

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MASCULINITY AMONG YOUNG MEN IN SERBIA

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Abstract

This thesis is an effort to explore the expressions of masculinity among young men in contemporary Serbia who actively took part in workshops organized through the Young Men Initiative, a project that sought to challenge “Balkan” masculinity by its implementation. By analyzing interviews conducted with these young men, much information was gathered related to masculinity in the various social contexts of Serbia. Therefore, this study contributes to existing literature on men and masculinities in the Serbian context. In order to contextualize their experiences during the violent division of ex-Yugoslavia and the war in Kosovo, followed by economic sanctions and NATO bombings that were happening almost simultaneously within the so called post-socialist transition process, I consider a brief history of these events and conflicts to place these young men in a specific time and place. In my research, I have questioned their gender roles enactment, engagement in sport activities, encounters with violence and their work experiences. I also looked at their family and relationships and discovered negotiations of the roles they performed. I discovered their ability to perform multiple conceptualizations of masculinity in relation to both dominant and subordinate masculine identities. Finally, young men from technical schools living in suburbs have showed how they both perform and challenge so-called hegemonic masculinity while also engaging directly with it.

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List of Abbreviations

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
IMAGES	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
YMI	Young Men Initiative

1. Introduction

For the past few years, I was involved in the work of a youth-oriented civil society organization in Serbia named Center E8¹. I started as an intern and advanced to the position of project coordinator after several months of dedicated work. Eventually I was responsible for the implementation of one regional project titled "Young Men Initiative - Engaging Young Men in the Western Balkans in Gender Equality and Violence Prevention."² The project was designed with the aim to end gender-based violence and promote "healthy" lifestyles among young men in Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this thesis, I will seek to explore expressions of masculinity among young men specifically in Serbia who actively participated in workshops organized through Young Men Initiative (YMI).

Since my adolescence, I have been interested in what it means to be a man. I didn't know back then that a concept such as masculinity even existed. While growing up in Serbia's capital, Belgrade, as a non-racialized, middle-class boy, I was constantly able to negotiate and find my "place" among peers. One event had a great impact on my childhood and I can honestly say it stood out as a driving force behind my professional engagement in working with young men and eventually this thesis. Growing up in the *kraj*³ where (today I would say) hegemonic masculinity, machismo and sexism played a large part of everyday life underlined

¹ See further: <http://www.e8.org.rs/>

² The Young Men Initiative was a project implemented in Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and by CARE international. "CARE has been addressing issues of youth development, gender equality, gender-based violence, women's empowerment and community mobilization over the past 18 years of its presence in the Balkans. The endeavor is to engage young men (aged 13-19) in addressing violence and the harmful practices of masculinity which emerged out of this institutional learning journey that included close collaboration with local partner organizations. Donor funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through CARE Norge, supported this 7-year initiative to address the challenge of deconstructing notions of masculinity and promoting gender equality at a regional level. "

Source: <http://www.youngmeninitiative.net/en/?page=4>

³ I use Serbian term "kraj" here to signify neighborhood, seen as a territory that is reserved for a certain group of people .

the significance of choosing to examine conceptualizations of masculinity. Remembering this period, there is a clear picture of an exclusively male group of friends being organized around the concepts such as *brotherhood* and *honor* that played a major role in sustaining the obvious hierarchy between us. On one occasion, a few of my friends drank heavily and then were aggressive towards some other boys who were not from our *kraj*. The outsiders were offended by degrading remarks made by my friends and stood up to defend their *honor*. A fight broke out and my friends beat down one of the boys. The next day, that boy fell into a coma and after forty-eight hours he died. Since this tragic event marked my childhood, I was looking for a way out, and eventually for a way in which I could help other kids to think before they act. If my friends from the *kraj* had someone to talk to, had examples other than the type of masculinity present within our community, perhaps they would not have gotten into the fight and killed a boy nine years ago.

Further along the years, through education in the field of anthropology and women studies, I became familiar with the theoretical concept of masculinity. In my thesis, I will use concepts surrounding masculinities to situate and analyze the experiences of young men with the aim of understanding what it means to be a man in contemporary Serbian society. The goal is to gain insights into the expressions of masculinities of these young men, to gain an understanding of what it entails to confront dominant masculinities, patriarchy, masculine privilege and social norms. The ethnographic examination of the intersections between age, gender and class will serve to provide a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of masculinities. With this thesis, I hope to shed some light on the experiences of young men in Serbia and through their stories provide an insight of how the construction of their masculine identity takes place. I argue that young men in Serbia have complex conceptualizations of masculinities and I will explore certain aspects of these complexities. Their experiences and

stories will provide evidences for my argument and therefore contribute to the scholarly debate around men and masculinities on a greater scale.

1.1 Theoretical framework

There is a set of questions that emerged when I was defining my thesis topic and it is important to mention these before engaging with the literature. The main research questions behind my thesis research are: How do these young men conceptualize their masculinity? How is masculine identity shaped and by which practices is it performed? In addition and related to the context of my research, I have developed the following sub-questions: What can the experiences of Serbian young men tell us about how they conceptualize their own masculinities? How do they perform and narrate their own masculinities? How can experience be conceptualized in such a way as to challenge the paradigm of dominant masculinities? How do transnational ideas and projects such as YMI fit into the specific cultural and historical context of contemporary Serbia? What are the implications of such framing? What *kind* of masculinity are these projects trying to challenge, what are the possible consequences? How do these young men participants see themselves and their everyday lives in relation to this type of intervention? How do age, social background and gender identity influence their behavior and attitudes regarding violence and, more specifically, gender-based violence?

As a feminist, anthropologist and gender studies scholar, I am aware that my thesis requires an interdisciplinary approach. As Judith Stacey (1995) has pointed out, feminist research usually crosses disciplinary borders so by using the theoretical and research frameworks of one discipline it is often not sufficient for doing fully-engaged research. Therefore, I will rely on literature from gender and masculinity studies but also work and research from social

anthropology and sociology. The literature that I need to engage with will cover the concept of masculinity in relation to youth, violence, sports and schooling which will prove to be sufficient for answering some of the questions I have previously mentioned

1.2 Theories and thoughts

When I first decided to write my thesis about conceptualizations of masculinities among young men in Serbia, I had very limited knowledge about the vast number of theories and literature covering this topic. This section will demonstrate the theoretical research I have completed throughout the previous months and serve as a review of significant literature that I will draw upon and use to answer and approach my research questions.

The theorization and research related to men and masculinities first emerged as a topic in the early seventies and since then a large number of publications has covered an unimaginable diversity of topics that were crucial for the development of the field. Theorization followed by research covered different aspects of masculinity—its formation and/or construction, experiences, history—while also challenging the concepts and demonstrating various intricacies (e.g. Connell 2005; Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994; Edwards 2006; Hearn 2006; Kimmel 2005).

Stephen Whitehead (2002) argues that since 1985 and the publication of the article "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" in *Theory and Society* written by Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee, we may follow the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Whitehead notes that drawing on the juridico-discursive model of power (ibid.: 88), Carrigan, Connell and Lee place the understanding of masculinity as a recognition of dominant interpretations of being masculine as embedded in male dominated social

institutions. Turning away from a psychologically inbred social self and functional rather than static sex roles, Carrigan et al. placed masculinity at the center of interplay between praxis and structure (ibid.: 89). They aimed to identify and describe a form of dominant masculinity, naming it "hegemonic" masculinity. I believe that this concept may help me identify practices that guarantee the dominant social position of Serbian young men. If this is the case, it consequently subordinates the social position of women and other non-conforming men as well. As a concept, hegemonic masculinity suggest an explanation for the dominance of some men over women, and other gender identities, which are recognized as collectively *feminine* in a given society. According to Whitehead, hegemonic masculinity has become a crucial term for critical gender theorists interested in men and masculinity. The power of the term lies in the fact that theorists can align themselves, as Whitehead (2002) referencing Connell (1987) suggests, with

the notion of patriarchy and male dominance, while mitigating any reductionistic oversimplifications through use of a concept that speaks of fluidity, multiplicity, difference and resistance, not only with the category of women but also amongst men. Moreover, in utilizing this concept the theorist is then excused from having to engage in any deep analysis of the actual practices of men, it being taken as given that dominant patterns of masculinity exist and thus contribute in some knowing way to a larger project of domination by men over women (91).

Connell's substantive examinations of hegemonic masculinity have been an important contribution for the development of the men and masculinities field of study and research. I found her work and conceptualization especially applicable because of the flexibility of the term in her definition, which allows for the recognition of different "kinds" of masculinities and also different relations between them (Connell 1995: 37)⁴. In the response to the criticism

⁴ Connell (2005) also detected and developed the analytical framework of three ideal types of masculine identity: hegemonic, subordinated, and complicit and marginalized (76-81). Hegemonic already mentioned above is in dominant relation to subordinated masculinities which are, according to her example, defined by homosexual practices and therefore are politically and culturally abused and excluded, etc. (ibid.: 78). They are also complicit masculinities, a group whose practices recognize "patriarchal dividend": "they are in connection with the hegemonic similar project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity themselves" (ibid.: 79). Marginalized masculinities belong to a constellation of masculine practices which are defined by race and class

made by Whitehead (2002: 93), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 838) acknowledge the ambiguity in the gender processes while stressing the importance for the recognition of ambiguity as a mechanism of hegemony. The question was who actually represents this hegemonic masculinity. This criticism was easily detected and ambiguities in usage of the term could easily ignore the historicity of gender while oversimplifying the change in social definitions of masculinity (ibid.). They also reformulate the concept of hegemonic masculinity and respond to criticisms concerning gender hierarchy, agency of women, the geography of masculinities, embodiment in the context of privilege and power, including the dynamics inherent within the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In this case hegemonic masculinity is considered a set of practices, it is normative but it is not enacted by all men; however, all men position themselves in relation to it (ibid.: 823). Various researchers have shown that masculinities are unstable, constantly changing and renegotiated within everyday life. There can be challenges to hegemony, rejecting of it and renegotiating. This is precisely the kind of conceptual flexibility I need to consult with before analyzing narratives of young men's everyday lives and experiences. The idea of the instability and ambivalent nature of masculinity is something that will be underlined throughout my study. For the sake of underlining this claim, and as Todd W. Reseer (2010) notes:

No identifiable person or group of people creates masculinity and then forces people to follow it. Masculinity is far too widespread, diffuse, and complicated for any single person or group to create it. Because it infuses everything, one cannot ultimately determine its origin. To say that it is created by the family, by media, by sports or by another means only simplifies the complexity of the issue. A boy is influenced by so many brands of masculinity that it is very difficult to isolate a single source. In the end, we can only try to determine as best we can what it is and how it functions (17).

Reseer's theorizing of masculinity shows how easy it can be to slip into generalizations about the formation of masculinity. His warning is important for my research because narratives of

factors always in "relative [relation] to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (ibid.: 80-81).

young men that I analyze may mislead me to make simplified conclusions about their conceptualizations of masculinity. There is no single source or origin of masculinity but I do believe that social context and experiences play important roles in the formation of complex conceptualizations exemplified by young men and formulated through their narratives. For the sake of further problematizing the concept and with the idea of showing how I will use it, I draw from one of Connell's more recent "definitions":

Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioral average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. 'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (2005b: 71).

What Connell is suggesting is that masculinity can only be approached, never defined. In terms of my research, I too will only be approaching the notion of masculinity in the context of young Serbian men. I intend to reflect upon what is masculinity according to their own words, as will be noted in the discussion of the interviews I completed later on.

2. Methods and Context

My main focus for collecting data was in-depth interviews. I talked with these young men and I heard their stories. I learned how they live their lives, what is important and what is less important to them. I prepared a structured but open-ended interview guide. I included as many interviewees as possible but only eleven could meet me during this short period of time allocated for research. This approach may be seen as fruitful and fitting for further analysis, as Cornwall & Lindisfarne (1994) suggest in *Dislocating Masculinities*: "[E]thnographic studies of the production of gendered difference offer new ways of looking at 'masculinity' which take us beyond the structures imposed by continued use of a single category, 'men'" (1994: 10).

2.1 Research methods, limitations and ethical considerations

Many of these young men I met previously while I was working with YMI and that fact was both beneficial and limiting for my research. It was limiting because the answers I received for some of my questions were probably influenced by my role as a project coordinator and mentor. On the other hand it was beneficial because “getting in” was easier, as I already had relationships with some of these young men, organizing and conducting interviews with those who already know and “trust” me made many topics and discussions more accessible to me. I conducted these interviews in Serbian language and I used a voice recorder. Ideally I was able to dedicate my full attention to the conversations and really engage with my interviewees. My interviewees were always asked prior to the interview if they agreed to be recorded. I have applied strict confidentiality with my respondents and their anonymity is protected throughout the research and thesis writing process. I have transcribed and translated sections from the recorded interviews. I choose to conduct interviews in Belgrade and focus on young men from one technical school, one rugby club and several other boys who were part of YMI. Regarding the participant observation part of the research, I contacted my former colleagues and learned that projects funding is severely cut and there were only a few activities planned during my research period in April 2014. I planned my presence and participation around these activities. I was present at MAN 2014 - *Super Hero of Europe* Conference that took place from April 9th to 11th in the Center for Cultural Decontamination⁵ in Belgrade and at that point I got oral confirmation from my colleagues that I may conduct this research. More importantly, some of my interviewees were present and volunteered at the conference so we agreed to meet in the next couple of days. Following this conference, I conducted eleven interviews during the following three weeks. I asked my interviewees to tell

⁵ See further: <http://www.czkd.org/>

me more about their lives, their relationships, families, fights, their idols, ideal men and also how did they get involved with the project. These themes and topics came out from previous research done in the region and my reading of masculinity literature which indicated that answers may expose certain expressions and conceptualizations of masculinity among these young men.

The mixing of methods such as interviews and participant observation with comparative data analysis of previous quantitative and qualitative⁶ research may provide me with more input on how masculinities are conceptualized among these young men and if there is a practice of questioning the existing gender oppression. This thesis is purposefully designed to include multiple research methods since variation in material collection approaches have different strengths and weaknesses (Esterberg 2002). Comparing previous data and results with newly gathered information may serve as an indicator of certain changes in their conceptualizations of masculinity. What is favorable in using the multiple strategies of qualitative research methods is that they can eventually deliver a greater comprehension of the topic (Creswell 1998) but also instruct interviewees' perception and understanding of experience in relation to the topic (Kvale 1996).

I expected to find stories that will be similar to my childhood experience previously mentioned, particularly in relation to the stories from and after some of the project activities I will be discussing. Above all, I was rather optimistic in initiating this research. I did not expect many problems in conducting my study; however, one possible issue was the spring school break which typically occurs in the month of April and which could affect accessibility to and for some of my informants. But as it turned out, this was also

⁶ Base-line and end-line research done by ICRW, uses both quantitative data obtained by questionnaires and qualitative data gathered through focus groups and interviews.

advantageous because my interviewees had more spare time which consequently resulted in longer interviews. Another potential problem I faced when on the field was due to age, as the age difference at times was large enough to act as a possible barrier for certain questions and which potentially affected parts of the interviews, depending on how they were framed. In order to provide satisfactory ethical standards for research, before engaging with interviews I always asked participants for their consent and, in case of underage boys, I spoke with their parents prior to our meetings and asked for their consent as well. I also ensured that participation of all respondents was voluntary.

It should be noted by now, my interest in these young men and their expressions of masculinity is related to my personal involvement in the project. It is very important to be reflexive about one's research position and acknowledge the relationship between researcher and his informants; especially the responsibility that comes with the interpretative power that I as a researcher pose (Sprague and Zimmerman 1989). I worked with them, I know most of them and I was aware that the implementation of the program had many problems in their schools. I knew also that only by recognizing their individual experiences I would be able to find out their conceptualizations of masculinity which may be in contradiction with YMI framing. By the completion of this research, I was able to collect and base my analysis on in-depth interviews with these young men that, as I had hoped, did cover family, relationships, friendships and sports, in addition to schooling, as a setting for the construction of masculinity. In one of the following sections, I will share their stories and attempt to dissect how they reflect upon masculinity themselves, consciously or not, as well as attempt to demonstrate the various intersections that arise in their narratives.

2.2 Context of Serbia, Belgrade

In this section I wish to answer a contextual important question: Where are dominant models of masculinity coming from and how are they being expressed in Serbia? Recently on one of the most popular social networks in the world, Facebook, I saw the name of the group that captured my attention. This group was called: “I’ve lived in 3 decades, 2 centuries, 2 millenniums, 4 states and I’m only 20 years old”⁷. As a gender studies scholar and anthropologist, I was instantly intrigued by this group that gathers people around my same age. I started thinking about the variability and adaptability of our identities as well as their duration. I was born in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, then when I reached four years of age I lived in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I hadn't even finished high school when in 2003 I began to live in a country called Serbia and Montenegro. Some three years later, I finally became a citizen of the Republic of Serbia. The only thing this online group lacks is an explanation or discussion of causes that such an intriguing “traveling without moving” was enabled by. The disintegration of Yugoslavia did not go quietly, bloody war ravaged and destroyed communities that consisted of five nations and six republics. In the analysis of the recent past and dissolution, one may find the so-called Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity” project ended by secessionist policy under the auspices of nationalist ideologies.

This reflexive introduction leads into an important contextual setting which is related to my informants and their conceptualizations of masculinities. During the early 1990s, once unified and multicultural Yugoslav identity further splintered and distinct nationalist categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ were produced. Serbs and others were developed in conformity with "collective violence pedagogy" (Milojević 2006). Consequently, “[s]eparation between ‘us’

⁷ See: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Živeo-sam-u-3-decenije-2-veka-2-milenijuma-i-4-države-a-tek-mi-je-20a/286788268681>

and ‘them’ also meant the invention of the category of ‘the other,’ even if that other was up until very recently part of ‘us’” (Milojević 2012: 60). In her chapter "Transforming Violent Masculinities in Serbia and Beyond", Milojević explains some causes for the violent hegemonic masculinity present in the Serbian context by examining "psychological, educational and symbolic" mechanisms behind formation of violent masculine identity.

Milojević states:

Hegemonic masculinities via past war heroes are [were] utilized in order to glorify and reward men’s willingness to turn themselves and other men into violent objects. Within this discourse on hegemonic masculinity, a good Serbian man, for example, is a hero who fights for his people, refuses to negotiate and does not settle for less than total victory" (ibid.: 61)⁸.

This description may be applied to all of the conflicting sides but more interestingly it was also a justification for international involvement in the conflict. Opposition between the civilized and the aggressive, barbaric, savage “other” in the region, especially of Serbia, were visible in discourses surrounding the interventions by NATO and consequent bombing in 1999 (ibid.: 67). However, this “violence resolved with violence” is not the only illustration of how young men born during the 1990s were thought to absorb and form their idea of masculinity.

There is an inspiring work done by anthropologist Stef Jansen that in a certain way recognizes important aspects of the Serbian context regarding masculinity construction. Jansen has conducted considerable research on nationalism in Croatia and Serbia during the late 1990s. He was interested in the urban areas of two capitals, Belgrade and Zagreb. In his article "Who's afraid of white socks? Towards a critical understanding of post-Yugoslav urban self-perceptions", Jansen talks about differentiation between those considered “real urban” individuals, other rural newcomers and, more importantly regarding my interviewees,

⁸ On analysis connecting gender and nation with special emphasis on Serbian masculinity see: Bracewell W, (2000) Rape in Kosovo: masculinity and Serbian nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism* 6 (4), 563-90.

those who live in the suburbs of the city. What Jansen argues is that “that the white socks worn by stereotyped frontline peasants came to serve as a focal point in post-Yugoslav discourses of balkanist distinction in modernization formation” (Jansen 2005: 163). Namely, those who came from the countryside or live in suburbs were viewed as the barbaric other, often seen as causing nationalist practices which were perceived as negative by “real urban” subjects. Urban self-perception was dependent on discursive distinction from rural newcomer, frontline peasants (ibid.: 155). Macho peasants in the eyes of urbanites were responsible for nationalism and wars, they were according to Jansen part of yet another already recognized discourse of balkanism (Todorova 1997)⁹. Jansen also uses Bourdieu’s concept of distinction (1980) and habitus (1979) to explain the struggle for culturedness (kultura) aspiration on the one hand and claims of self-evident possession on the other (ibid.: 159). I find his work very important because of two related notions. Firstly, my respondents can be considered as part of the first or second generation of “newcomers“ and it would be interesting to capture how that influences their conceptualization of masculinity. Secondly, they (my informants) live in suburbs, areas recognized as backward and uncivilized through discourses of urban subjects and it would be useful to consider how that may be incorporated in narratives that were gathered throughout our interviews.

Dichotomous conceptualizations of masculinity were very well described by Jessica Greenberg in her article "'Goodbye Serbian Kennedy': Zoran Đinđić and the New Democratic Masculinity in Serbia" (2006). Greenberg in her analysis of the Serbian context of the early 21st century puts special emphasis on media discourses surrounding the 2003 assassination

⁹ Jansen mentions others who have used Said's conceptual framework for analyzing “Western attitude to South-East Europe” (Fleming 2000; Todorova 1997) and relations between the various post-Yugoslav states (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden & Hayden 1992). Building on the notion of “nesting“ or “recursive“ inflections of balkanism identified by these authors, others have shown that, due to a chain of equivalences, the concept can also be used to explore opposition within the various post-Yugoslav national contexts (Đerić 2003; Helms 2008; Jansen 2002a, 2005: 158; Živković 2002)

and funeral of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić. Greenberg recognizes two types of dominant discourses of masculinity articulated in both the media and the public. First was one embodied by Zoran Đinđić. He was the civilized, democratic family man mourned mostly by urban pro-Europe citizens (Greenberg 2006: 138). On the opposite position, those who were accused of his murder were depicted as uncivilized, undemocratic, radical nationalists organized in mobster clans who were non-procreative models of masculinity and which are undesirable in Serbia (ibid.: 139-143). In other words:

The distinction between good state affect versus bad nationalism is one that was tied to people's experiences during the Milošević regime and the wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and later Kosovo. Many urban, educated people with whom I spoke felt that their waning political and social influence, combined with isolation of the country, created a power vacuum that was filled by nationalists who undermined Serbia as a European space and by those with rural or suburban backgrounds who threatened Serbia's modern orientation. Educated urbanites felt that cities were dominated during and after the war years by the cultural forms, political ideologies, and consumption practices of people from the countryside and suburbs who also had ties to organized crime, paramilitary organizations, and the Milosević Regime (ibid.: 135-136)

One may understand Greenberg's analysis as a conflicting discourse and how the shifting of contexts influences the models of desirable gendered subjects. It is important to connect Jansen's and Greenberg's analysis because they both effectively contribute to the understanding of the Serbian context within ideas of tradition and modernity opposed, embodied by individual figures and perceived and reproduced through citizen-state relations (ibid.: 143) everyday discourses that may be somewhat important for understanding my informant's expressions and conceptualizations of masculinity.

2.3 Young Men Initiative implementation in Serbia

In this section I intend to introduce YMI more thoroughly. As mentioned before, I was personally involved in its implementation. It is important to explain the work with young men that has been done over the past seven years and elaborate upon various kinds of

masculinities this project was and is set up to challenge. The YMI started off with a pilot phase from 2007 to 2010. The project is a joint effort of CARE international and partner organizations include those from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as Brazil, Northern Ireland and USA. The idea was to promote gender equality and violence prevention through advocating healthy lifestyles among young men by using peer education (workshops) and social campaign activities. This was the only program of its kind in the region and several evaluations have shown positive results in reference to young men's attitudes and behaviors. The pilot phase was used to adapt the methodology previously developed by Promundo, a Brazilian organization which is reknown for its global network around engaging men in gender equality, MenEngage. Their Program H¹⁰ was translated and fine-tuned for the work in the region. During the pilot phase, YMI was implemented in schools and in the community but also focused on the advocacy that will eventually lead to scaling-up of activities at the national level and assuring the next two phases of funding. (*Young Men Initiative—A Case Study* 2012).

I have joined Center E8 as intern in September 2011 when the project was already very well known to the public. This was a so called second phase from 2010-2013 and I was responsible for the communication and implementation of the project activities in around 20 cities in Serbia. Needless to say it was a very hard task, however I liked the idea and worked wholeheartedly. We were aiming to collaborate with technical schools having in mind greater number of young men will be reached. Workshops were covering four themes: gender, violence and violence prevention, sexual and reproductive health including alcohol and drug

¹⁰ "Program H (H stands for *Homens* and *Hombres*, the words for men in Portuguese and Spanish, respectively) seeks to engage young men and their communities in critical reflections about rigid social norms. The program includes a series of workshops for young men with topics that include gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, emotional well-being and violence/conflict resolution. It was developed and validated in Latin America and the Caribbean and has since been adapted for use in several countries" (Namy, Heilman, Stich & Edmeades 2014: 4). For more information, see: <http://www.promundo.org.br/en/activities/activities-posts/program-h/>

use. I had to organize campaign activities, workshops in schools and offsite retreats constantly balancing between the needs of teachers, young men and our educators. Many problems had to be solved and we were successful at getting positive feedback from young men, but more than once reactions to our work were negative. School staff accused us a few times for the promotion of homosexuality. We were also labeled as evil, pro-European, liberal scum, Soros mercenaries, etc. I never paid much attention to this because it is not uncommon that NGOs in Serbia get treated like this. However from today's perspective and divisions I have earlier mentioned this treatment fits right into the discursive picture between a civilized, urban European Serbia on the one hand and a backward Serbia infiltrated by those of its own countryside on the other.

Work done by YMI may be described through elaboration on three different themes, "intervention" (workshops and residential trainings) "campaign" (social media and public actions)¹¹ and "evaluation" (research and reports). Intervention consists of workshops and residential trainings previously mentioned. Firstly we were organizing educational trainings for "youth workers" who would eventually conduct workshops with young men.¹² Depending on the occasion different approaches to this education were implemented. In order to evaluate our work there was a need to work in one school over the period of one school year (approximately 10 months). This was the case in technical school that several of my informants were going to or are still going to. Before education has started we were introducing the methodology to school staff and parents. Not without hesitation and

¹¹ "Be a man" campaign was developed by boys participating in the pilot phase of the project in 2007 and during the following years in cooperation with social media and campaign experts from SMart collective Belgrade: <https://www.facebook.com/smart.kolektiv>. Campaign materials, such as posters, t-shirts and brochures, are presented in the vocational schools, short films developed by the young men were produced and boys have also formed "Be a Man" clubs in several different cities. The campaign is promoted widely through Facebook, Youtube and other websites."source: <http://www.youngmeninitiative.net/en/?page=50> Writing and analysing the campaign may be in focus of some future academic research projects.

¹² While I was working, there was a considerable effort towards engagement of girls and young women in the framework of the project. Eventually in 2012, educational manual was developed and workshops with young women were "piloted" in several locations.

sometimes obvious antagonism we confirmed our collaboration and started planning an integrated school curriculum with professors. Right before first workshop in coordination with CARE and ICRW base-line research¹³ were conducted with all first and second year male students. Idea was to administer basic¹⁴ set of workshops in school premises and advanced¹⁵ in off-campus residential retreats somewhere in Serbia during the three days period. After few basic workshops we organized interested boys and formed “be a man” club. A common practice following the methodology, as thematically weeks and workshops passed by boys were organizing different kind of public or in school actions to promote values of the project (gender equality, tolerance, non violence, healthy life styles). At the end of the school year before summer brake and after all of the workshops end line evaluation was conducted.

From the unpublished ICRW (2013) report that I have received from my colleagues shows that unfortunately:

[E]valuation results show that boys in Belgrade did not experience positive changes in most YMI outcome areas. It is unclear why YMI appeared to be less effective in Belgrade as compared to other program sites, and evaluation data are not sufficient to speculate about this particular school’s population or how outside factors may have limited YMI’s effectiveness. Monitoring records and interviews with implementers, however, underscore that facilitators experienced many difficulties in delivering the YMI sessions in the classrooms (e.g., poor discipline and lack of participation), especially during the initial sessions. (20)

¹³ We used a modified Gender Equitable Men scale to assess boys’ alignment to various attitudes related to gender. The full scale included fourteen items, and boys chose whether they strongly agreed, partially agreed, or disagreed with each item at both baseline and endline. For ease and specificity of analysis, we present the findings broken into three separate indexes: (1) Gender Roles; (2) Gender Norms; and (3) Homophobia (ICRW 2013:10). More about GEM scale <https://www.c-changeprogram.org/content/gender-scales-compendium/gem.html>

¹⁴ Basic set of workshops (level 1 in ICRW report) consists of: 1) Introduction 2) Talking Stick 3) What is this thing called gender 4) Power and relationships Health, 5) STI-s and HIV/AIDS 6) Men and contraception 7) What is violence Negotiating skills 8) What are drugs? Decision making and substance use. Descriptions of workshops in: (*Young Men Initiative—A Case Study* 2012).

¹⁵ Advanced or Level 2 were as follows: 1) Introduction 2) Labeling 3) Expressing my emotions 4) Young Men’s health 5) Can a men like another men 6) Want, don’t want... 7) Understanding the cycle of violence 8) What is sexual violence 9) A live fool or a dead hero 10) What do I do when I am angry 11) From a violence to respect in an intimate relationship 12) Drugs in our lives and communities 13) Making the change in our lives and communities, (*Young Men Initiative—A Case Study* 2012). *All of my informants went to all the above mentioned workshops.*

Research has failed to show how successful our work was at the technical school in Belgrade but I will later argue that for these young men our work was very important. I would here return here to a previously mentioned conference where I have initiated my research, MAN 2014 - *Super Hero of Europe*, to make an important connection "This conference had gathered participants from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Estonia, and Northern Ireland, with the idea to explore the role of men in building a gender equal and violence free Europe." According to its own mission statement:

Experts and activists, from various countries, who are dealing with issues of masculinity and gender equality, will introduce their work at the conference. This will provide a rather unique opportunity for young people from South Eastern Europe and the EU to join in a youth movement for engaging around gender equality and violence prevention and thus presume the role of active European citizens inside and outside the borders of the EU. ¹⁶

Desirable gendered subjects, active European citizens, the discourse is clearly reproduced again, and it is all happening at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in strict city center of Belgrade. What I am trying to point out here is the idea that something needs to be done with "our" (Serbian) youth, especially men. They need to be changed to become "real men", good European citizens. The notion of Europeans seem to suggest that Europe is the ideal for which countries like Serbia much strive for, as if to suggest that there is no gender based violence, alcoholism, homophobia and drugs in Europe. This discourse may be followed back to the YMI case study.

As in many other settings, patriarchal and rigid norms around gender and masculinities are still prevalent in the Western Balkans. These norms influence young men's attitudes, behaviors, and relationships with other young men, young women, families, and larger communities. From an early age, many young men are taught that being a "real man" means being a provider for and protector of one's family and community. Boys and young men are

¹⁶ Source: <http://www.e8.org.rs/man2014/man-conference/> accessed 21.9.2014

often raised to be aggressive and competitive, in preparation for these social roles. Many boys and young men are also often raised to be self-reliant, to not worry about their health and do not reach out for help when they may need it...

Given the growing concern in the Balkans about rising levels of gendered and peer violence (including homophobic and xenophobic violence), it is imperative that civil society and governments understand more about how gender norms and other social influences shape young men's attitudes and behaviors, and how programs and policies can most effectively address these issues (5-6).

It is clear after reading just a few lines of this case study that this approach although sounds “rational” produces some uncalled for side-effects. First of all, is one related to the geographical term of (Western) Balkans and its implications? I wouldn't be the first to argue that this is a form of “orientalism” as Maria Todorova suggests when introducing the term “balkanism” in *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). Referring to Todorova and others, Diana Labiris (2013) analyses this issue very well in her MA thesis. Dedicated to showing the politics behind engaging men in the prevention of violence against women, she was studying YMI's implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Through the concept of Balkanism, Todorova intended to capture how, ‘as in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of “European” and “West” has been constructed’ (1997: 188). Milica Bakić-Hayden demonstrates how Balkanism may be seen to have been internalized by people from this region, themselves (1995)... YMI may be seen to reproduce a kind of *nested Balkanism* which, in the context of post-war recovery, comes to be articulated through the aim to create a “new” Balkan masculinity or masculine subject (the “new Balkan boy”), typified by non-violence and tolerance, in short, “Europeaness” (34-35).

One of the complementary examples depicting this internalized Balkanism produced by YMI was during the January 2012 conference organized in Serbia with the working title: “MAN 2012: New Balkan Boy”¹⁷. This conference was framed around the idea of becoming a traditional gathering space that would bring together experts and activists from Serbia and the

¹⁷ This title also represented a word game related to one famous song (Balkan Boy) by Antonije Pušić, aka Rambo Amadeus, musician from Montenegro. The original refrain: “Ja sam Balkan boj i smrdim na znoj, / i kad-tad, ja biću tvoj”, one may read it in a sexist line: “I'm a Balkan Boy and I stink of sweat, / but sooner or later you'll be mine”, or “sooner or later I'll have you”. This is one more example of the construction previously mentioned of barbaric “Balkan masculinity” (Pavlović 2011: 4).

region as well as the world. The aim was the deconstruction of the challenges that men and boys face today, especially with regard to social and cultural norms of masculinity in the region—this so called the “creation” of a new Balkan boy¹⁸. So while “rethinking masculinity” and other problems of “today’s men”, a new/old problem were being forgotten. I argue that the examination of actual young men’s practices and experiences is in order. It may not solve the problem but it may reveal how embedded these conflicting discourses go and to what extent their idea of masculinity/ies is/are influenced by it.

3. Stories of Young Men

As mentioned above, for this chapter I have analyzed interviews with eleven young men that have been engaged in the YMI in the last couple of years. Most of them are seventeen years of age and at the verge of becoming adults when they reach their eighteenth birthday. They were all part of the YMI for a period of one to two years and, through their involvement, have certain ideas of what men should be like or what is the role of men in society. In order to ensure their anonymity, I intentionally leave out certain details and descriptions and gave them pseudonyms. While constructing and conducting the interviews, I based my questions on a number of themes but also ensured that my questions were flexible enough to cover different topics, even those that I have left out but they may find significant enough to mention. For the following three sections from where I will do my analysis, I have selected three main topics they all discussed in their interviews and which seem to stand out in all the conversations I had with these young men. These topics are as follows: (1) Violence and sport culture; (2) Family and relationships; and (3) Future, work and hope. These topics seem to be central to the stories all my informants shared with me. Overall, what became

¹⁸ <http://www.e8.org.rs/man/man-2012-new-balkan-boy/>

highlighted is the power of storytelling in getting closer to understanding how these young men understood, expressed and regarded masculinity. Storytelling became an important feature of these interviews and, in my opinion, it represents a form that secures interesting facts about one's self perceptions. The way one talks about his or her experiences through storytelling transcends the often awkward interview *question and answer* pattern. Our conversations, after being transcribed and examined, formed a specific kind of interview narratives about and around masculinity/ies as such which I will show in the next couple of pages. Famous French scholar Roland Barthes (1993) once made an inspiring observation about narratives by concluding they may be found virtually everywhere:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative... Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, and transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (251-2).

Although I won't use Barthes semiotic approach in my analysis, his words remind me that complexities of meaning hidden in every form of communication underline a crucially important reflexive point: one must not accept culture as if it was nature. From my research I can say that interview narratives found among young men from Belgrade also *hide* some revealing symbolic and discursive indications. I start with stories about violence and sport and gradually continue towards the analysis of family relationships, work and future.

3.1 Violence and Sport Culture

In this subchapter I will focus on the analysis of two interconnected topics: violence and sport. I chose to introduce the topic of violence and examine it through the conversations I

had with my informants. I was following previous experience and research done in the region by CARE and ICRW. *Exploring dimensions of masculinity and violence* published in 2007 focused on this research and has showed that groups of young men participating in it recognized different types of violence.

Young men listed and categorized types of violence into physical, psychological (emotional) and sexual violence. For most groups, the different categories resonated, and the young men referred to these categories and concepts throughout their subsequent discussions of violence. Young men themselves readily identified that all three types of violence had profound consequences. Some young men assessed that in fact emotional violence could have the most lasting and severe consequences (33).

Guided by this information and after a few basic questions about their life, I asked my interviewees whether they had ever witnessed any form of violence, whether they participated and what had happened. These eleven young men all recognized and described different occasions when violence was part of their lives. They had different but complementary responses to my questions. What they all have in common is the notion of violence as strictly reserved for boys and, one might argue, representing a perceived rite of passage¹⁹ to manhood. It is a part of growing up, fights occur in school yards, toilets, neighborhood streets or night clubs where and when boys get drunk. Usually, it is male-on-male violence, as described by my interviews; sometimes it is a group fight while other times it is one-on-one. Marko said fighting is a common practice: “Yes, well, I was present in many situations. In some I even participated but you know its all part of growing up”. I thought

¹⁹ This famous formulation of the concept may be found in Van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage* (1909). He identifies three steps in this process: separation, transition and incorporation. Here I aim to show that the act of fighting belongs to the second stage where boys go through the crucible of fighting to prove their manhood. According to the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*: Rites of passage are the constitutive moments of ritual transformation of an individual or collective subject from one culturally defined status to another mode of life.” Through this process subjects break with one element of their identity and assume another position in the social system more adequately befitting their age, gender, experience, skills, education or professional status. The gendered component of this universal practice is a major driving force in the confirmation of society’s cultural values and gender regime (Flood, Gardiner, Pease, & Pringle 2007: 539). When previously elaborating on manhood, Flood et. al. state: [w]hat is common within both industrial and non-industrial cultures, and appears to have been for much of history, is that the transition from boy to man is invariably invested in some form of male-dominated ritual and initiation practice. Examples may include circumcision, sexual activity, male bonding rites and various tests of strength, prowess and endurance. The rites of passage into manhood can be further characterized by a symbolic, and in many instances spatial, separation of the male from the female... (ibid.: 380).

about my own childhood in Belgrade and realized that fights were part of my growing up. too. There is always something that initiates a fight, some dispute or division. But also, many times it seems as if there is no particular reason, as Luka points out: “Guys fight, just like that, without reason, it’s like, you look at someone and he is, like, – *What are you looking at?* People don’t have anything else to do so they find a reason to start a fight.” Another interviewee Ivan gave an example of this division which made the reasoning more clear. He said:

I witnessed this two times, it’s usually Red Star fans against Partizan fans. And in my neighborhood, Center 1²⁰ is supporting Red Star (football club) and Center 2, right across the Zrenjanin road, are Partizan fans mostly... It happened last year, both times, first time they came into our neighborhood and second time we went there. It was an arranged fight. But it was fair, no knives, just fists. It’s mostly between these groups of fans.

From Ivan’s example one might notice that *hooliganism*²¹ is present in these spaces and has a character of gang violence, with organized and structured fights and rules of engagement. By saying: “we went there” means that Ivan identifies as a member of this group but he was also assuring me he did not participate:

I didn’t participate, I was watching. Why would I fight when I don’t have to? Why would I want to get my ass kicked without a reason? I don’t care, I just wanted to go chant and watch the match,²² and get in the stadium for free.

His friends that were fighting were older than him and he never felt obliged to take part in these fights because they were all “into that kind of stuff” and he was not. Interestingly

²⁰ Center 1 and Center 2, are parts of one suburban neighborhood in Belgrade, called “Borča”.

²¹ Football hooliganism refers to violent and harmful behavior by football fans, supporters of football clubs, including scuffles, intimidation and vandalism. Football hooliganism usually involves gang conflicts in British context known as football firms. However in Serbian case, football hooliganism is closely tied to war volunteers who took part in paramilitary activities (war crimes) during the Yugoslavia disintegration war of the 1990’s. Besides openly nationalistic values, these groups were formed around the specific propose of fighting and intimidating supporters of all other teams. Besides that these groups are part of organized crime chain involved in drug dealing. In Serbian case two biggest hooligan groups are: Red Star – “Delije” (heroes) and Partizan - “Grobari” (gravediggers undertakers).

²² Ivan is talking about derby match between sport rivals, Red Star and Partizan football clubs. This local derby is most significant sport event of the year for those who support the teams. Very often these fan groups take part in violence which is characterized as above mentioned hooliganism.

enough what Ivan talks about has been identified by Anthony King (1997: 585), football becomes the central ritual arena in the constitution of their (male fans) manhood:

Through the support of football team, the male fan affirms his status as man (in eyes of his peers and himself) and also articulates the nature of that manhood. A central practice in the re-constitution of manhood in football is the communal chanting in which fans participate. Through these songs male fans re-affirm and re-negotiate the partially subconscious idea of their masculinity.²³

These boys seemed to talk about these fights as if nothing is unusual about them, they didn't put a lot of emphasis on details, and they simply acknowledge that violence is part of their lives and growing up. For Nemanja it was similar, but he felt righteous about his stance, he said:

To tell you the truth I haven't witnessed many fights. I fought only once. It was two years ago on the first of May. We were in some forest collecting wood to start a fire for a barbecue and some guys came and they wanted to take the wood that we gathered. It took us an hour to collect all this wood and I said to this one guy: "You can't take this, go into the forest and gather your own". Then he started showing off, calling me names and went back to his friends. They came back, it was five of us and ten of them, they went after us and we started fighting.

In Serbia, a common practice on International Workers' Day is to spend it outdoors with friends. There is always barbecue and alcohol around but unfortunately many incidents happen in these traditional gathering spots where young people from different parts of the city come to spend the day. Nemanja was not proud of his fighting experience but from his story one could also see that these disputes may be initiated with the smallest things such as kindling wood gathered and eventually protected by a group of friends. There is something rather telling in this type of scenario. If one would remove these young men from the context of contemporary Serbia, the very idea of having two groups of men fighting over supplies and territory seems to elude some "primitive" scene. There is almost a return to some basic sense of survival and protection, perhaps some distorted Darwinian response of *survival of the*

²³ There are of course many other ways in which one can re-affirm his masculinity, for instance, by doing sports as I will show later in this chapter.

fittest. Flight is not an option but fighting is because of the constant need to prove they are fit and worthy of their “wood and land”, followed with idea that it is their right to defend themselves and/or take what they desire or need without consideration of the other. There are various issues with this kind of response, not only it is denying their ability to negotiate and resolve conflict or dispute in a more “civilized” fashion but it also seems to highlight how it is their very masculinity, as its perceived connection to their very strength and sense of power that allows them to be able to initiate and engage with one another in such a violent way. It is practically the very denial of their ability to interact in more productive ways, to create resolution through discussion, recognition and respect. This is where, one may argue, one type of “hegemonic” masculinity plays a significant role in relationships between these boys and young men.

These high levels of violence acceptance may indicate that it is internalized—it is not questioned in any way and it is talked about in quite a matter-of-fact manner—and represents a way of communication between these young men that also takes an important part of their conceptualization of masculinity. For instance, friendship also dictates certain rules, male peer acceptance in case of violence comprises of unconditional support in fights, when the cause is seen as justifiable. From Sava’s example, one may see that even if justifiable it is not unconditional for his group of friends, during our interview he explained:

If I see that someone wants to fight and if they are my friends, I will fight for them. But if these people or person are not bothering me, I tell them “people, I don’t have anything against this person”, and then I step aside. Rarely is there a fight because we immediately stop hanging out with this person who wants to fight, we just cut him off from our lives, we only say “hey” when we see each other on the street. That’s it. I never got into some big trouble because of fighting, in school sometimes we quarrel and professors find out and then we have to go to the school counselor to talk and discuss what happened, but that is it.

What one can see from Sava's or Ivan's examples is in a way a challenging of hegemonic masculinity that is ever present in these boys' lives. Exclusion of those who are aggressive and choosing who are you going to be friends with or will you participate in violence shows that there is a way to perform masculinity in less hegemonic ways. These young men also know that violence can lead to tragic consequences and with some of the boys I talked about my own experience—of the boy who died after falling into coma when my friends fought with him in the street. When I told this story to Nemanja, he had a similar one to share:

I know a similar situation. It was the same, some older guy from the *kraj* and someone approached his girlfriend, he asked this guy – *why are you talking with my girlfriend?* Then, a second guy hits him in the head and he fell down and hit his head on the sidewalk and from that he fell into a coma and he died in the hospital.

These extreme cases with deadly outcomes are rare but leave strong influence on every young men. Although rare, these are the stories that circulate among these boys and young men. With that in mind, there is awareness to the possible lethal limits to the violence that permeates their lives. Yet, the very violence itself is not fully questioned and it is accepted as an everyday part of their lives.

Violence takes many forms and the one that is usually more socially accepted may be seen in sport arenas around the world. Young men practice sports and their masculinity is often constructed and builds upon successful performance. Violence and sport may be connected through explicit endurance of pain which is respected by others, precisely that's why sport is a big part of manliness "show". Connell (1995: 54) has stressed out that sport may be seen as a leading modern definer of masculinity in mass culture, and that masculinity is embodied, because sport provides a "continuous display of man's bodies in motion" (Hatty 2000: 126). Sport is embedded in the modern gender order, and has been integral in the process of making men – "of installing the avowed qualities of manliness in young men and of

instructing all men, regardless age, in the radical opposition between men and women in society” (ibid.: 126). Doing sports, as one may see in the following lines, takes a big part of these boy’s lives. Most of my interviewees have been practicing some kind of sport for a longer period of time. Some of the sports mentioned were: rugby, taekwondo, karate, wrestling, handball, American football, running, dancing, and working out. Sports and athleticism play a significant role in the creation of their masculine identities and these young men from Belgrade also confirm this when they talk about their engagement with sport. When asked whether he does any sport, which sport and why, Marko told me:

I’m practicing wrestling, I think its six years now. Because, I must say, when I was a kid I used to be small and I couldn’t even do one push-up, you know. So at home my two older brothers used to mock me, like “*look at you – you can’t even do one push-up*”. Then I started training with them, working out, you know. Later, they started practicing wrestling and then I joined them. I remember when I did my first pull-up and push-up and so I started practicing every day. I liked doing sport. It’s somehow attractive, difficult, you can measure how far you can go, how long you would last in some situation...

Marko as the youngest child in his family, smaller and weaker, was obviously teased by his older brothers which resulted in years of practicing wrestling and eventually being very successful at it. Obviously his brothers used engendered pejoratives to put his internal worth and masculinity in question. As Parker (2000) notes, “[s]ports and exercise play a key role within the body-media nexus”. According to that Marko needed to prove that he is not a weak, “feminine” type of boy. Male family members frequently dictate and reproduce masculine values in opposition to feminine and push the younger generation into sport in order to prove their masculinity. This was also the case with Bojan and his family:

I started practicing taekwondo when I was six years old; my dad dragged me to the first training. While I was in elementary school he used to be my trainer, we have our own club, but that’s a different story. I liked the sport; I have friends there whom I’ve known for more than ten years... For me sport is something that I started doing since the beginning of my life and I plan to do it throughout my entire life.

Being *dragged* to his first training and basically being pushed into taekwondo by his father was a positive thing for Bojan. He proudly speaks about his friendship with other athletes and his achievements as a sportsman. His masculinity was at test many times but he recalled one occasion when he was passing a rigorous training session for black belt certificate.

It was a two-day test; there was this Korean master, Kang. Two-day training up to seven hours of working out with one break in between. A thirty-minute break just to have some water and food. Later, after one year, I found out I passed the test and I got the certificate.

For Blagoje it was similar. Although he didn't continue practicing karate, he was aware of his development and frightening strength as a boy. Father's role in both his and Bojan's engagement in sport was rather emotional, they were both looking up to their fathers and wanted to avoid their disappointment.

Well, my dad was a famous karate fighter and because of that I used to practice karate. Maybe that's the reason why nobody wanted to fight with me. I used to do it throughout my elementary school and high school...You can just feel that your body is developing; I formed my posture by doing karate. I didn't train anything else and I really loved it. My dad never made me do it, I just got hooked on it.

Blagoje's awareness of dominant physical strength and masculine posture resulted in his avoidance of fighting. His aggression was reserved for training where he learned valuable lessons in self-control. Miloš also talked about rewarding effects of doing sports and why he misses doing sports today.

I used to practice Real-Aikido and Brazilian Jiu-jitsu for nine or ten years. I had to stop because of school and other obligations besides school. It was really fulfilling me back then. It meant a lot to me and today I still have physical strength and stamina thanks to that, but also techniques. I miss that a lot.

Besides above mentioned, my interviewees gave few other interesting responses. Milan was more oriented toward team sports and he spoke passionately about American football.

I practiced American football for three years now, this summer it is my last junior season. It is like a violent sport and rough but I'm attracted to it because of the team work. It is not important if a guy is skinny or fat, it is all mixed, but if somebody makes a mistake the whole team suffers the consequences. I

like that sport because, I don't know, it gives you space to blow some steam off. I don't know, I used to train kickboxing and that was also attractive to me. Not because I want to know how to fight, just because of this adrenaline and moving that I liked.

Team work, friendship, blowing off of some steam through moving and adrenaline made him enjoy and practice American football. He characterize it as a violent sport and throughout our interview he talked about sport as a space and practice where violence and aggression were allowed but under certain rules and regulations. They all stated that doing sport was important but for Luka rugby is more than passion:

I practiced rugby, more than two years now. When I started mom and dad didn't let me train it. Later they said its ok – it's better to train than to hang out on the streets. Then I started liking it and now I think I could not live without it.

Avoiding hanging out on the streets where all uncalled for violence may happen and doing sport as a healthy activity made him realize that rugby constitutes a big part of his life. His younger teammate Goran even gave me a short history of Rugby League 13 and described their (players) friendship and relationship as a strong motivation for practicing.

I practice Rugby 13, it comes from Australia. I practiced it for two years now. I started spontaneously through a friend and now I train because I enjoy it... Both (American football and Rugby) are male sports but rugby is rougher. It's a big difference, we only have mouth guards and they [American football] have armors and other things. I used to practice basketball and many other sports but I'm drawn to rugby because of my teammates. We stand next to each other in any situation; we spend a lot of time together.

Goran characterized rugby and American football as male sports but he told me later females also play but the game is still developing in Serbia. Rugby being seen as rougher than American football²⁴ therefore seen as more manly is preferred for practicing. When I asked him how violent is it, he told me about certain troublemakers and what kinds of problems usually happen.

²⁴ But only because American football players use armors and different kinds of protections when playing the game.

These kids from the city center are usually problematic. They are not kids, they are my age, and I think they are influenced by society. There is this rugby player from Dorćol, I won't tell you his name but every time we play, he starts a fight. He is all worked up and full of himself, he has some people behind him and nobody can touch him. So every time they lose, he starts a fight. This is my experience.

This is where one may notice an indication of suburb/city center divide and perceptions that these young men have. Characterizing kids from down town as spoiled, trouble makers actually produces an inverted discourse for the one I have detected while giving context. For Goran that young man from city center (*influenced by society*) is the one who is performing "hegemonic" masculinity and behaves "uncivilized".

3.2 Family, intimate relationships

This subchapter will serve for the analysis of two other important areas of my interviewees' lives. It is often the case in theory developed around masculinities that family is considered to be the most significant area for its construction. Fathers are seen as role models for their sons playing a crucial part in their construction of masculinity. Today one may state there is no singular form or structure of family but it is usually considered to be a group of people tied together around the ideas of blood or affinity. Consequently there is no one form of masculinity learned and produced in the family.

I chose to avoid invading the privacy of my informants in asking questions about their family and sexuality but nevertheless their responses led to significant material for this subchapter. Confirming that there is no singularity when one talks about masculinity, their expressions came out from questions about their role models and how they imagine men or women should behave and why. On the other hand when asked about their relationships and sexual experience directly, they responded rather vaguely and I received more information from

their social media profiles and activities than from their responses. There is an important connection between family, gender roles, normative heterosexuality and different forms of masculinity that may become visible when one reflects on the narratives provided by these young men. Production of their identity is tied to their family members and they are inevitably shaped by dynamics of the household.

With the idea of avoiding any generalizations and claims that may damage my informants I will here analyze complexities of their families in reaction to their perception of gender roles that shows to be a fruitful way for understanding their masculinity conceptualizations.

Nemanja talks about his growing up and explains complex relations in his family:

My mom had two husbands, so I have two brothers and a sister from my mom's first marriage. With that first husband I didn't have any connection, I never met him. Her second husband is my father. They never lived together, but he lived very close to our place. I could always come and visit him, whenever I wanted to. Our relationship was cool but the two of us never got along. Also, my father had two wives; from his first marriage I have two brothers. But I don't talk with them because they are a little bit different.

Having a big family and a *cool* relationship with his father while growing up with his mother, Nemanja grew to develop a certain gender equitable attitude toward the division of household labor. Masculinities are often constructed upon power relations interplaying with (gendered) division of labor and with patterns of emotional attachment (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 2002: 112-114). Hegemony closely involves the social definitions of tasks as "men's work" and "women's work", and some tasks more masculine than others (ibid.: 114). Challenging of the male/female binary in the division of labor came with Nemanja's experience and in comparison with some other members of his family.

The man should be doing everything, of course he should be working around the house, all the heavy work, but also why wouldn't he do so called "female" work? It's totally okay from me... I don't make this division of male or female work. Because, I live only with my mother, she is old and a bit sick so I do all the work I can around the house. I mean I don't know how to turn on the washing machine to wash my clothes, she does that, but I clean, wash the

dishes, cook, nothing special, but I can prepare a decent meal... For instance, my nephew he comes back home and he just says, "Mom, give me something to eat". He is always complaining, he is eighteen years old and he never prepared a meal for himself.

But as one may read from Nemanja's story the *man should be doing heavy work* around the house, he should help his female counterpart. Clearly the idea developed to underline the absence of a father figure in everyday life in one of Belgrade's suburbs. Nemanja questions gendered division of labor but sees man as a person who should help a woman not because she can't deal with the workload but because it is a right thing to do. Sava's story reveals a different situation and attitude developed and designed by his experience.

I have a big family, four brothers and a sister. My father died in September of 2011 and this was a really hard period for me. I live with my mother and her brother. My sister got married and she is expecting a child soon, like in a month. In general, I'm happy with my life and what I'm getting from it.

Sava openly talks about his family and the hard time he had when his father died. This emotional period of his life resulted in his wish to become a provider in his future family.

I look at that as in my family, when I grow up, when I get married, my wife should not work, she should sit at home and be a housewife, but I learned that from my father, he taught me that. He was working on a huge ocean transporter and while he was working on ships, my mother was a housewife at home. My dad had a problem this one time and they were in some storm for three days, he didn't sleep for three days and he had a heart attack. After that he couldn't work anymore and my mom had to start working. She works twenty out of the twenty-four hours of the day, she has changed, she used to be more happy and cheerful and that's why I said to myself, as a man I have to provide money and a house for my future wife...

From his experience the only right thing to do as a man is to become a provider for his future wife. Sava talks very emotionally about his mother and how she has changed, but does not acknowledge that he plans to reproduce the same gender role pattern which led to the current situation in the first place. Sava said it himself *I learned this from my father*, this is a prime example of fatherly inception of a certain masculinity conceptualization. The role of provider is in many cases followed by domestic violence, this is where Ivan's story comes in hand:

That's usually when a woman has an alcoholic husband and he comes home drunk and nervous and as it happens she says something and he beats her up. That is not ok. For example if kids also make certain noise he beats them up as well. That is what my grandpa used to do. But when he was with my sister and me he was the best in the world. For everyone else he was dangerous.

Ivan's grandfather was an alcoholic and an obviously violent man, having him as an example in early childhood he decided to live a different life. When I asked Ivan what a man should be like, what he should do, he responded shortly:

Man should have a normal life, to have a wife and kids... he should not gamble, do drugs or get drunk every day... He should never hit his partner, because I would personally never hit a female person or hurt her in any other way.

This heteronormative statement is developed in opposition to a hegemonic type of masculinity Ivan has experienced while growing up. "Hegemony always refers to a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held, has to do with institutional formation and practices through which hegemony is constructed and contested – in short, the political techniques of the patriarchal social order." (Carrigan, Connell & Lee. 2002: 114). However, one may ask, is Ivan reproducing the same order or challenging it? Further on, from my interview with Marko I noticed that he recognizes the same domestic violence issue. His story combines a provider role and a missing father trope, similarly as other young men.

Well, I think man should always be a good host at home, that there is no violence at home like in 90% of homes in Serbia as far as I know. He should never neglect his family; he should be with them in best as well as worst possible situations. Like, fuck I must say my father was never there for me, but my mom did her best. So, man should I think be educated, to earn as much as possible for his family, never to steal like politicians do for example.

Domestic violence is a big problem in Serbian society and boys recognize that very well. Being aware of this problem magnified by a missing father they realize that family may influence further life choices and behavior. Bojan talks about this in his interview, he puts a lot of emphasis on the behavior learned at home by blaming parents for their neglect.

Today's generation thinks that everything is in football and hooliganism; they should not behave like they are being raised on the streets. I think the way you

behave is learned at home, if you are behaving like some scum from the street you are thought to behave like that at home, that's how your parents taught you and I blame them because they didn't influence their child's development

Stereotypically gendered nuclear family envisioned as a crucial area for child development may be understood in the light of expressed experiences these young men had. Hooliganism is recognized as a negative type of behavior that belongs to "uncivilized" discourse and is condemned by Bojan.

In the light of knowing how their parents communicated and their families functioned (or didn't), I asked them a few questions about their emotional life and intimate relationships. We didn't discuss their sexuality in particular but from their stories I've learned they were all heterosexually oriented. "One of the most important features of this masculinity is heterosexuality, the pattern of exclusive adult heterosexuality is a historically constructed one but its dominance is by no means universal." (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 2002: 113). Milan openly talks how he used his ex-girlfriend. It was their first sexual experience and the relationship didn't last long.

I don't have a girlfriend now. Last year I was with this one girl and then I got mononucleosis. With that girl, I was... sincerely I used her, fuck. And I don't know she went to Italy, she came back and then we broke up. It was only for two months our relationship. I was her first... boyfriend and I used her.

Milan feels that he was not emotionally invested in this relationship and explains his experience as a common practice among his peers. Young men are at their age talking about sex don't know much, but they know they want to do it. Having sex (with a girl) is a way of proving one's masculinity, at least the type they are pursuing. The more sex you have the more you are perceived as a successful man, Milan mentions his friend: "I have a friend, first his genetics are amazing like he won a lottery, and he is built like Apollo. He looks amazing and in life he is very fortunate, every night he has a different girl". He is a bit jealous that his friend has multiple partners and a sculptured body, calling him fortunate; this reveals that the

ideal for Milan and his peers is to have as many sexual relations as possible. This promiscuity is perceived as positive only among young men, if a girl has multiple partners she would be labeled as a “whore”. Therefore the sexuality of these young men is important for the construction of their masculine identity and as in many other occasions it is being defined by double standards and always in opposition with femininity. On the other hand, stable relationships and intimacy are also highly valued by some of my interviewees, Ivan talks about his partner.

I do have a girlfriend at the moment. She is going to gymnasium and we are together more than two months now. We have a great relationship. We talk about everything, my childhood her childhood everything. There is nothing I couldn't tell her. Everything that I had I told her, I have nothing to be ashamed of in front of her.

An open and sincere conversation about their lives is something that Ivan finds very important and he proudly talks about their *great relationship*. It is often hard for a young man to talk about his emotions with his male peers that is why Ivan is grateful for the space and security provided by his girlfriend. In front of his friends he would be ashamed to talk about certain things or problems but it is not the case when he is around his partner. Code of conduct or masculinity conceptualization forbids revealing certain emotions or problems among male peers. Every time you talk about your emotions, you are becoming less of a man because emotions are a topic that is usually discussed by girls.

Interestingly enough all of my informants have social media accounts and use Facebook on a daily basis. They reveal more details about their relationships on these new media platforms than in some of the conversations we had. Posting love songs, heart symbols and pictures with their partners is common practice, but when one asks questions about their emotions and intimacy they choose to reveal almost nothing. Fortunately enough it is not the case with all

of my interviewees, for example Marko actually talked how he met his partner by using social media.

Well it will be eight months now on the 11th of May. Can you believe we met over Facebook? She added me over some of our mutual friends and we were posting things on each other walls and chatting for two months. Eventually I told her that I like her and then it started. After few days she told me that she likes me two... We argue rarely but sometimes we do, mostly about her grades, she doesn't want to learn.

The Internet opened new frontiers in the way the world functions and new social media channels take big part in this equation. It still remains to be examined how masculine identities are being performed online and I wish to underline this as a possible future research project. Marko was also surprised that he met his girlfriend over Facebook and he was very happy to share this story with me. Some also talked about relationships they had and why it didn't work out, such a story was shared by Bojan:

We had a good relationship, we understood each other and we broke up because of nonsense. We were fighting because she was literally saying lies to me, basically she didn't tell lies but she also didn't say the truth about certain things. I couldn't deal with it anymore and we eventually broke up.

Bojan explained that there must be trust between partners and communication must be exceptional at least that is how he imagines a *good relationship*. Even so trust must be built and maintained once the balance is lost, relationship is easily broken. Needless to say, there is nothing unusual about two adolescents breaking up, but Ivan's previous experience revealed some other behavior common among young men in Serbia. Breaking up is by provisions of patriarchal macho culture best "cured" by extensive alcohol consumption.

She told me we are breaking up over the phone. I got angry, and I went to the store behind the school with a friend who has an ID. I told him; buy me a bottle of Rakia. So I set down in front of the school, security was not around and I drank the whole bottle. I realized later that I made a fool out of myself and then I said I will never get drunk like this again.

One could often hear that "real men" drink rakia, alcohol is present in everyday life one may boldly state part of Serbian culture. Even though prohibited for minors it is easily bought in

any small store in the city and extensive consumption leads both young men and women in high risk situations. Ivan also claiming that he will never drink again it is highly unlikely because of the peer pressure surrounding alcohol consumption.

3.3 Work, future and hope

This subchapter will serve for the analysis of my interviewees' previous work experiences and their life plans and hopes for the future. In the stories they told me, I found very revealing the sense of interconnectedness between economic factors and the construction of masculinity. As one could read in previous chapters most of my interviewees have specific family situations and as young men they wish to help their parents and later on pursue their future role as providers.

The labor market in Serbia has pretty depressing statistics, according to data of the national service for employment, there is at the moment around 770.000 unemployed persons. The worst situation is found in the category of youth unemployment with numbers up to 202.000²⁵. In Belgrade youth unemployment (between ages 15 to 24) is around 43.5%, being better than Serbia's national average of 58.6%²⁶. By looking into that statistical overview one can't say much about individual experiences of my interviews but may assume that the situation is very discouraging. Most of these young men had some work experience and were planning to work in future. Considering also the fact that all of my interviewees are still in high school or finishing this year, work for them is not the primary goal at the moment. Nevertheless their class mobility may have influenced their decisions to become engaged with any form of work. One could see this clearly. Bojan first said:

²⁵ http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/dokumenti/statisti_ki_bilteni_nsz_-_2014._godina.cid11156 accessed 15/9/2014.

²⁶ <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/402530/Crni-dani-dolaze-2015-skok-nezaposlenostiaccessed/9/2014>

I kind of do work. Well I should get some money, but because I'm a volunteer I still don't get anything. I need to be a referee for one year totally for free and then after that I'll start getting some money, hopefully.

Bojan is a Taekwondo referee and he got interested in this by doing sport and the active support of his father, as mentioned previously. His father sometimes also needs help at work and Bojan gladly accepts the offer. Helping his father gives him the opportunity to act as his father, to work and reaffirm his idea of masculinity. He wishes to help his family and tries to find a better paid seasonal job for the summer.

Well besides that I work with my dad when he needs help. I get 1000/1500 dinars depending on the job, so I get this money on the side from him. Now for summer I'm planning to find some seasonal work through the youth office.

Doing manual work and helping his father is for Bojan an important experience and provides him with the sense of accomplishment. He is still a high school student but he hopes for a better future. Bojan's experience is similar to that of my other interviewees, such as Milan who spoke about his work experience. From his story one could again recognize the emphasis he puts on the physical performance of the able male body

Well I don't know, I was working, I had two jobs so far. First job, so called job was being an extra for Big Brother, in the semifinals and finale. Second job was at Lafantana, you know that thing with water delivery. So I was delivering bottles of water across Serbia from 6am to 6pm every day. I worked just to get some money during the summer. This job was not easy at all. I mean this guy that I worked with, he was not very muscular or anything but his forearm was huge because he used to carry three of these bottles and one bottle has 16 liters. When I would come home after this I couldn't even raise a cup.

Having said this, he added that he only wishes to help his parents out, to have some pocket money so he does not have to ask them for it. Being a burden for his parents is not what Milan has planned for his future, as we further spoke he told me he is going to try enrolling with the Faculty of Philosophy's Department of Psychology in Belgrade. The sense of honor and dignity may be noticed as he spoke about his colleague, "true" masculine values were present in Milan's story about his work experience. For Goran who is a rugby league player and my youngest informant, it was not a secret that he worked.

Yes, I was digging foundations to earn some money to help my parents... also I was chopping wood and other stuff like that.

Helping their parents seems to be a recognizable trope of these stories. It seems highly linked to the individual self-perception as a young man, at the verge of becoming adult, they wish to prove themselves as worthy of their family. Of course, this is also linked to the category of class. Living in the suburbs of Belgrade, going to technical schools and doing sports all indicate belonging to the lower working class. I wouldn't go as far and state this is a fix category that means something specific but that these young men all feel the need to provide economic assistance. In my opinion, by doing so also confirms their masculine identities.

Goran explains his situation:

I don't know my dad, I mean it's a bit harder for us. His salary is 40.000 dinars and he doesn't have a free day, his boss takes 2000 out of his salary and last summer we were building an auxiliary building, so mom and I were helping this mason by adding bricks for him, over 2000 bricks went through our hands.

His mother is a housewife and his father's salary is simply not enough, Goran started helping out as soon as he got old enough to work and now he uses every opportunity to earn some money. Besides that he goes to school and practices rugby successfully as he just recently joined the junior national team. Like the others, Sava talks about his work experience and his family:

Besides volunteering in Center E8, well at one point I moved out of Belgrade to live with my father for four years. Back then I worked this seasonal work. Picking cherry's and plums and in my opinion the salary was very good. Every summer I go and work this seasonal work and make from 50 to 150 Euros for two months of work.

Sava's parents are separated and he worked with his father when he was living with him. One can see in this working class setting the father figure is somehow important for the first work experience. Fathers take their sons to work and teach them to be productive individuals and providers for their family, reproducing a gendered division of labor and supporting the idea

of patriarchal masculinity. Comparably Ivan conversed about his work experience and other means of income

I never had to work. I always wanted to work with him (father). He works as an assembler of heating installations. He works in the firm but also individually. I got some money from helping him out.

Ivan, differently from many others didn't have to work instead he willingly choose to do it, repeating the same pattern as some of his friends. His father is blue collar workers who brought him to work and gave him an opportunity to one day inherits his firm. But the future may bring him some other occupations as Ivan explains he found another way to earn some money:

So I'm administrator at this gaming server and I can make some money there also. For example someone buys a slot or admin or levels, speed or strength. So some bourgeois pays like 5000 dinars for all this levels and my friends and I split the money.

Ivan's answer was thoughtful, first he showed me that *he knows who he is and where he comes from* (working class) but also that *he knows how to earn some money by ripping off those bourgeois* (middle class) kids who play games online. Ivan's class awareness shows clear delineation with those who are living better off in the city center. Paul Willis (1977) in his classical ethnography *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* describes the 'lads' culture built on working class background distanced from school culture and requirements. Similar to my interviewees, lads praise practical knowledge, life experience and resist theoretical knowledge offered in school. Willis argues that their own culture prepares these working class lads for the manual giving of their labor power, with emphasizing of "self-damnation" for occupying subordinate roles in Western capitalism. (Willis 1977: 3) Lads counter school culture glorifies hard manual labor, promotes chauvinistic masculinity, challenges obedience, search for control (non-formal) over work process and finally attributes positive values to one group of belonging. Willis further argues that this working class youth culture dismisses mental labor not just because of their

experience at school, but also on the account that such labor is perceived as feminine while manual labor is regarded as masculine. Working physically hard is thus perceived as an expression of masculinity, not of exploitation. Here, for Willis, patriarchy aids in the reproduction of manual workforce for the service of the capitalist system (ibid.: 148) My interviewees come from different social backgrounds and I won't go as far as Willis and claim there is a specific culture among this diverse group of them but on the other hand many of his insights around class may be useful here. In my opinion these young men in Serbia are not repeating the same "mistake" as Willis' lads. Throughout our conversations they were giving me clear indications that they wish to continue studying and get more education so one day they can be better positioned in the labor market. I am unsure what will be the case but nevertheless conclusions may be drawn that their conceptualization of masculinity is one aiming at social (class) mobility even though their fathers (if they are around) are trying to push them towards hard manual labor and becoming *real men*.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to explore dimensions and conceptualizations of masculinity among a certain group of young men in contemporary Serbian society. Much of this research shed light on how these young men saw themselves in terms of masculinity, individually or amongst other young men. By using a theoretical framework surrounding the concept of hegemonic masculinity I have shown how these conceptualizations are influenced by different factors and are negotiated and performed in multiple ways. These young men both enact and challenge hegemonic masculinity and their narratives indicate certain logic behind

how they individually confront masculinity. This logic is influenced by various social and economic factors as was demonstrated in the interviews.

By completing this research, I became aware of how the urban environment and location also affect how one appears to be a man in Serbian society. Living in the suburbs of Belgrade, depicted through discourses of backwardness, has seen these men as failures by the very standards hegemonic masculinity itself promotes. Regardless of goals and implementation of YMI when trying to address some problematic forms of masculinity, participants such as my interviewees are subject to influences projected by hegemonic masculinity. Therefore despite positive outcomes of these international initiatives demonstrated in participants one may see that it is very hard to really address the issue of challenging more pervasive forms of masculinity. My interviewees have shown that they have positively negotiated their masculine identities in the home, amongst friends and even in organized sports. However moving from micro to the macro I recognized their enactments of dominant forms of masculinity in conformity with dominant forms of masculine identity as witnessed in their father figures, friends they admire and colleagues they respect.

In mentioning figures or role models these young men look up to it is possible to recognize the established gendered roles that they absorb. In my analysis I have attempted to question their gender roles enactment, engagement in sport activities, encounters with violence and their work experiences, their family and personal relationships. I discovered there are constant negotiations of the roles they performed. Their ability to perform multiple conceptualizations of masculinity in relation to both dominant and subordinate masculine identities came out within this study.

All of these young men interviewed were boys when Serbia was under continuous conflict, which is why I consider my investigation to be of major importance to understand contemporary notions of masculinity. In the context of the violent division of ex-Yugoslavia and war in Kosovo, it is relevant also to note what followed these conflicts. There were economic sanctions with NATO bombings happening simultaneously within the so called post-socialist transition process. One here could talk about new forms of masculinities that were introduced by these highly militarized discourses. Alongside the rise of these new forms, others also came into the equation. These new forms were very different, having to do with recent peace times and aspirations of Serbia to join the European Union. In these young men, this all comes together in a very particular way. And this is why one can see complex conceptualizations of masculinity from their narratives.

Regarding limitations, as could be noted throughout my study, there are no definitive conclusions or definitions to what it means to be a young man in Serbia. However, my work revealed some possible leads that shed light upon these questions despite various limitations I encountered. For instance, one limitation includes the number of young men interviewed. With better networking and follow up on the YMI it may have been possible to gather more data prior to the time allocated for the research period. Also more in depth analysis of specific parts of interviews may have resulted in greater comprehensions of how these young men conceptualize their masculinity. Lastly, all that may have been lost in translations only leads me to believe that it is necessary to do this study in Serbia and in the Serbian language for the intricacies of the language to come forth within these narratives.

I believe this research is a starting point for a further investigation of Serbian masculinities and of those in the region. By looking at a younger population, it becomes possible to look at

the various stages that make up the trajectory to becoming a *man*. My interviewees already knew what it meant to them to be men, but they were still in the process of becoming them. Through their stories, they demonstrate how they intend to do so. Their narratives provided a snapshot of what it means to grow up in today's Serbia.

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