country, fewer and fewer refugees and migrants were living in places outside of explicit state control. According to UNHCR reports, between April and May of 2017, the total percentage of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants in
Serbia accommodated in one the 18 state-run centers rose from 81% to 93% (Inter-agency Report April, 2017; Inter-agency Report May, 2017).

For some NGOs, in particular the independent and non-institutional domestic organizations which stepped in to provide much of the direct assistance to refugees and migrants over the previous months, this drastically changed the landscape of their work. An employee of an independent NGO reflected that

...previously our entire demographic was 95% were the people in the Barracks, particularly for our school, we were running English classes on someone else’s premises, in Info Park’s premises, and then we opened up our own actual physical location and then it literally switched in the span of one month from all guys from the Barracks to all kids from Knjača, so then all the guys from the Barracks were not receiving any form of education because they were sent to all various camps which didn’t provide anything like that, there is almost no recreational activities in most places outside of Belgrade. (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017)

The normalization of the refugee situation in Belgrade produced a high incentive for NGOs interested in remaining in Serbia to seek access to state-run camps in order to find and provide services to beneficiaries.

The evidence from my interviews, however, signals that this process is far from linear and involves a negotiated performance of being a “professional NGO.” An employee of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants framed the fragile nature of camp access for NGOs as a problem born out of structural weaknesses within civil society. She reflected that

...we have a situation where some organization is [sic] in our camp I don’t know, for one month, two months, three months, and after that they are leaving because they don’t have enough money or their project is finished or something and they start to do something with the refugees and leave him at the halfway, the job is not finished, and that is the main reason because we are quite strict about this. (D. R., personal communication, May 5, 2017)

Predictably, this stance contrasts with the perception of the situation by actors within the NGO community. An employee of a prominent NGO which provides psychosocial assistance to refugees and migrants remembers this differently. In her comments, the psychosocial support was
inconsistent in government camps because the Commissariat would sometimes allow them into
the camp for a period of time, only to renege on this offer later, and then subsequently re-grant that
permission (J. B., personal communication, April 26, 2017).

It should be carefully acknowledged that the state employee’s read of the situation does
touch upon several potential points of truth as it underscores the project-based sources of funding
that organizations are able to secure as opposed to sustained or generic funding. In the resource-
scarce environment of Serbian civil society, organizations of all types can only provide services
so far as their sources of funding will finance. This is particularly true for organizations which rely
on project-contingent funding from international donors such as Oxfam or the ECHO fund.

Nonetheless, the stance of the state employee seems somewhat misguided in her characterization
of this being a source of shaky NGO presence in camps because project grants are very rarely
awarded in week-by-week timeframes. Rather, the psychosocial NGO employee’s characterization
of a camp access being subjective and state contingent fits the mold of the impressions of many
other NGO actors.

Further complications have arisen from the state’s control over access to camps. After the
demolition of the Barracks in May, 2017, independent organizations which had previously been
active in the squat complained of that in the wake of this decisions, officials were “now trying to
bargain with volunteers and grassroots organizations, dangling the idea of camp access in
exchange for their departure for the area” (AYS, Money Talks, 2017). Perhaps more alarming,
there were also reports of state representative pressuring NGO workers to share photos of President
Vučić with a refugee boy named Farhad Nouri in September, 2017 to ensure that these groups
would stay on good terms with the government (AYS, New old route, 2017). In this regard, it is
likely that the Serbian government leverages, to a certain extent, its position as the gatekeepers of
access to its asylum and transit centers in order to moderate the activity of some NGOs.

The strategic deployment of a professional organizational “personality” was identified as key in terms of gaining access to camps. As one figure from the NGO community reflected “it is much, much easier to communicate with other organizations that are from the civil society and the NGO sector but we do communicate with the state. We have to of course, in the end it is their question.” (T.G., personal communication, April 26, 2017). Another NGO worker reflected that

I think the better relationships you have with the Commissariat, with the municipalities, and the more you do things in line with what is asked and required, the better image you have, and that seems to be a really important thing: the image of your organization and what you do, and how you are perceived by the locals and the government. (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017)

Expanding on this thought, she commented that it was particularly difficult for independent organizations to gain access to camps:

...any smaller NGOs, like at our level...unless you are providing clothing or distribution of food or something like that, you are not gonna get access, so even if you have a relationship and you do the things with the government, it’s almost impossible currently (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017)

Overall, access to camps has become an important, albeit contentious, point of consideration for most organizations working in Serbia in the post-crisis period. Judging from the evidence offered from this study’s participants, it would appear that a number of NGOs have begun to deploy strategies in order to set themselves up better to secure such access in the future, mainly through the professionalization of their structures and activities.

Political Advocacy and Contentious Forms of Assistance

Given the tense nature of refugee assistance work in Serbia, it is of use to look into the ways in which institutional pressure might disincentivize or discourage politically contentious forms of activism from these sorts of NGOs. The responses of my participants on this topic indicated, by and large, that the performance of politically contentious forms of activism is taboo
to the extent that it might jeopardize future working relationships with the Serbian state. That being said, however, the participants of this study indicated that there is a wide array of alternative approaches to advocacy which are practiced within the field.

It is common for humanitarian or refugee assistance organizations to frame their work as apolitical, or non-contentious. For organizations assisting individuals who are operating within the accepted asylum and migration norms of the country, this designation seems like a no-brainer: the right to food, shelter, and asylum are a human right, as per the Geneva Convention, and therefore should be accepted as a norm. This was a stance commonly brought up in my interviews. The independent NGO Hot Food Idomeni, for example, would give a speech to its crew of volunteers every day before its distributions where it restated its identity as a “non-political organization” solely interested in the distribution of high-quality, nutritious, hot food. To this end, there was a desire to detach the organizational activities of humanitarian organizations from the political questions which may arise from being involved in refugee assistance.

The designation of being apolitical begins to face some tension, however, when groups begin to assist contentious pockets of need. This was reflected in a conversation with an employee of MSF last spring who stated that “today, to work around the nature of migration in Europe you have to take political stances” (A.C. #1, personal communication, April 27, 2017. Thus, the organization’s decision to erect five tents in the Barracks in late January, 2017 for the purpose of providing medical assistance, without the approval of the Serbian state, held certain political implications. Similarly, their publication of reports documenting and condemning the epidemic of border violence perpetrated by EU authorities positions them, at least in part, in public opposition to the Union’s current border regime. Despite these pseudo-political actions, it is still important for organizations to frame these stances in a non-political nature. Continuing on, the MSF
employee remarked that “we try not to compromise our agenda, which is strictly humanitarian, with political agendas. Because then you have donors, you have organizations which depend on donors, you have government authorities, you have other authorities which they all have their own political agendas” (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017). To this end it is important to for organizations, especially those with many points of contacts with influential actors, to think holistically about the implications of their actions.

This applies to smaller organizations as well. An employee of a small international NGO reflected that “raising awareness is part of our organization, what we do, but we also have to remain neutral and independent and...it’s finding the balance between speaking out and not saying things that will cause drama that doesn’t end up paying anything” (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017). One figure at Belgraid commented that his organization wasn’t “super interested in shit-talking.” Elaborating, he reflected that “We work in Serbia, it benefits us to work closely with the Serbian government, we have to, to a degree, but also we don’t want to have an antagonistic relationship with them because I don’t see any real positive outcome of that” (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017). In this sense it is important for many organizations to toe the line of respectability with the state and international institutions which grant them access and funding. Echoing the sentiments of the MSF employee, the figure at Belgraid explained that,

As an organization we call ourselves non-political and I think that, in a lot of ways, that’s accurate. We’re not here to promote a political agenda, we are here to promote humanity and human rights for refugees. If that aligns with a political side that is accidental. There has been so much opportunity to just provide for needs in the past that it has just been less of a focus. (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017)

Not risking the direct confrontation of other, more contentious, political tactics, certain professional organizations make a strategic decision to organize their actions with a certain level of respectability in order to maximize their perceived effect.
Independent groups often operate under more heavily politicized circumstances in Serbia due to their tendency to assist refugees and migrants outside of the state system. This is perhaps no coincidence. Certain groups embraced their politicized work, to an extent. No Name Kitchen defines itself by its differences to hierarchical, institution-driven forms of humanitarian assistance which it sees as inadequate or unwilling to meet the needs of those in need. Similarly, the independent group Rigardu defines itself partly in opposition to the traditional institutional assistance structures. Their website emphasizes their origins as a “loose, self-organized group of people” which grew rapidly to provide a number of projects such as food distribution and the deployment of a mobile shower system to the border towns of Šid, Subotica, and Sombor. Eventually they would also become officially recognized as a non-profit organization. The group believes that that their work strongly benefits from their “largely un-bureaucratic structure which allows” the organization “to act spontaneously” (Rigardu, 2017). Writing on their political approach, the group states that:

The necessity of our humanitarian and educational work arises from the failure of the responsible political actors to protect human rights, particularly the rights of fleeing persons. With our work we aim to bring this issue to the attention of politicians and civil society. That is why we see ourselves as a political actor and want to be perceived as such. (Rigardu, 2017)

All over Europe, in places where squatted or informal camps of refugees and migrants struggle to survive outside of the securitized migration landscape, solidarity groups similar to these can be found. The autonomous, leaderless, No Borders collective, in particular comes to mind for their substantial contribution to the assistance of refugees and migrants in the “Jungle” in Calais, France (Milner, 2011). The influence of the No Borders tradition is quite wide and their practices can be observed in the behavior of many of the new groups operating in Calais, Greece, and Serbia. Importantly, “No Borders activists believe in horizontal, non-hierarchical structures of organizing and reject the binary identities of citizen vs. non-citizen and illegal vs. legal. The network is a
social and political site, that does not operate through a permanent membership model, but rather through a common thread of political beliefs and principles that links a number of radical migrant solidarity groups and campaigns together” (Cantat, 2013, p. 28).

The local No Borders group in Serbia is arguably one of the most controversial, albeit least understood, participants in the field of refugee assistance in the country. A group of refugees started a protest in Belgrade in November, 2016 which subsequently turned violent and resulted in the injury of several people including three of Info Park’s aid workers (I.V., personal communication, December 19, 2017). In the fallout of this event, many within the field pointed their fingers at No Borders for instigating the protest as a means of furthering their own political aims. One NGO remarked that “They are pushing their political ideologies in a context where it shouldn’t be pushed. It’s humanitarian aid to refugees who need lifesaving support and mixing that, then, with pushing one’s own political ideology can be quite a dangerous thing” (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017). Nonetheless, the local No Borders group in Serbia has engaged in important acts of assistance that have ranged from starting one of the first informal squats for refugees and migrants in Belgrade in 2015 to distributing tea to providing material assistance to independent organizations like No Name Kitchen (Milan & Pirro, 2018; (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017).

It is important, however, to understand that the defiance of political norms within the NGO community are limited to a few organizations. As evidenced before, other independent and non-institutional domestic NGOs, mirroring their more professionalized counterparts take steps to minimize the political nature of their work, preferring to focus on the simple tasks of meeting the immediate needs of those that they are helping. This is a dynamic which some groups have been able to carefully navigate to their own benefit. A good example of this is Info Park’s activities in
the Barracks during the spring of 2017. According to one of the employees, in the spring of 2017 they began to provide breakfast to the residents of the Barracks through project-financing from Oxfam. Strategically, they used two independent groups, an Italian group named Bridge to Idomeni and a Bosnian group called MFS-Emmaus, to carry out the groundwork of this operation. Using this strategy they were able to remain, for the benefit of their relationship with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants, outside of the squat.

[When the] breakfast started, people started to ask questions. Who are the providers? Who are the people providing this thing? The Commissariat was the first asking questions, what is this? And Info Park’s name started showing up, and then of course, they started asking questions like “Why? Is it true that...you are providing support?” And we were like “No, it is just like a bridge between independent organizations and Oxfam as a donor”, which wasn't really true, we were the ones organizing everything, and the volunteers were there really just to put their hands on the materials. (S.T. #2, personal communication, December 12, 2017)

To this end, it is important to understand that although there are strong incentives for groups to mediate their actions and activities in such a way that they are more attractive to donors and can secure access to state-run camps, certain groups develop mechanisms to work around this dynamic. In the following section, I will explore these pressures and the resistance against them within the field in more detail.

Professionalization and the Organizational Field

As the previous sections have demonstrated, there are powerful incentives on organizations in Serbia to professionalize themselves so as to be better able to compete for grants and continue their assistance work by gaining access to camps. It is important here to understand why the trend of professionalization is so pervasive.

In their chapter in the book *Solidarity Mobilizations in the ‘Refugee Crisis’*, Milan and Pirro (2018) provide an analysis of the grassroots/independent organizations active in Serbia
during the “Long Summer of Migration” in 2015. In particular, they identify three “solidarity mobilizations” of interest - Info Park, Refugee Aid Miksalište, and the local No Borders group. This is of interest because during the period of focus for this research, particularly from 2017 onwards, both Info Park and Refugee Aid Miksalište have professionalized considerably leaving only the No Borders group which could be considered as a possible independent group. Both of the former two groups gradually took on paid employees who were hired from within the professional assistance community, a departure from their previous identity as purely volunteer-dependent organizations. Accordingly, it is likely that their workplace cultures have evolved as well.

This is a common case for the domestic, Serbian organizations which first became active at the start of the refugee crisis. Although they began as grassroots or civic mobilizations during the peak of the refugee crisis when Serbia functioned exclusively as a transit country, the changing demographics of movement in the country have resulted in the professionalization of these organizations. One NGO worker reflected on his time at the organization:

I started working with Info Park when the whole idea of independence also started to cook, because Info Park started in 2015 as a completely voluntary project, then somehow professionalized during 2016, and in 2016 Info Park moved out from the hut in the park [and into its current office space]. (S.T., #2, personal communication, December 12, 2017)

The prospect of future plans and interests forms a key component in the development of organizational strategy and this is compounded when an organization has clear plans to stay active within a certain location for the foreseeable future. Overall, international organizations engaged in crisis-response capacities do not encounter the same burden of maintaining solid working relationships within the field given their short-term commitment to the country.
Nonetheless, professionalization has also been exhibited by the community of independent, international groups active in the field. As one member of the organization Belgraid brought up, organizations tend to do what is best for their mission in the long run:

You know, organizational ideas of how this should run, or should work, between like, we do more good if we are here, for sure, if we can stay on the ground that means that sometimes we are going to have to be really strategic in how we approach things. It doesn’t mean that our values have changed or that we are going to ignore major issues that need to be reported on. (C.S., personal communication, December 13, 2017)

Due to its working relationship with the Commissariat and its sustained funding from large international donors like Oxfam, Belgraid was considered by a number within the field, particularly smaller organizations, to be a recent example of a professionalized independent organization. Thus, it is important to note the way in which the employee framed the organization as being strategic in how they approached delicate institutional issues while emphasizing the absence of any ideological changes.

Put simply, most organizations, independent or not, have ambitions to expand the size and scope of their projects and in order to do that it is necessary to secure new means of funding. A figure from another small independent group which has previously relied on crowdfunding and collaborative grants echoed this issue:

Next year we want to become much more specialized and we want to go a lot maybe next year open up a couple of schools and do a lot more community outreach projects and really sort of professionalize our organization and maybe get a lot more business consultants, which we've done in the past few months, and really try to develop as best as possible and expand and I think that's when we're really going to be applying for a lot more grants and so that will maybe change the dynamic. Maybe we will be competing with a lot more NGOs but I don't really know how that will play out. (D.V., personal communication, December 18, 2017)
This speaks to the need for many organizations interested in expansion to institutionalize themselves, to an extent, in order to become more attractive candidates for grants.

Even No Name Kitchen, an organization which shows an impressive devotion to the ideals of solidarity, horizontal organizing, and alternative political structures, acknowledged an interest in expansion which may require more traditional funding sources. Although their funding currently comes from individual donations from mainly volunteers and people who know volunteers, one of the organization’s leaders acknowledged that “maybe if one government wants to give us money to do something, we will see who is the government, what kind of funding they give us, to do what, then we will see” (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017). This is not to say that the organization has lapsed on its desire to “do things differently”, rather it is should be seen as a nuanced mediation of the logistical realities of humanitarian work.

The incentives which new organizations face to professionalize are strong and this has been observable to actors within the community. One employee from MSF remarked on the independent, volunteer-based organization Belgraid and noted its recent shift towards a more professional orientation:

All of those...non-organized groups, or self-organized groups, [sic] then they change, they shift, they take positions. For example now we have Belgraid, Belgraid is an NGO. It started as a group of different volunteers with the different backgrounds, now it is kind of an institutionalized body, which has also a clear position, but that still keeps inside of a certain tradition, if you want to say. So you also have this kind of hybrid development on positioning which are also very interesting because, it is a process, again, on how certain initiatives then if they want to continue they also need to adapt to a certain way of operating which is regulated by institutions, by states, by the fact that this is an institutionalized response. It is not any more an emergency response. (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017)

To this end, there is observable pressure exerted onto NGOs by institutional actors in Serbia. This influence was observed as being manifested through funding pressure and control over access to camps. Many of the younger groups in particular saw this influence as manifested through pressure
on their organizations to professionalize so as to better be able to compete for grants and camp access. Importantly, this exertion of influence is by no means direct, or perhaps even the result of a conscious policy effort, rather it is the manifestation of a system-wide process of vetting. This process, by its very nature, tends to moderate the contentious actions of the very groups it relies on. In my closing section, I will develop some conclusions from this overview of the organizational field and the types of NGOs active in the field in Serbia.
V - Conclusion

“[Working with] the European Union, it is always like a pact with the Devil in a way...they will start to push their own activities that they want to see, that is the problem with the European Union always.”

- S. T.

“Any organization that has any level of issues with the Commissariat and the government, will just not be able to get access into the camps.”

- D. V.

This paper has sought to analyze the ways in which refugee assistance organizations operate and develop their operational strategies in light of a changing work landscape. Moreover, it attempted to contextualize these strategies within the greater context of the “organizational field” in order to develop an understanding of how state and international institutions influence the actions and decisions of NGOs. This is an important area of research not only because there has been relatively little scholarship done on the impact of the migration crisis on the behavior of NGOs, but also because it informs the broader discussion on the strategies humanitarian NGOs deploy in contentious environments to accomplish their goals. More broadly, it will also shed light on the overall role state and international institutions play in NGO work.

To reiterate, this thesis has put forth several findings which shed light on the way in which refugee assistance NGOs develop and deploy organizational practices. First, I outlined four distinct patterns of organizational structure that exist within the community of NGOs providing assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. These ideal organizational types were referred to as independent organizations, international organizations, institutional domestic organizations, and non-institutional domestic organizations. These four categories provide a way of characterizing
the general management structure and project focus of organizations; however, it is recognized that within these ideal-types, organizational activities vary widely.

Second, I discussed the practical implications of Serbia’s organizational field, conceived of as the range of grievances, resource flows, political opportunities, and cultural framings which come together to shape the appropriate organizational structures, goals, and methods of operation in a field of NGO action. To this end, I argued that the field presents certain institutional incentives to mediate organizational activity. Primary amongst these factors is the funding landscape as well as the interests and behavior of three main groups of institutional actors: the Serbian state, the EU, and international institutions like the UNHCR. In particular, the effect of these institutions works to professionalize the organizational activity and structure of NGOs. This is accomplished within the Serbian case primarily via soft control over funding flows and the control over access to camps.

In this final chapter I elaborate on these findings by putting forth an argument which ties the moderating characteristics of the organizational field to a rationality of governance that strategically utilizes NGO-work to accomplish its goals. Through the soft mechanisms of organizational influence, such as control over access and funding, a dynamic is produced wherein NGOs function not only as *subjects* of governance but also as *participants* of governance. This argument is rooted in Foucault's concept of governmentality which refers to an “indirect form of power exerted upon a population through a configuration of institutions, ideas, routines and procedures to induce individual subjects to govern themselves” (Richter, 2008, p. 1). According to Foucault, modern political institutions do not exert power over society; they exert power *through* society. They act upon the “field of possibilities” of others’ actions’ to construct subjects who govern themselves (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Importantly, government in this sense is not limited to the formal institutions and policies of the state, but refers to the entire repertoire of institutions,
procedures, analytical techniques, strategies and practices configured to shape human behavior towards a particular end (Richter, 2008 on Foucault, 1994a: 220).

As Sending and Neumann (2006) argue, the role of NGOs in carrying out global governance functions is expressive of a changing rationality, or logic, of governance “by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of government to be acted upon into an entity that is both an object and a subject of government” (p. 652). In this reconfigured logic of governance the “self-association and political will-formation characteristic of civil society and non-state actors do not stand in opposition to the political power of the state, but is a most central feature of how power, understood as government, operates in late modern society” (Sending & Neumann, 2008, p. 658). States utilize the ability of civil society to act as reliable sources of expertise and assistance, as opposed to traditional state institutions, which in turn renders them central participants in such processes of governance. To this end, for the Serbian case, it is within the Serbian state’s interest and intent to professionalize and institutionalize NGOs to an extent, while simultaneously emphasizing their autonomous and flexible capacities. These organizations help fill gaps in the assistance of refugees and migrants which the state is unwilling or unable to provide. Crucially, professionalization leads the groups to become more active participants in governance insofar as they begin to envision and conduct their work through established channels of assistance, such as camp-based care or policy development, which upholds the state’s sovereignty over borders, human movement, and the asylum process.

An interdependent relationship then characterizes the dynamic in which institutional actors require the unique skill-sets and adaptability of NGOs to further their policy goals, whereas NGOs require the monetary assistance, access, and legitimacy that cooperation with IGOs and state institutions afford. In doing so, NGOs become both subjects, limited by access and funding
constraints, and objects of governance. Importantly, this field of influence is both enabled and constrained by its powerful institutions. It has finite boundaries of control against which it is possible for organizations to navigate and push back.

The Return to Normalcy

In terms of the refugee crisis in Serbia, the constraints and pressures applied to refugee assistance organizations work, broadly speaking, towards the interest of the Serbian state, the European Union, and international institutions. Refugee assistance organizations provide humanitarian support in cases where the state does not or cannot provide support.

Where this relationship becomes more blurred, however, is in the cases of refugee assistance organizations which work in direct contention with the state. The local No Borders group and, to a lesser extent, ideologically driven solidarity groups like No Name Kitchen present a challenge to this relationship due to their ability to facilitate activities such as contentious political protests or illegal border crossings and run in direct contrast with the European Union’s border regime. Their avoidance of traditional funding models further insulates them from this influence.

To this end, it should be observed that while NGOs may function within the broader interests of state governance, there are methods and manners to which they may push back against this role. This can be achieved more visibly by organizations which work in direct contention with the state. The organizational style of these groups push against the traditional conceptions of humanitarian assistance and organizational structure and present an altogether new approach to solidarity activism. Importantly, more professionalized groups have also demonstrated their capacity to push against the normalizing effects of the organizational field through strategic
actions. Info Park, a grassroots initiative which has professionalized into an established Serbian NGO in the past several years, continues to engage in the sorts of advocacy and projects which have typically been relegated to independent groups in Serbia.

Importantly, this should not be taken to mean that established, professional groups such as the Belgrade Center for Human Rights or the Danish Refugee Council do not engage in cases of contentious political advocacy or express dissent against controversial state decisions. Rather, this argument seeks to highlight how the organizational approaches to refugee assistance by these groups tends to be conducted within established professional channels which in turn carries certain implications. This paper argues that the very act of becoming “professional” is a culmination of the strategic mediation of the desire to ensure the ongoing ability for these groups to assist refugees and migrants.

In the context of a stabilizing refugee situation, such as the one in Serbia in 2017, the future goals of refugee assistance organizations incentivized many groups to present themselves in such a way as to be able to secure continued funding and access to state-run camps. As the needs of refugees and migrants began to change, at least in the eyes of institutional actors, so too did the funding and access opportunities of the organizational field. One employee of MSF reflected upon this:

The whole point is to come back to normality....the response is over, the emergency response is over, this should be part of the normal administration. Because the numbers are going down so there is no need any more to have all this machinery, to have all this money, all this external donors because otherwise then there also is the legitimization of the state, the weakness of the aid institutions...which is one of the risks in general terms, about the introduction of NGOs. (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017)

To this end, the return to “normality” which state and international institutions seek is consistent with the broader hegemonic discourses on migration and securitization.
This discourse on migration characterizes the rising numbers of people seeking to claim asylum as a “crisis” or a “flood” of refugees; it is portrayed as a momentary aberration in the normal state of affairs for the developed countries of Europe. From a position of crisis, then, the chief desire is to a return to normalcy. For the Serbian case, the “return to normalcy” has been characterized by the containment and sequestration of refugees and migrants in state-run centers which exist out of the public eye.

Importantly, this initiative to securitize the movement of refugees and migrants within the country was not initially accompanied by any viable paths towards long-term residency which relates to a key underlying tension in the refugee assistance field in Serbia: no one originally thought of the country as a permanent destination. The testimony of the hundreds of refugees and migrants who attempt to cross into the EU from Serbia every month, only to be violently pushed back by Croatian and Hungarian border police, speaks for itself. Just the same as the hundreds of thousands who crossed the country in the summer of 2015, very few intended to stay in Serbia. Importantly, this belief was also a cornerstone of the Serbian state’s approach to refugees and migrants in the country:

PM Aleksandar Vučić built national consensus on migrants by stressing two main points: first, by nurturing the idea that refugees would not settle in the country and, hence, Serbia would not have to offer them permanent asylum and, second, that Serbia had the duty to assist migrants as a way to accelerate its path towards EU membership. (Milan & Pirro, 2018)

There was a certain eagerness with which the Serbian state accepted the task of facilitating the movement of refugees and migrants, as temporary, transiting individuals, through its borders. Prime Minister Vučić said in September of 2015 that "Serbia has not put up fences or barbed wire. It would be easy for us [to do so], while you in the EU were silent, when the fence was being erected.” Elaborating in a later social media post, Vučić touted Serbia’s response to the refugee situation by stating that "Serbia will receive a certain number of migrants. This makes us more
European than some member states. We don't build fences" (Avramović & Jovanović, 2015). The situation began to change drastically in Serbia with the closure of the EU borders surrounding the country in March of 2016. Since then, the public perception of refugees and migrants, as potentially permanent residents within the country, has had a large impact on state rhetoric. In the summer of 2017, Vučić, now President, said that Serbia cannot be a "parking lot for Afghans and Pakistanis who other countries don’t wish to see, let alone accept" (Rudić, 2017).

The Open Letter issued to international humanitarian and non-governmental organizations providing support to refugees and migrants in Serbia represented the beginning of the state’s push to securitize the crisis and return to normalcy. There were two important implications attached to the Serbian government’s claim that it was no longer acceptable to provide direct assistance and support to refugees and migrants residing outside of the government’s asylum and transit centers. First, it signaled the beginning of the end of the state’s tacit acceptance of unregistered refugees and migrants within its borders. The refugee populations living in abandoned squats in downtown Belgrade or in the border towns of Šid, Subotica, Sombor, and Horgoš, would no longer function with the level of impunity with which they had been afforded in the summers of 2015 and 2016. Second, from an institutional standpoint, this also signaled the implicit disapproval of any groups which continued to provide assistance to refugees and migrants living outside of the state system.

Although the Open Letter was not a formal piece of legislation, it carried weighty implications for NGOs in the field: conform to government’s script of acceptable assistance or risk the costs of a jeopardized relationship with the Serbian state. As one NGO worker reflected:

"It was just a fear tactic to kind of scare people off from providing aid, and it all worked...because they didn’t want to lose their organization, and everyone sort of did risk assessments for what they sort of can do and can’t do, and how to do [it], and started to rely on more independent volunteers to do things because they wouldn’t be as likely to get in trouble or be here as long, or independent organizations. (D.V. personal communication, December 18, 2017)"
A figure from the Info Park echoed this point and remarked that after the Open Letter was issued, many domestic NGOs were afraid of continuing to provide direct support because they didn’t want to risk losing their permission to provide assistance to refugees and migrants in Serbia. Importantly, he also remarked that in addition to this fear, “organizations were somehow indoctrinated in a way that the institutional support is the only one which is proper...so basically the camps and the registration is the only way to support refugees and migrants” (S.T., #2, personal communication, December 12, 2017).

To this end, we can track the professionalization of NGOs in the Serbian refugee response to the concurrent institutionalization of refugees and migrants within state-run asylum and transit camps. Following notions of governmentality developed by Foucault, NGOs are subject to an indirect form of power which induces groups to conduct themselves in conducive to the interest of the state which are, in this case, the securitization and control over refugees and migrants. By and large, domestic Serbian organizations did cease in the direct assistance of refugees and migrants outside of the state system. Independent, non-professional groups, unphased by the threat of a jeopardized relationship with Serbian state, then rushed in shortly after to fill this void.

Importantly, this period also witnessed the professionalization of two assistance groups, Refugee Aid Miksalište and Info Park which Milan and Pirro (2018) identify as two of the most important independent groups in Serbia during the summer of 2015. It is of note that in the time frame of my study, between March, 2016 and June, 2017, these two Serbian organizations had professionalized into established NGOs and somewhat relinquished their identities as civic, solidarity, mobilizations. This is partly due to a shift in personnel as many of the original volunteers and staff of these organizations left to be replaced by hired professionals. Importantly, the adoption
of a more professional organizational identity is also likely due in part to the changing funding and access requirements of a long-term assistance organization in Serbia.

As the circumstances of refugees and migrants began to become normalized within state structures, so too, did the heterogeneity of the NGOs providing assistance to this population. This point alludes to the moderating effect of the organizational field. Consistent with this finding, previous work has found that in fields which are strictly controlled and moderated, institutional actors are more likely to have clearly defined scripts of behavior which are passed down from higher- to lower- level organizations. Conversely, “in fields with no clear hierarchy...isomorphism takes place more subtly” (Ron, 1997, p. 277). To this end, one might argue that Serbia’s hectic transition from a transit state to a holding state, where the standard procedures of camp-based care and state control over migration were absent, provided the perfect environment for a heterogeneous community of NGOs to grow. As the situation began to be normalize under state structures, there began to be a greater pressure for organizations conform a certain script of presentability which would allow them to compete for camp access and funding.

Accordingly, the pressure to demonstrate legitimacy within a normalizing organizational field are high and in response to these pressures, many NGOs develop structures and behaviors to respond to and fend off claims of illegitimacy. As Ron (1997) writes, “over time, organizations learn what types of response to audits are legitimate and what types of external structure they should adopt to maintain the proper aura of respectability” (p. 277).

The strategic, organizational changes of NGOs active in the field of refugee assistance in Serbia navigate the constraints and conditions imposed upon them by the organizational field. “As the environment changes, some forms of behavior become stigmatized while others become acceptable. Actors seeking to boost their reputations will want to reflect the new criteria for
evaluation, even if they do not believe in the substantive value of the new symbols themselves” (Ron, 1997, p. 279). Importantly, as Ann Swidler (1995) writes, "what governs action in this case is not individuals' internalized beliefs, but their knowledge of what meanings their actions have for others” (p. 8).

To this end, NGOs involved in migration constitute, perhaps unwillingly, a crucial component of state migration policy. In subtle ways, neoliberal conceptions of camp-based care and governance are reinforced by the interdependence which these actors entertain. The securitization of migration by institutional actors is made easier, not harder, by this relationship.

Importantly, the organizational field has finite boundaries of control to which it is possible for organizations to navigate and push back against. True opportunities emerged in the context of the refugee crisis for independent, non-professional organizations like No Name Kitchen or Rigardu to engage in radical acts of solidarity which subvert the traditional notions of assistance and control. These groups define themselves through their opposition to hierarchical, institution-driven forms of humanitarian assistance which they view as inadequate or unwilling to meet the needs of refugee and migrant populations. As one figure from the organizations said to me in passing, “we really believe that we can do things different” (B.A., personal communication, December 20, 2017). Their acts can be interpreted as reactions to the poor responsiveness of public authorities and traditional assistance networks. Through their reliance on crowdfunding, non-professional, volunteer-based assistance these initiatives aim to overcome the limited financial and human resources available to non-professional organizations in support of migrant populations. Their reliance and their aversion to camp-based care for refugees and migrants in turn allows them to engage in this work without direct cooperation with the state.

Additionally, the fact that these groups are often spontaneously formed by ideologically
driven foreigners further diminished their need to play by the rules of respectability and plan for future considerations of domestic cooperation. The practice of radical solidarity, such as these groups engage in, inherently pushes against the borders of the supposedly self-contained organizational field which leverages the future goals and pragmatism of traditional NGOs against the desires of state authorities to control and securitize migration.

Importantly, it should be understood that, while perhaps less explicit, professional organizations can push back against this as well. While independent groups with little interests in career-building are particularly resistant to this form of influence, other organizations within this study exhibited strategic, professional behavior while simultaneously engaging in norm challenging methods of assistance. Info Park serves as an excellent example of a domestic organization which has professionalized, to a certain extent, while still maintaining a strong workplace culture of civic engagement.

MSF, as an international organization, displayed similar tendencies. As a large, established, international organization, it has shown an impressive commitment to engaging in contentious advocacy for issues involving refugees and migrants in Serbia. This has most notably consisted of its publication of reports cataloguing and condemning the violence of EU-country authorities on the borders of Serbia. Additionally, it has engaged in a number of actions which defy the expressed wishes of the Serbian government, such as their decision to provide direct medical assistance to the residents of the Barracks from a tent they set up on the premises of the squat in January 2017. Perhaps most importantly, the group has shown its willingness to engage in close cooperation with non-traditional, non-professional independent groups in recognition of the unique skills and abilities that these groups possess. As one figure from the organization explained,

An alternative response can be efficient rather than investing so much money in an institutional response, I'm not saying that the two things cannot cooperate together, I'm
just saying that we have to recognize the role all of the non-traditional actors, especially in this context. (A.C. #2, personal communication, December 15, 2017)

The malleability of this organization’s approach to politically contentious issues is likely rooted in several factors. The historical ideology and tradition of certain groups, such as MSF, are rooted in the notion that humanitarian assistance is inherently a politically contentious process. In fact, the organization was formed as a result of a group of doctors’ resistance to the apolitical stance that the Red Cross has historically prescribed itself (Omaar & de Waal, 1994). As a result, a workplace culture has developed inside of MSF which accepts a certain amount of “political script deviation” from its project managers and employees which other organizations might shy away from. Additionally, the group benefits from its international and recognizable character. An internationally recognized group like MSF can often “get away” with much more than smaller, domestic groups which lack the platform of MSF. Further, as an organization which is only temporarily engaged with the refugee situation in Serbia, their group escapes some of the intense pressure which domestic groups face to preserve their relationship with state actors.

To this end, it must be understood that while the pressures NGOs encounter to enact governance from a professionalized standpoint are strong, they are also finite. Certain organizations develop strategies and structures which challenge the state’s traditional control over humanitarian assistance and human movement.

Further Research

This research is not an exhaustive look at refugee assistance organizations and the institutional pressures they encounter. Accordingly, there are a number of places which subsequent research might expand upon. Further studies would certainly benefit by shedding light on the extensive fields of assistance which have also developed around Greece and in Calais, France.
Although I devote some space to the analysis of non-professional, solidarity mobilizations, there is certainly further room to expand our understanding of these groups. Of particular interest is the connection between these groups and their political cultures which, in many cases, is rooted in anarchist political theory and practice.

Additionally, while the dynamics surrounding cross-organizational cooperation between NGOs has received a great deal of attention from scholars recently, the local dynamics of cooperation between refugee assistance groups and the people which receive their help present an equally interesting opportunity for further research. In particular, the role in which refugees and migrants play in the development and practice of these solidarity networks is sorely under-researched.
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### Appendix

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<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Foreign/Domestic</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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Table 1. Interviews Chart. This table reflects the various participant individuals whom I interviewed for the purposes of this thesis.