ENTERTAINING THE YUGOSLAV CAPITAL: CULTURE, URBAN SPACE, AND POLITICS IN BELGRADE BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

This dissertation examines entertainment in Belgrade during the 1920s and 1930s, a period when it was overwhelmingly foreign. Entertainment presented an everyday challenge to social hierarchies propped up by elites, conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents. More importantly, its ubiquitous presence was yet another impeding force to the development of a unified Yugoslav culture, all the more detrimental in the state’s capital city. I argue that foreign entertainment destabilized the notions of class and gender that formed the fundamental pillars of Yugoslav society, just as it democratized both national and elite cultural hierarchies. At the same time, this dissertation situates the Yugoslav capital on the web of hegemonic urban culture originating in cities like Paris, London, and Berlin. Although Belgrade remained politically, economically, and socially peripheral to Europe’s metropolitan centers in the two decades after the Great War, I argue that foreign entertainment forged new links between the Yugoslav capital and Europe by privileging residents with access to the mainstream cultures of the continent’s metropolitan centers.
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Acknowledgments

It is perhaps not surprising that a project about fun turned out to be, well, fun. I am thankful to my committee for not only taking the project seriously, but also for asking questions that made it more exciting. For this, I am most grateful to the long-term support of Maria Todorova, Mark Steinberg, Keith Hitchins, John Lampe, and Dubravka Stojanović. Their own work, and their patient investment in mine, has been a tremendous influence; words cannot fully express my gratitude.

The Department of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been a superb place to grow as a scholar and teacher. Seminars, workshops, and independent studies were formative in my first years in the Department. After exams, formal and informal discussion with faculty and other graduate students were just as important. I am thankful for the support of a cast of Department Chairs, Directors of Graduate Study, and the Department staff for making it all a smooth process. I’d especially like to thank Tom Bedwell and Elaine Sampson.

Scholars in the United States and Serbia have helped me think through ideas big and small in the last several years of research and writing. I’d like to thank Simona Ćupić, Alice Freifeld, Jill Irvine, Jovana Knežević, Piotr Kosicki, Brigitte Le Normand, Patrick Patterson, Paula Pickering, Alex Vari, Radina Vučetić, Larry Wolff, and Nathan Wood. I have benefited from discussions of this project at Wilson Center’s Junior Scholars Training Seminar, Urban History Association Conferences, Berkshire Conference on Women’s History, Conventions of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Harriman Institute at Columbia University, the Mid-Size City Colloquium, and the East European Reading Group.

My research has been supported by the Fulbright Institute of Higher Education, the Henson Anderson Bunch Fellowship, and the Department of History at the University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign. I also benefited from two academic year Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships from the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center, the William Widener Teaching Fellowship, and work as an editorial assistant at *Slavic Review*. For this last experience, I am grateful to Mark Steinberg and Jane Hedges.

The staff of the following institutions were helpful during my research in Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, Biblioteka grada Beograda, Istoriski arhiv Beograda, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Muzej pozorišnih umetnosti, and Narodna biblioteka Srbije.

My paternal grandmother deserves special recognition here; she was the one who first instilled the love of Belgrade in me, and then sustained it with books, plays, and dinners that we enjoyed together during my stays in Serbia. I am grateful to my parents for setting me on the path to becoming a doctor, even if this was not the end goal they imagined. I have loved growing up with my siblings and seeing our kid dreams become adult realities. And, I am glad for the circles of friends from days spent States-side and abroad, especially our shared stories, drinks, and visits. I would especially like to thank Radmila and Ivan Gorup for their heartening support. The most deserved thanks, however, belong to EGM, whose companionship has been, much like this dissertation, nothing short of fun.
Introduction

For a city that was never renowned for its architectural beauty or exceptional museums, it is perhaps not surprising that Fodor's travel guide *Eastern and Central Europe* and Rick Steve's *Best of Eastern Europe* relegated Belgrade and all of Serbia to Europe’s unmapped gray zones as late as 2005. Their message was clear: in the years following the Yugoslav Wars, Belgrade merited no attention from travelers who might otherwise visit a “Paris of the East” in Hungary, Romania, or Poland. Around the same time, however, the global media began to take an interest in Serbia’s capital on account of its wealth of nighttime entertainment. Belgrade was suddenly revered as a “booming, cocktail-soaked cradle of decadence”¹ where “disco dynamo citizens” populated the “commie-somber” cityscape.² On a 2005 visit to the Serbian capital, a writer for the *Daily Mail* announced that he was “forced to leave [his] preconceptions in the cloakroom, along with [his] coat,” and incited readers to “forget London, Paris or New York; this was one of the coolest nightspots” in all of Europe.³ That same year, *The New York Times* profiled a number of bars and clubs, describing the city’s entertainment as surprisingly international. A New York DJ testified that Belgrade audiences were comparable only to those in South America and Japan, while an American aid worker commented that Slobodan Milošević’s trial at The Hague paralleled Serbia’s cultural opening to the West: “There’s light, there’s people,” he was reported as saying, and “they're ready to party!”⁴

The flowering of entertainment in Belgrade was not new to post-Milošević Serbia, much like its role has not been stagnant in history. It stretched back to the café-bars bearing the names

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⁴ Seth Sherwood, “Belgrade Rocks.”
of far-away places in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it weaved through the variety theaters of the jazz age, and it echoed in the student rock clubs of the socialist period. Even as conditions faltered after every major “big event” of history – the redrawing of borders, the reshuffling of ideologies, and the destruction of war – entertainment existed side-by-side with everyday political, economic, and social realities in Belgrade.

This dissertation examines entertainment in Belgrade during the 1920s and 1930s, a period when, much like today, it was overwhelmingly foreign. However, the foreignness of entertainment in interwar Yugoslavia was interpreted in markedly different ways. First, it presented an everyday challenge to social hierarchies propped up by elites, conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents. More importantly, its ubiquitous presence was yet another impeding force to the development of a unified Yugoslav culture, all the more detrimental in the state’s capital city. While scholars have asked important questions about the failed political, economic, and social histories of Yugoslavia, I ask a different set of questions that turn our attention to the cultural history of Belgrade. The study of entertainment, I show, gives us a glimpse into an urban society that stood at once in the center of the national project but also outside of it. Foreign entertainment forged new links between Belgrade and Europe in two decades after the Great War because it privileged residents with access to the popular mainstream cultures of the continent’s metropolitan centers.

I make three central arguments in the course of this dissertation. First, I suggest that foreign entertainment is a point of departure for understanding the city in its concurrent roles as a Yugoslav capital and a European metropolis. In the 1920s and 1930s, the state financially supported the development of foundational principles of unified Yugoslav national culture and invested in marking the capital with patriotic displays. At the same time, elites lobbied for the...
arts in the interest of Belgrade’s legitimacy as a state capital on par with its contemporaries. Scholars have already studied elite and national cultures, but the scrutiny they have received is not commensurate with the attention awarded by contemporary audiences. More importantly, I argue that entertainment often resonated more strongly with self-actualizing urban audiences than national and elite culture. Yet, while observers in and outside the state unanimously described Belgrade as a metropolis on account its rich European entertainment, this was also a commonly cited culprit calling into question Belgrade’s centrality to the state and the nation(s).

Next, I contend that a story of urban entertainment presents a corrective to the existing scholarship of the history of interwar Yugoslavia. Beyond King Alexander’s dictatorship and the political discord between Serbian and Croatian politicians, I show the cacophony of interwar narratives about entertainment reveals that cultural debates were as prevalent in society as its actors were diverse. Alongside state officials issuing warnings about the eroding mores of the nation, the panicky cultural elites fearful of losing cultural legitimacy, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois urbanites prophesizing social decay, I consider other voices who shaped these discussions: profit-minded entrepreneurs, half-hearted police agents who often sympathized more with the patrons of nighttime venues than the regulations they set out to enforce, and ambitious domestic performers who were quick to mimic their foreign counterparts. Moreover, I argue that foreign entertainment destabilized the notions of class and gender that formed the fundamental pillars of Yugoslav society, just as it democratized both national and elite cultural hierarchies.

Finally, my project tells a story of increasing interconnectedness in the age of globalization. I show that interwar Yugoslavia, particularly its capital city, was linked to the

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5 Globalization is a multi-directional flow of people, goods, and ideas brought about by developing links of economic, technological, sociocultural, and political trends that, in turn, transform local phenomena into global ones.
European mainstream far more than existing scholarship lets on. Belgrade was a site where European urban culture was consumed as well as a one where it was appropriated, interpreted, and reformulated. I situate the Yugoslav capital on the web of hegemonic urban culture originating in cities like Paris, London, and Berlin. However, while Belgrade was neither backward nor provincial, it remained politically, economically, and socially peripheral to Europe’s metropolitan centers during the interwar years. In terms of urban culture like entertainment, this lopsided relationship pitted the city at the receiving end of hegemonic European culture – and at the margins of Europe itself.

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While entertainment is not unique to the modern period, it was fundamentally redefined around the turn of the nineteenth century. Scholars of the early modern period discuss entertainment as a component of heterogeneous local culture that did not conform to class hierarchies. “In 1500,” Peter Burke writes, “popular culture was everyone’s culture; a second culture for the educated, and the only culture for everyone else.” Industrialization, however, replaced entertainment as a product of the capitalist economy. Not only that, but industrialization reconfigured the city as center of its production and the increasingly connected world as its market. As it became commercialized, entertainment also became a site of contested meaning.

(Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.). Scholars have debated the origins of globalization, locating its onset as early as the Roman conquests in the centuries before Christ and as late as postwar Americanization (George Ritzer, *Globalization* (West Sussex: Willey-Blackwell, 2011), 17-24). While the beginning of modern globalization is usually associated with industrialization (it is sometimes dated at the discovery of the Americas), most scholars mark the end of this period with the First World War (Manfred Steagar, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2013.). The following period, one associated with the dominance of American culture after the Second World War, is the subject of a rich scholarship that critically discusses globalization as a process of cultural imperialism, homogenization, and hybridity (Lane Crothers, *Globalization and American Popular Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 17-31.). Most scholarship, however, overlooks the two decades between the World Wars a globalizing moratorium. As my dissertation suggests, this requires rethinking: the interwar decades saw the development of global networks – some an extension of hegemonic flows of the modern period, while others created entirely new socio-spatial links – that help us understand globalization as a continuous process.

Historian Derek Scott suggests that, in the early nineteenth century, “popular” denoted culture that was widely consumed, but that the meaning of this term shifted to signify culture that was deemed to be of lesser value by the later part of the same century.⁷

It is a legacy of the cultural politics of the late nineteenth century, as Lawrence Levine shows, that most scholars equate culture with the arts – from theater and ballet, to the applied arts and literature – and sideline other types of cultures as everything that the arts are not.⁸ Richard Maltby echoes this assertion by noting that culture is “often assumed to refer only to what is called ‘high culture.’”⁹ Entertainment, on the other hand, is culturally and politically marginalized; as scholar Simon Frith writes, it is often referred to as “only entertainment.”¹⁰ In focusing my attention on everything that the arts are not, I build the case for entertainment as more central to interwar Yugoslav – and more broadly European – society than historiography concedes. While overlapping signifiers such as the arts, elite culture, and high culture have an important place in Belgrade’s history, I only discuss them insomuch as they relate to debates about entertainment. I also leave aside state culture such as parades and festivals, sponsored public art and museums, and educational programs and sporting events, except in instances when they were appropriated by urban residents as participatory or spectator events in the city.

Entertainment has been the subject of serious scholarly study since the mid-twentieth century, often discussed under the category of either mass culture or popular culture. The postwar Frankfurt School famously described mass culture as an inauthentic. Scholars like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer saw its audiences as depoliticized consumers of a cultural

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industry, and, as such, instruments of top-down social control and manipulation. Contemporary scholars who stress the hegemonic function of entertainment in industrialized societies continue to use mass culture as a category.\textsuperscript{11} Robert W. Ryder and Rob Kroes see it as a term that signifies the mobilization of cultural and ideological resources on a scale unimaginable in a preindustrial society lacking mass transportation and communication facilities.\textsuperscript{12} Scholars commonly use mass culture as a category in discussions of national or imperial projects, where culture served as a tool of homogenization and information dissemination. The term also carries the implication of a lower class culture because it is associated with cheap production and widely available industrial distribution. In the case of Russia, Stephan Frank and Mark Steinberg suggest that “classes and genres intermixed in the penny press and in popular theaters, where an emerging ‘mass culture’ – promoted by market sensitive entrepreneurs – embraced factory workers, migrant laborers, peasants, petty merchants, salesclerks, and even the illiterate.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Birmingham School recast mass culture as popular culture in the 1970s by locating it between dominant and subordinate classes, as “the ground on which the transformations are worked.”\textsuperscript{14} Stuart Hall was among the first scholars to ascribe the agency of interpretation to the audience and subsequent theorists have been more concerned with the heterogeneous public, “cultural capital,” and the practice of consumption. Other scholars define popular culture on the grounds of a shared common value with pre-modern folk culture that is magnified through mass production – most importantly, they argue, popular culture is defined by its grounding in locality. Interestingly, popular culture is rarely conceptualized as exclusively a product of urban

industrialization or of the city itself. As Jim Cullen explains, “popular culture represents a symbiosis between the city and country, as rural people pour into cities, they bring their backgrounds with them, and as popular culture emerged from cities and diffuses into the countryside, where the whole process begins again.”¹⁵ In turn, scholars of popular culture do not necessarily conceptualize it as inseparable from commercial consumption.

However, another set of scholars sees entertainment as inseparable from the city and resorts to the category of urban culture. This category prioritizes the city as a defining variable because of its concentration of capital, populations, and socio-political power. For instance, Erica Rappaport discusses department stores and reading rooms where middle class British women shopped for pleasure as defining of late nineteenth century London,¹⁶ while Mary Neuburger paints a picture of new leisure in interwar Sofia – from the promenade to the café – and suggests that these signifiers made the Bulgarian capital modern.¹⁷ Some scholars of urban culture also engage deeply with the category of the nation. For instance, Louise Young and Blaire Ruble discuss how urban culture of non-capitals undermines the nation,¹⁸ while Eric Gordy argues that urban culture in the Yugoslav capital challenged the nationalizing state regime in the late twentieth century.¹⁹ Urban culture is thus not synonymous with mass culture and popular culture, but offers another interpretive term for understanding entertainment.

Entertainment itself encompasses components of mass, popular, and urban culture, just as

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it can be qualified as mass, popular, or urban. Maltby defines entertainment as a “commercial leisure activity, produced by professional performers for sale to an audience, who consume it for pleasure, relaxation, or amusement. Usually expected to be undemanding of its audiences, entertainment, in such forms as cinema, music, literature, and television has become a major industry in the twentieth century.”

To this definition, I append three amendments in my own usage of the term. First, I do not see entertainment as an exclusive domain of professional performers but also include amateurs, spectators, and everyday residents as producers of entertainment. As I show in the fourth chapter, streets, homes, and cinemas were among the sites that offered spectators a platform to perform anything from their class and gender to urban and national belonging. Second, while my research primarily focuses on commercial forms of entertainment, I argue that its consumption did not always serve commercial means. Instead, Belgraders overheard music pouring out of cabarets, they gleaned posters advertising film, and they shared one newspaper among many readers; in each of these instances, they consumed entertainment without directly purchasing it.

Finally, while I agree with Maltby’s qualification that entertainment is pleasurable, relaxing, and amusing, I argue that not all entertainment was equally pleasurable, relaxing, or amusing to all urban audiences. Instead, entertainment was hierarchized. Strains of local popular culture like fairs and street performers that had been common in the prewar city continued to thrive as decidedly non-commercial entertainment for peasants, workers, and other lower class urbanites. This type of entertainment was cheap or free, embedded with local signifiers, and performed by casts of domestic actors. Indeed, lower class urbanites were not privileged to the same entertainment as their bourgeois and petit bourgeois neighbors – or the same pleasures, relaxation, and amusement. Well-heeled Belgraders more frequently patronized commercial

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entertainment – the focus of my study – an overwhelmingly foreign array of illustrated magazines, films, and variety performances. I term this hegemonic European entertainment, a category that underlines Belgrade’s peripheral position on European cultural networks. Although much of my argument in this dissertation is premised on the fact that entertainment was a democratic form of culture because it was increasingly accessible to urban residents (even if only by proxy), it is important to underline that entertainment is nonetheless not democratizing.

In the dissertation as a whole, I rely on the category of entertainment as it is defined above. However, I also employ working categories like popular culture and urban culture at appropriate moments. Although they are not synonyms with entertainment, they overlap at the site of the city and at the moment of consumption. As I show in the chapters that follow, particularly in chapter two, Belgrade’s interwar residents also contributed to the politics of naming, as they negotiated categories describing entertainment, its place in the city, and its role in society.

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In the last two decades, scholars have tackled the difficult task of explaining how Yugoslavia managed to persist for the better part of the twentieth century, why it collapsed in the early 1990s, and how its legacy shaped successor states. They offer compelling arguments about Yugoslav history from the perspective of politics, nationalism, state-society relations, state-society relations, state-society relations, state-society relations.

economics, and culture. However, the point of departure for most narratives of Yugoslavia remains the moment when the state ceased to exist, and the central question continues to be why. Although the lack of easy answers has intellectually stirred a generation of scholars, it has also created a polarized historical space. Scholars are divided into ideological camps – apologists, critics, or ardent oppositionists of the Yugoslav project – just as the literature is fixed in a historical vacuum with little regard for history outside state lines.

Relative to scholarship on the socialist and post-Yugoslav periods, the years between the two World Wars are understudied; when they do attract scholarly attention, the 1920s and 1930s are described as the first occurrence of failed national, political, economic, and cultural unity. Ivo Banac discusses the early years of the period as a time of political discord between Serb and

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Croat politicians that predated Yugoslavia, while Dejan Djokić asserts that this discord was engendered by the unification of the state. Scholars argue that the parliamentary democracy of the 1920s was hardly a democracy and that the ruling Karadjordjević dynasty, particularly King Alexander, reinforced dictatorial, centralist, and Serb-dominated politics. John Lampe shows that the previously Ottoman, Habsburg, and independent regions had a genuine promise of economic integration, if it had not been for the incompatibility and incompetence of political leaders. Finally, Andrew Wachtel presents a convincing case of the failure of elite culture to develop a unified national platform, while Marina Vujnovic similarly shows that popular culture did not incorporate Yugoslav supra-national identity into its discourse.

Belgrade itself has merited longue durée narratives as well as broad approaches to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its historians have enumerated the streets and squares.

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30 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as a History*.
31 Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*.
32 Mariana Vujnovic, *Forging the Bubikopf Nation: Journalism, Gender, and Modernity in Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).
hotels and cafés, and the architecture that flanked its boulevards. Others have written about topics like social statistics, fashion, automobiles, and the avant-garde. While this literature is useful in its meticulous reconstruction of certain aspects of urban life, it lacks the theoretical framework that would help us understand urban dynamics in dialogue with national and international trends.

A few histories of Belgrade stand out. Dubravka Stojanović and John Lampe offer excellent interpretations of late nineteenth century Belgrade within the framework of Serbian state politics and urbanization in a global context, respectively. Brigitte Le Normand and Vladimir Kulić present compelling analyses of the suburban expansion of socialist Yugoslavia’s capital. Finally, the work of Eric Gordy sheds light on the post-1990s tension between urban, semi-urban, and rural politics, as Srdjan Jovanović Weiss offers the discursive category of “national” and “un-national” in contemporary architectural styles. Surprisingly, in light of the spare historiography on interwar Yugoslavia, 1920s and 1930s Belgrade has captured the

attention of a number of excellent scholars whose work connects the capital’s history with that of the state and the world.43

Broadly speaking, urban history overlooks cities like Belgrade in order to privilege larger and more prominent centers.44 Although the study of cities like Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Shanghai, and Petersburg has produced exceptional scholarship that shapes my own work, it overshadows cities that tell different urban stories.45 My approach to studying urban history is influenced by James Hodos’s comparative project that studies Manchester and Philadelphia as “second” cities in “significant relation [to] global and other cities all over the world.”46 Hodos approaches second cities as distinct urban actors, premised on their form of global participation:

43 Tanja Damljanović Conley maps how residents engaged with the socio-political markers of the built environment, such as that of the National Assembly, across shifting political milieus (Tanja Damljanović Conley, “The Backdrop of Serbian Statehoods: Morphing Faces of the National Assembly in Belgrade,” Nationalities Papers 41, 1 (2013): 64-89.). Predrag Marković explores the relationship of European-wide trends (like social mobility) to the patterns of everyday life in the city (Marković, Beograd i Evropa.). Radina Vučetić-Mladenović discusses the growing pains of Belgrade’s elite culture, in a city whose majority population was comprised of first generation urbanites (Radina Vučetić-Mladenović, “Pobednici ‘Pobednik.’” Polekime uoči postavljanja Meštirovićevog spomenika,” Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju VI, 2 (1999): 110-123; Radina Vučetić-Mladenović, Evropa na Kalamegdanu. “Cuvjeta Zuzorić” i kulturni život Beograda, 1918-1941 (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2003.).), while the work of Ranka Gašić studies the influence of French and German culture on the arts in Belgrade (Ranka Gašić, Beograd u hodu ka Evropi: Kulturni uticaj Britanije i Nemačke na beogradsku elitu, 1918-1941 (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2005.).). On the other hand, Marko Miljković and Simona Ćupić begin to discuss the powerful influence of European trends on popular culture in the interwar capital (Marko Miljković, “Grand Prix Beograda 1939 – spoljnopoličko kontekst velikih automobilskih trka,” Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju 18, 1 (2011): 7-29; Simona Ćupić, Gradjanski modernizam i popularna kultura (Novi Sad: Galerija Matica Srbije, 2011).

44 As Benjamin Ofori-Amoah writes, “mainstream urban studies have overwhelmingly focused on the upper end of the system, which consists of cities of national or global, and in a few instances, regional or provincial importance. Such cities are very large in terms of population, and are economically, socially, and politically domineering.” The author suggests that smaller cities merit scholarly attention because they represent a more accurate picture of the more common urban experience” (Benjamin Ofori-Amoah, ed., Beyond the Metropolis: Urban Geography as if Small Cities Mattered (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 3-4.). George Kubler similarly argues that “small cities have generated the principal events of history more often than the megalopolis” (George Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 93.).


46 Also see: Young, Beyond the Metropolis.
“the dominant theme is that these cities, rather than being marginalized or excluded, have long been active participants in global society across a range of dimensions.” In turn, he suggests that the self-perception of such cities is not steeped in negativity or inferiority, but rather developed “through claims of a glorious past, of superiority over lesser national cities, of equality with an international group of similar provincial capitals, of favorable comparisons with global cities, and sometimes explicitly being ‘second.’” While I share Hodos’s conviction that “second” cities should be studied in their specific political, social, economic, and cultural context, as well as on regional and world maps, I also assert that the power relations implicit in urban hierarchies constitute an important component in their history. Indeed, I study Belgrade on its own terms, but I also maintain that this unavoidably includes studying its relationship to cities like London, Paris, and Berlin.

Following the lead of scholars who have shown that Eastern Europe is a historical construct and those who have contested the category of the Balkans, the understated motive of my project is to challenge the backwardness ascribed to Eastern Europe by including this region, as Maria Todorova suggests, “in a common European or global space and in the proper comparative perspective, rather than ghettoizing it in a diachronic and spatial Balkan community.” The work of John Allcock, Noah Sobe, and Zoran Milutanović has been influential in recasting the interwar period and the narrative of Yugoslavia as a whole into

48 Hodos, Second Cities, 18.
50 Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
European and global histories. Recent scholarship of Eastern Europe also examines social, economic, and cultural questions specific to cities, rather than as an afterthought of the nation-state. Following Nathan Wood’s study of late nineteenth century Cracow, I show that Belgraders shared a common culture with other European urbanites and that an interwar urban identity co-existed with the national one. In turn, I examine the history of Yugoslavia for what it was after the First and before the Second World War, rather than asking why Yugoslavia is no more.

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Five chapters drive the narrative arc of my project. In the first chapter, I postulate that Belgrade was peripheral both in Yugoslavia and in Europe. I show that its urban culture – increasingly filled out with foreign content – was a point of contestation in the new state time and again. At the same time, I argue that Belgrade remained marginal to hegemonic European culture. In the following chapter, I compare domestic and foreign entertainments, speculating why foreignness was such an allure to interwar Belgraders. I discuss the polarizing language of

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52 John Allcock argues for an understanding of Yugoslavia within the context of “Europe’s common history – a history which can be plotted theoretically between the axes of modernity and globalization,” one that also explains the 1990s as indicative of European, rather than uniquely Yugoslav, conflict (John B. Allcock, Explaining Yugoslavia (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 440.). Noah Sobe makes a case for interwar Slavic cosmopolitanism that was more concerned about linking Yugoslavs to the world rather among one another (Noah W. Sobe, Provincializing the Worldly Citizen: Yugoslav Student and Teacher Travel and Slavic Cosmopolitanism in the Interwar Era (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).), while literary scholar Zoran Milutanović writes that during the interwar period, “for all Europeans, Europe was somewhere or someone else” (Zoran Milutanović, Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture (Amsterdam: Radopi, 2011), 17.).


contemporary actors – national conservatives, cultural elites, and reform-minded bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie – to talk about entertainment. I contend that foreign entertainment ushered in a social crisis that precipitated a reshuffling of cultural politics. In the third chapter, I explore how the state, the city, and civic cultural organizations attempted to manage entertainment in interwar Belgrade. Just as entertainment had shifted the playing field of cultural politics, I argue that the management efforts of the state, city, and civic organizations came to be shaped by entertainment more than they succeeded in shaping it. In the chapter that follows, I turn my attention to urban space and the spatial practice of entertainment in Belgrade. I show that the practice of entertainment in diverse commercial, public, and private places had a different effect on social hierarchies in the Yugoslav capital than in entertainment districts of big European cities. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I compare national manifestations of physical culture, such as Sokol rallies, with metropolitan ones, like the performances of Josephine Baker. I also discuss four case studies of Yugoslav entertainers, showing that that the physical cultures of the nation and the big city were irreconcilable for domestic performers.
Chapter One
Peripheral Metropolis:
Interwar Belgrade on the Margins of Yugoslavia and Europe

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, Belgrade was on a steady, though not necessarily linear, trajectory of modernization, urbanization, and Europeanization. As the population of the new Yugoslav capital more than tripled during the interwar period, its residents, journalists, and cultural workers more frequently cited rising anonymity on city streets, a quickening pace of daily life, and the city’s vertical and horizontal expansion as indications that Belgrade was becoming a metropolis.¹ The development of urban culture – especially that of entertainment – was another sign Belgraders used to compare their city to others they deemed thoroughly metropolitan. In his memoir, interwar resident Milan Djoković remembered the new cafés, bars, and nightclubs opened and staffed by Russian émigrés in the early 1920s and suggested that “they contributed to the development of metropolitan life.”² In 1922, an article celebrated the opening of a new nighttime venue, the Music Hall,³ and declared that “there are many establishments like this in Paris, London, and Vienna. Belgrade has not had one until now. In this respect, Belgrade is racing to stand among the best European cities.”⁴ Several years later, a writer for the arts magazine Comœdia praised a new acting company by comparing it to the Parisian Le

¹ There is a slight difference in the terminology used by interwar sources and historiography from the last several decades. In interwar popular discourse, Belgrade was qualified as a velegrad, a word similar to the German Großstadt, that can be translated as big city, great city, and, indeed, metropolis. Contemporary scholars, on the other hand, almost exclusively use the word metropola that leaves little interpretive doubt about its connotations.
³ The venue’s name is an obvious allusion to the genre of entertainment popularized in British music halls in the second part of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries. Although the platform of the music hall was widely interpreted, in interwar Belgrade it generally resembled the variety theater with its popular songs, comedy, acrobatics, and stunts.
Théâtre du Grand Guignol\(^5\) and suggested that “Belgrade is gradually taking on the shape of a big city, its daily life is becoming metropolitan, its public is acquiring metropolitan desires such as theater where they can laugh and brighten their mood.”\(^6\) At the same time, interwar illustrated presses, a genre that wrote about entertainment as much as it was a form of entertainment in its own right, sensationalized “dangerous delights”\(^7\) like urban crime, substance addiction, and violence as further proof of Belgrade’s metropolitan membership.\(^8\)

There is little question that the experience of interwar Belgrade was, indeed, metropolitan for many of its everyday residents, a sizable number of who were first generation urbanites. Observes from across Southeastern Europe similarly looked to the city as an emerging hub of politics and commerce – but also of leisure and pleasure. However, the same aspects of urban culture that denoted Belgrade as metropolitan in the eyes of everyday residents presented a sore for the higher echelons of society. National conservatives saw it as an impediment to the development of national consciousness; cultural elites feared it would undermine the salience of the arts and, with it, their grip on culture in the city; and Belgrade’s small, but visible, bourgeoisie voiced concern that it curbed social morality. All the while, elites from other

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5 Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol (The Theater of the Big Puppet) was founded in 1897 and operated until 1962 in a former chapel in the Parisian neighborhood Pigalle that came to be synonymous with tourism, entertainment, and sex in the twentieth century. The Theater’s popularity among the well heeled peaked between the two wars, when a common performance comprised of five or six plays that ranged in style from horror to comedy. The Grand Guignol was particularly associated with the genre of “naturalistic horror” that explored altered states (insanity, panic, hypnosis, uncontrolled horror), gory special effects, and a bleak worldview; it has since become an umbrella term for graphic, amoral entertainment. In Belgrade, however, the Grand Guignol was (mis)interpreted only as a signifier of entertaining, humorous, and spirited fun – an implicit comment on the homogenization of popular culture and entertainment from Paris and other big European and North American cities in the Yugoslav capital.  


8 For example, an article in the daily Novosti sensationalized the disappearance of a young girl as a “passionate whim of metropolitan life” (“Tragedija male Side: Žrtva životinjskih prohteva velegradskog života. Nestanak jedne devojčice,” Novosti, 14 juli 1928, 3.). At another instance, the same paper declared that “Belgrade has become a metropolis, with all the secrets and mysteries of big Western capitals. There are many difficult and twisted things that happen here, and the police hardly even know about them” (“Tajne bankarevog doma,” Novosti, 14 septembar 1928, 3).
Yugoslav cities like Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo contested Belgrade’s place as the center of the state, arguing that their respective cities had comparable, if not stronger, urban legacies as well as the inheritance of unquestionably European prewar aristocratic classes.

The debate about Belgrade’s place in Yugoslavia is further complicated by its uncertainty on the interwar map of Europe. Foreign visitors frequently remarked that Belgrade shared many metropolitan signposts like bustling commercial streets and fashionable residents. As Belgraders were keen to remark, the artifacts of the European metropolis were found in almost all reiterations of the city’s urban culture. Yet, there was very little of Belgrade that became entrenched in foreign cities. Part of this has to do with the fact that the Yugoslav capital was much smaller and less developed than many of its European contemporaries. However, this unevenness is illustrative of the power relations dating back to prewar Europe. Although the city was now a capital of a major international player, one with notable connections to France in the 1920s and Britain and Germany in the 1930s, the Yugoslav capital remained on the periphery of the urban hierarchy topped by the French, British, German cities.

In this chapter, I argue that Belgrade was a peripheral metropolis both in the new Yugoslav state and in interwar Europe. That Belgrade was veritably metropolitan was never in question. However, I show that Belgrade’s urban culture – increasingly filled out with foreign content – was a point of contestation in the new state time and again. Despite that the city stood as the capital of Yugoslavia, European-style entertainment in the city challenged its centrality in

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9 The metropolis is a late nineteenth century urban center, most commonly in Europe but not exclusive to it, that was highly advanced in industry, technology, and commerce; presided as a political, social, or cultural entity; brought diverse, but fragmented, populations together, often described as “cosmopolitan;” and provided a platform for the experience of modernity. Emily Gunzburger Markaš and Tanja Damljanović Conley write that “the 1890s marked the dawn of a new period in European urban history: the era of the metropolis and rapidly accelerated urban growth concentrated in a few key European centers” (Gunzburger Markaš and Damljanović Conley, Capital Cities, 17.). Although their histories are far from homogenous, cities like Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna, New York, Shanghai, and St. Petersburg are generally accepted as late nineteenth century metropolitan benchmarks. Each counted more than two million residents around 1900, served as a state capital, exhibited a quickly industrializing urban space, and housed a booming capitalist economy that supported growth of income and free time.
conservative national agendas (Yugoslav as much as Serbian) and state-building initiatives on the part of elites. At the same time, while there was no denying that the metaphorical space and time between the big European city and the Yugoslav capital was closing in, Belgrade remained nonetheless peripheral to the flow of hegemonic European culture. As I explore Belgrade’s place in Yugoslavia and in Europe during the interwar years, I follow the negotiation of metropolitan and peripheral qualifiers used to describe the city’s urban culture. At the onset, I provide social snapshots of interwar Belgrade: its urban geography and its social demographics. I follow this with an examination of how observers like urban residents, elites, and other Europeans experienced interwar Belgrade and how they interpreted the city’s wealth of foreign entertainment. Then, I explore the transnational connections that linked Yugoslav urban culture with its European contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s, specifically taking note of the direction in which culture flowed. Finally, I examine how the global tendency toward synchronization was manifested in Belgrade – and how it impacted the city’s centrality in Yugoslavia and in Europe.

**Social Snapshots of Interwar Belgrade**

The years following the First World War can be characterized as a period of growth of both the built environment and population in Belgrade. In this section, I provide a brief overview of this growth as well as the accompanying shifts in the city’s social milieu. I focus particularly on Belgrade’s maturing petite bourgeoisie – a social class comprised of state servants, small proprietors, and rentiers – and rural migrants-cum-workers who, together, constituted the largest proportion of the urban residents and its most quickly growing population. Unlike large European and American cities, but also Zagreb and Ljubljana within the new Yugoslavia,
Belgrade lacked an urban aristocratic class and historians term its interwar middle class as “unidentified and unstable”\textsuperscript{10} or “struggling to understand itself.”\textsuperscript{11} In contrast, I show that the city’s petit bourgeois and working class residents were in the process of self-actualizing as urbanites.

Belgrade’s built environment grew exponentially between the two wars, with 1923 and 1932 as the most productive years.\textsuperscript{12} Industry and rail developed along the riverbanks and the periphery, while residential neighborhoods radiated southwards from the center. But, despite continuous building, Belgrade was in a constant state of housing crisis that was confounded by a fast arriving migrant population. Several urban plans were proposed as solutions for the growing demands of housing, but scholars have deemed them as inefficient and uneven. Oliver Minić, for example, criticizes the city’s 1924 urban plan for addressing problems only in the city center, and overlooking the possibilities of the large swath of swampland across the river Sava, that was not utilized until the late 1930s (and was to become the residential Novi Beograd only in the postwar period).\textsuperscript{13} At the same time, rents were simply too high for many residents who, in turn, built makeshift homes in abandoned rail wagons, shacks, or side streets that existed entirely outside any urban plan.

The physical growth of the city produced innumerable infrastructure needs, from public works to transportation; in both instances, historians write about the city’s persistent race to catch up with residents’ demands.\textsuperscript{14} By 1932, Belgrade had 32 working tramlines and 122 cars to

\textsuperscript{10} Marković, \textit{Beograd i Evropa}, 41.
\textsuperscript{12} Marković, \textit{Beograd i Evropa}.
\textsuperscript{13} Oliver Minić, “Razvoj Beograda i njegova arhitektura izmedju dva rata,” \textit{Godišnjak grada Beograda}, knj. I (Beograd: Muzej grada Beograda, 1954), 177-188.
\textsuperscript{14} Historian Dubravka Stojanović argues that early twentieth century Belgrade was “an unfinished capital of an unfinished state,” a problem that she ascribes to the fragmentation of political parties and urban elites. Stojanović
service the expanding city. In 1928, the first buses were added to the urban transport network to supplement the tram tracks that could not be laid quickly enough. In addition to internal traffic, the city’s rail station struggled to accommodate the 1.2 million passengers who passed through Belgrade each year, as well as almost half of all commercial transport that entered the state. Of all international rail and river transport that reached the capital, three quarters of goods were unloaded in Belgrade, while the rest was transferred to other Yugoslav destinations. Belgrade, in other words, was becoming a major urban market.

Like the city’s built environment, its demographics were changing. Belgrade’s population grew from 111,000 in 1919, to 288,200 in 1929, and finally peaked at 350,000 in 1939. It is worth noting that while the urban population was booming, the 1931 census recorded 13,934,083 Yugoslav citizens, only a small overall growth from its 1921 population of 12,017,323 Scholar Tomislav Belgovac terms Belgrade as “the city of the migrant,” suggesting that the city’s population of newcomers was always proportionally higher than Belgrade-born residents. And, indeed, less that a quarter of Belgraders were born in the city by 1941, while the rest had migrated from all regions of the new unified state. By some accounts, about 13,800 foreigners also passed though the city in the late 1920s, most of them Austrian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and German citizens, while some 22,250 foreigners, primarily Russian émigrés, called Belgrade...
home by the end of the interwar period. In the early interwar years, new urban dwellers maintained links with the village and sometimes resided in the city only part of the time. Mirjana Prošić Dovnić suggests that Belgrade’s urbanization was more akin to a “ruralization” of the city but this generalization overlooks socio-cultural changes that happened over time. While many newcomers teetered between the village and the city, many also defied patterns of rural life in place of new city habits.

Belgrade’s bourgeoisie was small but visible in the social, cultural, and political life of the city. However, the growing numbers of petite bourgeoisie (state servants, property owners, and businessmen) and working class residents were becoming increasingly prominent in everyday urban life. As the state centralized in Belgrade, ministries and agencies attracted new residents to the city and created a class of civil servants, while developing industries transformed peasants into manual laborers and blue collar workers. In the late 1920s, 24% of Belgrade’s population was state employed and 19% belonged to the commercial class; professionalization of the petite bourgeoisie is evident in the swelling numbers of trade associations and societies. In a generation’s time, the city’s became home to a maturing class of urbanites who were semi-educated, semi-professional, and defined themselves by the desire to stand apart as “civilized.” For instance, literacy in the city reached 86% by 1929, while rates in Yugoslavia as a whole trailed far behind at 45%. Similarly, the role of women, though not uncontested, was changing: some 22% of Belgrade women worked outside the home in 1929, they comprised one fifth of


Lampe, *Yugoslavia as a History*, 145.


enrolled university students, and more than one in ten university professors was female.\textsuperscript{25} The definition of family and interpersonal relations, likewise, were in flux. Divorce peaked at 20\% of all marriage in Belgrade in 1925, and later held at 10\% in the 1930s; all the while Yugoslav-wide divorce never exceeded 4\%.\textsuperscript{26} That is to say that the growing urban population was becoming socially distinct from Yugoslavs as a whole.

Daily presses regularly bemoaned the rising costs of living, but many urban residents – especially the petite bourgeoisie – were able to meet the financial demands of city life. For example, the estimated minimum monthly living income for a family of four in 1930 was 1,500 dinars. An average office wage was 2,100 dinars, and a public official earned around 3,000 dinars per month. About a quarter of Belgrade’s petite bourgeoisie did not work at all, but rather collected rents from property in the city. At the same time, an average worker’s salary was slightly below the minimum, at 1,400 dinars per month, but families might have navigated this situation if another member worked outside the home or if the family lived further from the center.\textsuperscript{27} More than that, most of Belgrade’s petit bourgeois and working class residents were able to afford at least some of the leisure increasingly available in the city; for instance, cinemas like the Metropol never charged more than 10 dinars for entry to its 1,000-seat hall.\textsuperscript{28}

Like in most European cities, attending the cinema or the cabaret, reading for pleasure, and promenading on the main pedestrian street were especially pertinent as markers used by Belgrade’s maturing petite bourgeoisie to assert themselves as urbanites. However, their claims to urban membership did not go uncontested by Belgrade’s bourgeoisie, particularly as the petite

\textsuperscript{25} Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 55.
\textsuperscript{26} Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 58. What is more, half of the city’s residents were single, sexuality was more openly discussed, and a surprising one in ten children in Belgrade were born out of wedlock. (Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 62. Also see: Predrag Marković, “Sexuality in Belgrade in the 20th Century,” in Between the archives and the field: A dialogue in historical anthropology of the Balkans, eds. Miroslav Jovanović, Karl Kaser, and Slobodan Naumović, trans. Aleksandar Bošković and Nina Dobrković, Beograd: Ćigoja, 1999), 93-100.).
\textsuperscript{27} Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 36, 57.
\textsuperscript{28} AJ, MP, f. 383.
bourgeoisie became eager consumers of entertainment. National conservatives scoffed at the sums of money spent on entertainment and warned that it signaled an erosion of patriarchy and, with it, national consciousness among audiences. Cultural elites, on the other hand, snubbed entertainment as a product of the “culture industry.” In the novel *Terazije* published in 1932, the critic Boško Tokin (1894-1953), a member of Belgrade’s bourgeoisie, painted a caricature of the “typical petit bourgeois” couple, Hinko and Angela Zorašić. They had recently relocated from Zagreb to the Yugoslav capital, and settled in the southeastern neighborhood Palilula. Hinko worked at the Office of Workers’ Insurance (*Ured za osiguranje radnika*), while Angela stayed home reading various German novels and novellas printed in the Belgrade papers. Tokin described the couple’s everyday activities:

She sat by the window, contemplating the street, snacking on candy, and cooking. Žuža handled all other household tasks. The husband returned home for lunch and dinner, bringing *Jutarnji List, Novosti, Kulistu, Svijet, Cinema Review, Die Dame*, and *Šerl Magazin*. In other words, all that was necessary for the maintenance of Angela’s cultural level. They had a record player and a radio, they don’t go out often, and patronize only Moskva [in the center] when they do. The café-bars in Palilula are not quite ‘noble’ enough for them. Sometimes they go to the cinema or theater.⁴⁰

Tokin’s sketch of husband and wife was intended to ridicule the petite bourgeoisie and their the consumption of entertainment. Whereas the urban bourgeoisie considered culture impervious to the act of consumption (although, it should be noted, Belgrade’s bourgeoisie did patronize certain forms of entertainment, especially the costlier kind, such as cabaret), the petite bourgeoisie and working classes of the interwar years defined it precisely by its ability to be easily consumed. Tokin’s criticism draws our attention to the fact that entertainment was, as we will see in greater detail below, of consequence to Belgrade’s upper classes because it

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²⁹ Žuža is the couple’s maid. The fact that the couple could afford to employ household help is another indication of their dispensable income.

diminished their salience as the barometer of culture among the city’s residents. At the same
time, it was cause for perpetuating the class conflict that underlined social relations among
Belgrade’s elites, the strengthening petit bourgeoisie, and the working classes.

The city was also a stage where Belgrade’s working class residents practiced their newly
acquired urban citizenship. What one wore, where one was seen, or how one behaved were
markers that could be manipulated to reiterate membership in the urban community. Historian
Predrag Marković reminds us that most of Belgrade was performing an urban identity; he writes
that “the muddy streets and cobblestone roads notwithstanding… the automobile was defiantly
part of Belgrade’s everyday life” in the late 1930s.³¹ That is to say that although most residents
in the interwar period lived well below the means to own an automobile, the visibility of the first
private vehicles in the city center made them an accessible artifact of urban life. For many of
these lower class residents, familiarity with upper class markers facilitated urban belonging. In
the novel Miris kiše na Balkanu (The Smell of Rain in the Balkans, 1986), Gordana Kuić
illustrated how the female protagonist Blanki, a poor Sarajevo Jew, found herself in the world of
technology and commodity culture in interwar Belgrade. Her beau, Marko, a businessman and
later a cinema and newspaper proprietor, facilitated Blanki’s encounters with the city and her
ease with urban signifiers. Kuić wrote: “in August of 1937, Blanki flew in an airplane to Zagreb
for the first time, then they rode in a car along the Adriatic coast. With Marko she rode in a car
for the first time, talked on the phone for the first time.”³² Blanki’s real life counterparts, the
legions of men and women who migrated to the capital in search of work and adventure, might
not have been as lucky. However, the sights, sounds, and smells of Belgrade’s streets lent

residents, an accessible, and often enticing, platform for experiencing the city side-by-side with their neighbors of different means.

As the proceeding sections of this chapter shows, these petit bourgeois and working class Belgraders were increasingly important historical actors in the interwar city. Not only did they constitute the largest new urban population and the most eager set of consumers of entertainment, but they were also a frequent dueling partner of conservatives, elites, and the reform-minded with competing stakes in culture in the city.

**Locating Belgrade in the Center and in the Periphery**

When Belgrade became the capital of unified Yugoslavia, it acquired a new role in the state and in Europe. The city’s urban culture saw a proportionate degree of change that was increasingly inclined toward styles popular in big European cities like Paris, London, and Berlin. In this section, I compare the impressions about Belgrade’s entertainment of newly arrived residents and regional visitors to those of elites and other Yugoslav urbanites. I show that Belgrade was unanimously accepted as a metropolis, but that its centrality in the state was challenged. I argue that many national and cultural elites saw the city as peripheral to Yugoslavia while Europe-minded bourgeoisie complained that the capital’s urban culture was emulating Europe in all the wrong ways. Then, I consider how foreign visitors evaluated the city, with attention to how they located the Yugoslav capital vis-à-vis to its European contemporaries. I show that Belgrade was increasingly recognized as a European metropolis but that it nonetheless retained its subordinate place in the continent’s urban hierarchies.

Before it was the capital of a large Yugoslavia, Belgrade was the head of the independent Serbian Principality after the last of the Ottoman representatives departed in 1867 and it was
later promoted to the capital when the Kingdom of Serbia gained independence in 1878. The mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth century is described in historiography as a moment when Belgrade evolved from an imperial provincial city to a national state capital. During this period, the state and municipal government was invested in reshaping Belgrade to mimic its European contemporaries; for example, the National Theater was built in 1867 as a symbol of both the nation and universal Western elite values. In addition to the arts, the city became a home to the highest concentration of publishing presses, schools and academies, and museums in the state. Within the Kingdom of Serbia, Belgrade also had the most vibrant urban culture, most of which – from the “funny stage” Branov Orfeum to the bohemian quarter Skadarlija – was inherently local. Some foreign forms of entertainment such as the circus, rudimentary film projection, and musical theater did appeared in prewar Belgrade, but urban culture in the capital was unquestionably Serbian. Taken together, it is not surprising that many of Belgrade’s 70,000 residents in 1900, most of who were Serbs, experienced their city as the undisputed center of the state and the nation.

Most historiography fails to problematize urban development in this period but describes it, instead, as inevitable, unaltering, and one-directional. See: Andrić, Antić, Veselinović, i Djurić-Zamolo, Beograd u XIX veku; Ćubrilović, Istorija Beograda; Djurić-Zamolo, Hoteli i kafane; Paunović, Beograd kroz vekove. More recently, Serbian historian Dubravka Stojanović shows that the city was plagued by economic hardships, poorly executed modernizing efforts, ineffective municipal leaders, and resistance to municipal change from residents that collectively complicated linear progress (Stojanović, Kaldurma i asfalt.).

This was a process visible across Eastern Europe; as Nathan Wood writes, “for European cities and their denizens and, indeed, most cities across the globe before the Great War, London and Paris were the models to which they aspired” (Nathaniel D. Wood, “Not Just the National: Modernity and the Myth of Europe in the Capital Cities of Central and Southeastern Europe,” in Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe, eds. Emily Gunzburger Markaš and Tanja Damljanović-Conley (New York: Routlegde, 2010), 261.). Also see: Norris, Belgrade, 87-122.

The nineteenth century bohemian quarter Skadarlija was known for its diverse kafanas. Historian Dubravka Stojanović suggests that these spaces were at the center of social life, democratization, and modernity in nineteenth century Belgrade, not unlike Viennese or Parisian coffeehouses of the same time. (Stojanović, Kaldurma i asfalt, 265-267). In the interwar period, it continued to be a popular haunt among Yugoslav writers, actors, and politicians. However, Skadarlija rarely appears in police files, possibly because it was familiar to an older generation of administrators, culturally mythicized, and contained within Skadarksa Street.
In the decades after the First World War, thousands of migrants from across the unified Yugoslavia arrived in Belgrade seeking opportunity and adventure. In their eyes, the capital was the center of the region. The nearest large cities were Vienna and Budapest – both with interwar populations of more than a million – followed by Athens, which was about three times as large as Belgrade, Bucharest was twice as large, and Sofia was only slightly more populous. Belgrade was thus among the few large urban centers in Southeastern Europe and it remained the largest city in Yugoslavia. Compared with its 1920 population of 112,000, Zagreb rivaled with 108,000 residents, while Ljubljana and Sarajevo resembled Belgrade’s prewar size. As Belgrade urbanized, it attracted increasing numbers of migrants from smaller cities and towns in the region and the state. Like the strongman Dragoljub Aleksić who was drawn to the city as a teenager, many newly arrived Belgraders recalled their first urban experiences fondly. In his memoir, Aleksić wrote that “since [I] was from the provinces and had never seen such a big city, Belgrade was a world of wonders.”

Aleksić worked a series of jobs and spent his free time watching movies; during a screening of a film starring Luciano Albertini in the darkened halls of the cinema, he discovered his lifelong inspiration of bodybuilding. The Yugoslav capital later served as the stage for the budding performer: in the 1920s, he tantalized journalists with his thrilling street stunts, he attracted crowds on buzzing urban squares, and he entertained Belgrade’s variety stage patrons.

Not every recently arrived urbanite, however, met success in the city; for some, it was more dreadful than delightful – though no less metropolitan. A late 1920s article in the daily Novosti (News) presented the case of Mika Tomić, a country bumpkin from a “sleepy province,” who came to Belgrade as a student. Although the article claimed that Tomić “hated alcohol in the

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[37] Aleksić, Aleksićev doživlјaj, 11-12.
depths of his soul,” it did not take long for him to acquire a taste for the bottle under the influence of his new city friends. The article narrated Tomić’s rapid spiral out of control through excessive consumption, careless spending, and dangerous behavior until the young man was driven to insanity and eventually suicide.\(^\text{38}\) The moral panic of stories like these was presented to Belgrade’s population as a lesson in the unsuspecting dangers lurking around every city corner.\(^\text{39}\) Milića Jakovljević’s popular interwar novel *Wounded Eagle (Ranjeni Orao, 1942)* can be read as a similar cautionary urban tale for women. In one instance, a distressed mother rejected a suggestion about her daughter’s continued education in the capital: “I won’t let her go to Belgrade,” she exclaimed, “I’m afraid of the big city – she’ll get caught in its whirlwind and fall to ruin!”\(^\text{40}\)

Indeed, like interwar residents, Yugoslav political and social elites – national conservatives, cultural elites, and the bourgeoisie – rarely debated the notion that Belgrade was a metropolis. Instead, they disputed the city’s endowment as the capital, a challenge aimed to undermine the city’s centrality in state life. Belgrade was poorly prepared for this task after the First World War. Historian Dubravka Stojanović suggests that Yugoslavia inherited an incomplete capital of a prewar state. “In every street, in every part of the city,” Stojanović writes, “the city leaves an overwhelming impressions of being unfinished.”\(^\text{41}\) This sense of being an incomplete capital plagued Belgrade throughout the interwar years. Unfinished state institutions

\(^\text{38}\) “Posle penušavig šampanjca… prljave noći Beograda. Gest jedne kabaretkinje i samoubistvo jednog malodušnika,” *Novosti*, 18 januar 1929, 6. Stories like this were not unique to Belgrade or the urban context; the 1936 film *Reefer Madness*, for example, is an American analog that raised a similar panic around the use of marijuana.

\(^\text{39}\) It is worth reiterating that *Novosti*, like most newspapers cited in this dissertation, are popular presses that were not shy in sensationalizing the news – it was in their interest. It is not surprising, then, that we come across articles decrying the moral corruption of the provinces as much as the city. One report about a violent crime in the central Serbian town Kruševac also drew the conclusion that “immorality in the provinces hides behind images of godfearing Christians and naïve innocence” (“Nemoreal palanke. Sadistički zločin jednog starca,” *Novosti* br. 2156, 9 mart 1928, st. 2).


were perhaps the most visible indication that the city was unprepared to serve as the Yugoslav capital. By the early 1930s, for example, the National Assembly – a building originally planned for construction in the late nineteenth century – had not yet been completed. Instead, the area surrounding it in the very center of the city remained chaotic. In the summer, a gas attendant manned a lonely pump amidst overturned cobblestones and rubble, while the wintertime brought treacherous conditions onto one of the major urban thoroughfares.

Other central parts of the city hovered in a state of transition. Tanja Damljanović Conley observes that “the image of Belgrade at the outbreak of World War II was quite unsynchronized.” While many newly built structures evoked European styles and contributed to the city’s metropolitan character, just as many buildings were left unfinished and their immediate surroundings unregulated. It was not uncommon, for instance, for commercial streets to have stretches of abandoned construction zones or for multi-story residential buildings to be

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surrounded by ground level shacks where livestock was held. Moreover, the lack of basic public works like sewage and heating remained a persistent complaint among interwar residents.

Critics similarly pointed out that the city lacked an aristocratic class while its bourgeoisie were too few and too weak, that urban development had progressed too slowly, and that the city’s economy was not stable enough for a capital whose state numbered 12 million inhabitants. In the spring of 1928, an article in Novosti bemoaned that Belgrade was estranged from the flow of life in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo, and that it failed to serve as a meeting place for Yugoslavs. The author griped about corrupt politicians, snobs, and war profiteers in Belgrade, and declared that “it cannot be considered a capital, because it has lost its role as a leader.” While a capital, as Gábor Gyáni explains “is elevated above other cities in order … to symbolize the political, economic and intellectual values of the state,” Belgrade’s interwar critics sought to negate its officially endowed centrality – but also to undermine its urban primacy in the state.

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45 Gyáni, Identity and the Urban Experience, 5.
Questions about Belgrade’s suitability as the capital were uncommonly manifested in the struggle over urban space. A public debate about Ivan Meštrović’s statue *The Victor (Pobjednik)* in the late-1920s aptly captures the arsenal of complaints – and their fragmentation – levied by national conservatives. *The Victor* had been commissioned by the Belgrade City Authority to commemorate Serbia’s victory in the Balkan Wars, but it was ready only in the second part of the 1920s. The final version of monument – the one we can see in Belgrade today – is a fourteen-meter column with a statue of a muscular bronze man grounded with a sword and holding a falcon. The most vocally raised problem with *The Victor* was the bronze man’s nudity. Despite his chiseled, athletic physique that was deemed respectable in the case of athletics, conservative critics protested the frontal exposure as an affront to public morality of the “not yet spoiled morals of our citizens.” The offending monument was also taken to task because some considered the statue too muscular, too athletic, and too masculine to represent a victorious war veteran. More radical reinterpretations of *The Victor* even suggested that the monument should depict a wounded soldier with a crutch and bandages. Some complaints of Serbian conservative cited that a Croatian sculptor could not properly commemorate the victory of the Kingdom of Serbia. Yugoslav-minded ones argued that the previous state’s triumphant body should not stand as a symbol in the center of the new state’s capital. In the daily *Vreme (Time)*, the journalist Miloš Andjelković griped that “the goal of a monument is not to glorify the ordinary man, as its goal is not to glorify his anatomy. These sorts of monuments lead to moral decadence, and they should be boycotted because they evoke beastly characteristic and carnal rage.” Historian Radina Vučetić argues that national conservatives in interwar Belgrade resisted *The Victor* as a

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symbol of encroaching Europeanization. In their opinion, the statue was not an adequate symbol of Serbia or Yugoslavia – and the state capital was not an adequate site for its display. On the contrary, the monument’s location exiled from the center of the city but perched on the edge of Kalemegdan park is a concession to cultural elites and bourgeoisie patrons who embraced The Victor as an urban marker of the primary of both the arts and Europe in the capital.

Belgrade’s lively entertainment was another point of contention for national conservatives. Serbian national conservatives argued that modern dancing was a glorification of foreign frivolities at the same time that it was an affront to the memory of those fallen in wartime. Yugoslav-leaning conservatives pointed to the loosening sexual mores of the dance floor, and suggested that youth have “put aside all dances except American ones,” such as the new dance style called “parking” that entailed less movement and more twisting, intertwining, and embracing to the beat of the music. In the early 1920s, an article in the daily Politička (Politics) voiced concerns about the “immoral craze” of the One-Step. Although the author recognized that dancing was not a new urban phenomena – styles like the waltz and the cardinal had been popular among prewar elite – he expressed concern about the different ways dancers interacted with one another on the floor: rather than just holding hands, jazz steps were provocative because they demanded more physical contact between partners. More than that, the article was adamant that foreign entertainment represented a danger to the nation on a deeper level. “At a time when there is so much fear about bolshevism sweeping up Europe to the east,” he wrote, “people have allowed another danger from the west to rule: after five years of war and

death, dancing has triggered another social insanity… a kingdom of One-Step and Foxtrot.” In other words, Belgrade’s national conservatives interpreted entertainment from the big city as a menacing ideology.

As for national conservatives, Belgrade did not stand at the center of the Yugoslav project in the eyes of cultural elites, but rather at its periphery. In this case, however, the critique levied against the capital was its lack of a critical mass of European signifiers. In an early 1920s article, for example, Novi list (New Paper) reported that a touring exhibit of Yugoslav painters had a disappointingly low turnout in Belgrade, despite the fact that the capital, unlike Zagreb and Ljubljana, did not even home permanent gallery space. Years later, the city remained an uncertain center for elite Yugoslav culture. When ground was finally broken for Belgrade’s first arts pavilion in 1927, its location was symbolically chosen by the members of the Cvijeta Zuzorić Association for the Friends of the Arts (Udruženje prijatelja umjetnosti Cvijeta Zuzorić) to be on the former fairgrounds of the downtown Kalemegdan Park. Instead of a mishmash of carousels, freak shows, and magicians that had attracted the city’s working classes, newly arrived rural migrants, and kids to the park, the pavilion was intended to reclaim it for the practice bourgeois respectability. A newspaper reported, “it has been decided that Kalemegdan will be the oasis for artists from now on. As one group of patrons has departed, another one has arrived.” The royal court, political leaders, and the Orthodox Church celebrated the pavilion’s opening as the new space of culture. However, an increased visibility of the arts in the city center did little to assuage the critiques of cultural elites; even with the opening of the pavilion,

52 “Jugoslovenska umetnička izložba,” Novi list, 13 juni 1922, 3.
53 Cvijeta Zuzović (1552-1648) was an educated society woman from Dubrovnik who exemplified women’s participation in the arts for interwar Belgraders: she had been both a poet and hostess of salon literary meetings.
the Cvijeta Zuzorić Association cited “an indifferent public” in Belgrade as its largest challenge.\textsuperscript{55}

But what troubled cultural elites most was that the combined consuming power of the fastest growing urban classes – the petite bourgeoisie and the workers – was increasingly slanted toward entertainment. More alarmingly, it was slanted toward culture from big European cities. The ardent consumption of foreign entertainment such as circuses, cinemas, and illustrated presses disputed the cultural hegemony of local elites, as the falling patronage of the arts threatened their moral and intellectual leadership. One critic expressed regret that the Belgrade stage had incorporated the wrong European signifiers, short skirts, skimp outfits, and an abundance of dancing in an effort to attract audiences and profit financially.\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, the president of the Association of Actors complained about the difficulties posed to domestic theater by the visiting tour of the German circus Greich in Yugoslavia. The president claimed that “the circus has absorbed the total attention of our diverse public, and it has taken large sums of money, and at the same time paralyzed the work of all our cultural institutions.”\textsuperscript{57} The Minister of Education forwarded a note with a similar sentiment to the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1932, suggesting that cabarets and cinemas were damaging to theaters. Hinting at the fragile status of “legitimate” theater, the minister suggested that “its interests must be protected.”\textsuperscript{58} Yet the fundamental concern of the Minister of Education in this case – a state official who was likely also a member of the cultural elite – was a concern for the legitimacy of the arts and the economic sustenance of “learned” performers that the growing patronage of entertainment challenged. The French performer Josephine Baker (1906-1975) was one such

\textsuperscript{55}Vučetić-Mladenović, \textit{Evropa na Kalamegdanu}, 32.
\textsuperscript{56}Amater, “Ki-Ki-Ki u Manježu,” \textit{Ilustrovani list}, 30 januar 1927, 7.
\textsuperscript{57}AJ, MP, f. 360, j. 88-166-32.
provocation to elite propriety despite the fact that her reception was overwhelmingly positive.\(^5^9\)

Although most newspapers celebrated Baker’s 1929 visit to Belgrade, one article snidely reported how an audience member, the Belgrade publisher Mr. S. B. Cvijanović, received a kiss from Baker and allegedly confessed to cherishing it more than “having published so many pieces of European culture.”\(^6^0\)

Belgrade’s upper-class elites were harsh in their appraisals of the city’s urban culture, seeing it as a misrepresentation of the experience of the big European city. Mihovil Logar, a musician and instructor, remembered his frustration with the National Theater’s small stage that failed to accommodate a full orchestra and his disgust at the outhouse that greeted patrons as they entered and exited the concert hall. “I was dizzy with the realization that something like this exists in the capital of Yugoslavia,” he wrote decades later.\(^6^1\) When it came to entertainment, Logar took issue with the rowdiness of smoking, eating, and drinking at film projections,” suggesting that the city’s urban culture had appropriated all the wrong aspects of Europe.\(^6^2\) The cultural critic Boško Tokin, no stranger to Europe’s urban centers, described Belgrade as a “jungle” and its veritable central thoroughfare Terazije as a čaršija, a term usually used to refer to the marketplace of Ottoman towns. In his early 1930s modernist novel Terazije, Tokin described Belgrade as a phantasmagoric metropolis:

> It was all just an illusion of culture and facades. From the outside, Belgrade resembled a big city, a European city, an Americanized city – something everyone was always glad to bring up. But, in reality, Belgrade remained... a refuge for people who have not yet become western and who have not yet been unburdened.

\(^5^9\) Josephine Baker was an American-born dancer, singer, and actress whose career was launched on the Parisian variety stage but later evolved to film and charity work. While she carried big city associations of provocative costumes, the Charleston, and the iconic pageboy haircut in when she arrived in Belgrade, Baker’s global cultural significance reaches far beyond fashion, dance, and, indeed, the interwar period. For more on Baker, see chapter four.

\(^6^0\) “Zbrinjavanje mrtvih i nezbrinuti živi. Džozefina i crni dani belaca,” Politika, 7 april 1929, 8.


by the Balkans. There were many contradictions. Everywhere. Undigested, unstable, and transient.\(^{63}\)

And while there is no doubt that Tokin positioned Belgrade on the European map – his frequent comparisons to other large cities alone testify to this – he imagined it nonetheless as peripheral to the European urban hierarchy. According to Tokin, Belgrade was a metropolis, but not yet European enough. Around the same time, the newspaper *Beogradske novosti* (*Belgrade News*) reported on the “circus within a circus” during the visit of the touring troupe Olympia. As the paper suggested, while the performance would have been considered uninspiring everywhere but in the provinces, the Belgrade audience filled the bleachers. But it was not only the public’s poor taste that bothered the reporter, it was also the behavior unbecoming of an urban public; the audience was said to be “so temperamental, so soulful, and so terribly rude” that fights and arguments were not uncommon.\(^{64}\) Again, the Yugoslav capital was presented as a metropolis, but one peripheral to the well-mannered European ones.

As the capital of an enlarged new state, however contested, interwar Belgrade began to appear more frequently on itineraries of foreign travelers – and in the imagination of Europe. The impressions of visitors to the Yugoslav capital hints at how contemporary European urbanites perceived the city’s urban culture. The British author Rebecca West dedicated several chapters to Belgrade in her mammoth travelogue through Yugoslavia in the 1930s. Her husband, the banker Henry Andrews, succinctly related his opinion of the Yugoslav capital, one seemingly shared across Western Europe: “as the Viennese talk of it,” Belgrade was “at the end of the earth, a barbaric village.”\(^{65}\) West, on the other hand, had a different first impression. She wrote that “the

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\(^{63}\) Tokin, *Terazije*, 36-37.  
railway station at Belgrade is like any big railway station anywhere. It was odd to step back from
the world where everything had its strong local flavour into scenes which were familiar precisely
because they were so flavourless, so international in the pejorative sense of the word.”66 In
West’s opinion, the customs of the countryside were the region’s greatest asset and she
interpreted Yugoslavia’s urban centers as disappointing replicas of the European big city. In
Zagreb, West criticized the visibility of the imperial legacy of Austria-Hungary, while in
Belgrade the locals appeared “not yet familiar with the circumstances of urban life.”67 Finally, on
her departure from the city, she declared that she “felt a sudden abatement of [her] infatuation for
Yugoslavia” after her visit to Belgrade.68

Lena A. Yovitchitch, an interwar traveler of Serbian heritage, approached her visit to
Belgrade with an affinity similar to West. Although she praised Belgrade as a vibrant city, she
also noted the “total absence of any ancient or historical buildings in town. No relics of the past,
no old churches, no landmarks dating from centuries gone by, are to be found in Belgrade to-day;
there is not a single monument of any particular interest such as most towns can boast of.”69
Moreover, despite the fashionable shops and crowds, Yovitchitch criticized the cultural merit of
the Yugoslav capital; for example, she suggested that the collection of the National Museum was
not even comparable with “the splendid museums in foreign capitals.”70 Like Yovitchitch, the
Hungarian scholar Dr. Kováts recorded his mixed impressions of the Yugoslav capital in a two-
part newspaper article after a 1927 visit. Kováts was dazzled by the city’s urban culture:

“Belgrade is most lively in the evening… almost every other building in the central square

66 West, Black Lamb and Gray Falcon, 457.
67 West excuses Belgraders’ city life faux pas (such as a diet devoid of vegetables and mothers who do not allow
their children to play on city streets) by suggesting that “it would hardly be otherwise, since thirty-five years ago
there was not a town in Serbia the size of Rockford, Illinois” (West, Black Lamb and Gray Falcon, 473.).
68 West, Black Lamb and Gray Falcon, 482.
69 Lena A. Yovitchitch, Pages from Here and There in Serbia (Belgrade: S.B.Cvijanovich, 1926), 3.
70 Yovitchitch, Pages from Here and There, 101.
houses a pub where the happy people of the city have fun. Most ladies are dressed elegantly and in good taste, shops are open until late, and the evenings are certainly most lively.” However, Kováts viewed the rail station that West deemed disparagingly homogenous as provincial and hardly worthy of the Simplon-Orient Express that bypassed Budapest and travelled from Paris to Istanbul through Yugoslavia.71

Yet even as foreign visitors spoke disparagingly about one aspect of the city or another, they rarely contested that Belgrade was a metropolis comparable – however peripherally – to its European contemporaries. One of the most important reasons why Belgrade was so easily accepted among the ranks of Paris, London, and Berlin was because it was privileged as the political, economic, and social capital of unified Yugoslavia. The view from without identified the city as the state’s uncontested capital. The view from within, on the other hand, was not always harmonious. Like the city itself and its urban space, Belgrade’s colorfully foreign urban culture was called into question by national conservatives, cultural elites, and the bourgeoisie, as well as elites from other Yugoslav cities, who saw it as an inadequate center – although not always for the same reasons. Belgrade’s residents, many newly minted urbanites, were perhaps the unanimous champions of the city’s urban culture as unconditionally metropolitan. To them, the city was the center of their everyday life, their state, and their Europe.

One-Directional European Cultural Networks between the Two Wars

New transnational networks play an important role in the story of Belgrade’s urban culture after the First World War, especially as links promoting increasing interconnectedness among cities. Jerome Hodos suggests that cities are the “central nodes in the economic, cultural,

and political flows that constitute globalization. As nodes, cities concentrate social interactions and are the source of innovations, new ideas, culture, and power.\textsuperscript{72} Hodos distinguishes between global cities – those defined by scholars like Saskia Sassen and Immanuel Wallerstein as economic coordinating nodes in the world capitalist system or nerve centers of global capitalism – from cities that are globally integrated. In this section, I argue that Belgrade was globally integrated (rather than a global city). I show that the city was peripheral in the flow of European transnational connections; that is to say that, Belgrade was a node receiving hegemonic culture from big European cities, but artifacts from its own urban culture were rarely incorporated to create bidirectional networks. I focus first on fashionable dress and show one instance of goods arriving one-directionally from Europe. Then, I examine the flow of performers to and through Belgrade to reiterate how foreign entertainers were integrated into the local urban culture. Finally, I consider broader European ideas about entertainment and how they were relayed, read, and re-interpreted in Belgrade.

After the First World War, physical networks of movement – roads, rail, and water transport – gradually linked Yugoslavia, and especially its capital, to European markets. While the degree of consumption varied widely across the urban classes, arriving foreign goods like photographs and films, automobiles and bicycles, hats and hairclips were more frequently in supply as they were more frequently in demand. The women’s magazine Žena i svet (\textit{Woman and the World}) for example, offered foreign fashion ads, especially those evoking the styles from Paris and London, as both a form of commercial advertisement as well as instructional manual for readers. A feature on contemporary fashion in the mid-1920s informed readers that they needed outfits for different seasons, for all times of the day, and for certain leisure activities

\textsuperscript{72} Hodos, \textit{Second Cities}, 3.
styled in “Parisian chic.” Prêt-à-porter clothing is an example of European goods that came to be consumed and reproduced in the Yugoslav capital. Some of the clothing sold in Belgrade’s shops certainly did arrive directly from Paris, London, and Berlin, though it would have been accessible only to the small numbers of wealthier residents. For an everyday Belgrader, style was more likely to be reproduced based in the images printed in local magazines; as Ljiljana Blagojević writes, “ladies’ fashion in the 1920s followed the dicta of Paris stitch for stitch, as Belgrade salons frivolously made exact copies of French models and sold them at ten percent of the original price.” Many shops dubbed “fashion studios” (saloni mode) and tailors advertised their services in the back pages of those same magazines, offering to outfit their customers in “the most modern Parisian suits” they gleaned in the spreads. The hairdresser Jelena Ostojić similarly promoted her salon near Slavia Square on the promise that she was skilled in producing the popular cropped style “à la Garçonne” worn by women in French and British cities.

Fig. 1.3: The May 1931 cover of the women’s illustrated magazine Žena i svet showed smartly dressed urbanites wearing bubikopf or à la Garçonne hairstyles, fur stoles, and dresses accenting their thin figures (and not necessarily feminine robustness) – styles that were popular across Europe.

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73 Žena i svet, 15 februar 1926.
74 Blagojević, The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture, 143-144.
75 Žena i svet, 15 mart 1925.
Although it is difficult to judge the degree to which everyday residents successfully mimicked European styles, elites faulted the less-than-sophisticated Belgraders for misinterpreting the nuances of foreign style – reminding them of their peripheral standing among the fashionable world. In a Politika article from the early interwar period, for example, one author expressed shock at seeing “new” trends like hatless women and men with loosened neckties on the city streets. The author, speaking on behalf of bourgeois society, wrote that the sight was shocking because it was a mistaken appropriation of something utterly unfashionable – in this case, he claimed German women wore no hat simply because they could not afford one, while men loosened their necktie in a grossly display of their “bull necks” – which, in turn, revealed the Belgraders in question as European “posers.” To add to this insult, he speculated that these faux-urbanites naively looked to Budapest for style tips. Unlike the moralizing of some conservative observers that rejected European styles as counterproductive to patriarchal values, this particular author maintained that European styles were illegible to everyday Belgraders. The real reason behind the bourgeois mockery, however, was the fear that affordable fashions would eliminate the distinction between “moral” and “immoral” women, underlining the concern that an upper class woman would be indistinguishable from the petite bourgeoisie or a house servant on the city streets. Indeed, this points to the elite struggle for the metropolis – a struggle that had largely been lost by the middle of the interwar years when the city’s growing petit bourgeois residents were seemingly indistinguishable from their upper class neighbors on city streets.

The flow of people through Belgrade, particularly foreign performers arriving in Yugoslavia via the London or Berlin, moved through the same cultural networks that brought

77 Popović, Moda u Beogradu, 56.
European goods to Yugoslavia – and in the same direction. In 1931, for example, the popular press *Ilustrovano vreme (Illustrated Times)* reported that local audiences expected the Hollywood actress and cabaret performer Nina Mae McKinley [*sic*] to resemble the Parisian Josephine Baker, who had performed in Belgrade two years earlier, in both costume and repertoire. The article suggested that the public was “surprised that she appeared on stage in a long, black dress that was elegant and well-fastened” rather than the short feathered frock and banana skirt that had become Baker’s trademark in the late 1920s. Belgraders’ confusion was further perpetuated by the fact that both performers were black. Indeed, the article suggests that McKinley sang sad songs “from the Mississippi region,” just as it had been reported that Baker was born “in the state Mississippi in the town St. Louis.” The conflation of black female performers with an association of the southern United States is not unlike the homogenization of Hollywood and Parisian entertainment. At another level, however, the conflation of Nina Mae McKinley with Josephine Baker signals that Belgrade participated in European urban culture only peripherally – not enough for its audiences to develop a refined eye to distinguish between two entertainers who were decidedly different in Europe itself.

Local performers, too, mimicked European trends and advertised themselves as comparable to foreign entertainers. For example, the illusionist Sreten Obradović, known by his performing name Reta, compared himself to the well-known Italian protean performer Leopold Fregoli. The dance instructor Petar R. Stojić posed as an arbiter of the big European city in the Yugoslav capital. When making cameos in Belgrade’s illustrated presses, Stojić kept the reading public current about recent trends from Paris, New York, and London, while he presented standard European favorites like the Tango, the Shimmy, and the Foxtrot to his students at the

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78 *Ilustrovano vreme*, 14 mart 1931, 226.
Akademija and Studio dance schools. Despite their comparable pedigrees to foreign contemporaries, Yugoslav performers rarely met success in another European metropolis. It was not for lack of imagination. Petar Stojić, for example, proposed to propagate the popularity of the kolo, the basic folk dance of the region, to Europe by suggesting its jiggling and hopping were of the upmost appeal.80 The strongman Dragoljub Aleksić considered taking his show to Paris only once when he was unable to secure an airplane in Yugoslavia for one of his stunts. In reference to this proposed trip abroad, the daily Vreme boasted that the country and its capital has become too small for him.”81 However, Aleksić never traveled as a performer outside Yugoslavia in the interwar period. Instead, like the great majority of domestic performers, he toured the state and feared the public’s short attention span. It was not lost on him that he stood far from Europe’s entertainment centers – close enough to glean their contemporaries but too far to join them.

European ideas about urban entertainment arrived in Belgrade by way of the same transnational networks creating new links across the continent in the early twentieth century. They transported the practice of the European metropolis to interwar Belgrade – and changed the way interwar residents engaged with the city, the prevailing social hierarchies, and one another. This happened, for example, in the democratized halls of the cinema, where all patrons were reduced to paying customers regardless of their capability to attend the movies as an everyday expenditure or only as an indulgence. Although Belgrade’s variety theaters were only mildly provocative relative to Parisian and Berlin stages, they similarly redefined the spatial practice of upper class sexuality in Belgrade along metropolitan lines. Magazines like Comœdia tirelessly championed urban French, British, and German models of the popular stage for Belgrade. In the summer of 1924, when the National Theater was on holiday, the magazine celebrated the actors’

81 Undated 1929, reprinted in Aleksić, Aleksićev doživlaj, 61.
participation in staging “soirées libres” that mirrored “Parisian and metropolitan boulevard theater.” As the article suggested, “the Belgrade audience is an audience of a big city, and as such it has a distinct mentality and particular desires – it needs more than just what appears on the stage of the National Theater.”

Like Comœdia, other illustrated magazines promoted European entertainment when they reprinted stories and photographs about big city fun, when they advertised local establishments hosting European-style entertainment, and when they encouraged readers to take part in popular trends like dances, clothes, and “modern” worldviews. Venue proprietors, publishers, and shop owners also played a role in promoting these ideas about entertainment in the capital, just as performers did themselves. But perhaps their most ardent supporters were urban consumers themselves: Belgraders who attended performances, purchased illustrated presses, and learned the new dance styles. By all accounts, the consuming public for entertainment was represented by wider swath of the urban classes willing to spend a part of their income on big city European fun.

New ideas about entertainment travelled among big and small European cites and precipitated debates about the prevalence of foreign entertainment in Paris as in Belgrade. Before jazz became French in the public imagination, as Jeffery Jackson argues, it was also considered an irrational, American affront to French music. Jazz was seen as a sign of cultural transition: “it seemed ‘noisy’ and ‘mechanical.’ To those who heard bombs and explosions in jazz, the music extended the wartime chaos into the postwar age. Furthermore, it represented culture in motion. Jazz was an American music … [it] posed a crucial challenge to many in France by suggesting the arrival of an era when old national boundaries and artistic categories were far more porous

82 “Soirées libres,” Comœdia, 8 juli 1924, 11.
than before.” Like the French chanson, new types of entertainment displaced music halls in Britain after the First World War. As Judith Walkowitz shows in her study of interwar London, foreign trends were quite popular among urban audiences. Walkowitz cites clubs that offered hot American jazz but had to employ British musicians from Cardiff, Africa, and the West Indies to impersonate African-Americans. As Walkowitz argues, “adaptations to British taste not only involved a local refashioning of foreign imports; they also demanded a theatrical social masquerade by service workers and their employers.” And, in the case of Berlin, Peter Jelavich shows that much of the city’s interwar revue was imported from Paris, London, and New York, in contrast to the city’s vibrant local prewar cabaret scene. In conjunction with the booming masses of newcomers in the 1920s, Jelavich argues that entertainment venues “demonstrated their cosmopolitan allures not by touting Berlin, but rather by presenting an array of foreign numbers.” In other words just as Belgrade’s conservatives decried the loss of tradition and elites feared for toppled the prevailing cultural hierarchy, foreign ideas about entertainment stirred similar contestations in most European capitals.

But metropolitan ideas traveling across transnational networks never flattened the European urban hierarchy. Cities like Paris, London, and Berlin were powerful capitals were privileged in their ability to dictate the contours of urban culture. For instance, heterogeneous identities of performers who arrived in London were consolidated into a single one: Londoner. Similarly, foreign entertainers who spent time in Berlin – Jelavich terms this the “international star circuit” – became Berliners when they toured elsewhere. Belgrade did not share the same transformative force of the big European city. While foreign entertainment arriving via

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transnational networks did bridge the spatial and temporal gap between Belgrade its urban European contemporaries, this relationship remained unbalanced. The big European city was found in all corners of the Yugoslav capital, but there was very little culture from Belgrade that reached foreign cities. Indeed, the entertainment industry of the Yugoslav capital was much smaller and less developed. More significantly, however, the relationships that dictated the political, economic, and social power balance during the interwar years across the continent also impacted the dissemination of urban culture. Belgrade was peripheral to these relationships; its place on the receiving end of transnational cultural networks – rarely the producing one – relegated it to the margins of the European metropolitan core.

**Uneven European Synchronicities**

As European entertainment funneled into Belgrade, so did the shifting temporal standards that lent residents the impression of relative synchronicity with their big city contemporaries. Yet, Belgrade’s own ticking urban time was never synchronous with cities like Paris, London, and Berlin. Unsurprisingly, twentieth century conceptions of the “age of speed” originated in the metropolis. But just as Belgrade was spatially peripheral to the European metropolitan network, it remained temporally apart from the synchronicity of the big city. In this section, I first discuss the tension between national time and the encroaching pace of European urban time in Belgrade. Then, I explore how cultural networks produced a sense of temporal synchronicity with the big European city, without actually achieving it. Finally, I examine speed as a category of urban culture and discuss how it was interpreted, appropriated, and enacted – and slowed down – in interwar Belgrade.
The consolidation of a shared past into a unified and linear time grounds almost any imagined community; as Benedict Anderson suggests, “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” forms the time-conception of such communities.\textsuperscript{86} For Anderson, newspapers and novels play an important role in the construction of the modern nation and the homogeneous flow of its time and, as we will see, these same artifacts are agents in the homogenization of urban time. In Yugoslavia, national and elite-sponsored culture was formative in laying the foundation of a unified South Slavic community whose historic time was synchronized. For instance, the sculptor Ivan Meštrović designed monuments depicting peasant costumes from across the region, the novelist Ivo Andrić imagined the diverse co-existence of early modern Bosnia as analogous to twentieth century Yugoslavia, and Sokol sports rallies assembled youth from across the state to perform the same acrobatic displays.\textsuperscript{87} The intent of each of these examples was the codification of historic time into a linear narrative corroborating Yugoslav nationhood. More than any other site, Belgrade was burdened with the task of representing the Yugoslav nation(s) as a single eternal and historic entity while, at the same time, embodying a modern urban capital. However, the city’s accelerated ticking stood as a challenge to the national conservative’s equally modern embrace of pre-modern time as an idyllic guardian of the nation. For cultural elites, it was primarily the hectic pace of foreign entertainment that presented an attack on the laborious ebb of the arts. This is why many observers described the flow of time in the city as unstable and unpredictable – the opposite of national-historic time said to be exemplified by village life. This is also why anti-modern, anti-western, and anti-urban sentiment was not uncommon among national and cultural elites.


\textsuperscript{87} As Andrew Wachtel shows that national time was a matter of uniting multiple national histories, and their temporalities (Wachtel, \textit{Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation}).
National and urban time constituted two competing temporalities in interwar Belgrade, poignantly expressed in the power struggle over night venues. National conservatives and cultural elites in Belgrade saw that heedless extension of leisure into the night and the even early morning hours in the capital as nothing short of dangerous – a threat to respectability and patriarchal values that were considered the pillars of national identity. One author reported that “nighttime life is developing at unbelievable speeds. It receives everything that’s dirty, trashy, and rotten from big western cities.” He alluded to a sort of colonization of the local time and space by “problematic types with venereal diseases,” singers with strained voices, and thieving women who did not hesitate to take advantage of unsuspecting guests “quickly, with acrobatic speed.” Moreover, the author bemoaned how the intrusion of European time in everyday life transformed “national” spaces (with uncanny Ottoman origins) such as brew houses (bozadžinica), eateries (aščinica), and artisan shops (turski ćepenak) into degenerate nighttime ones like bars, cabarets, and skyscrapers. After the King’s 1929 coup, urban order became a heightened priority and police raids began to target spaces of European-style entertainment. However, municipal ordinances like the closing time ban worked only to underline respectability of the daytime and its association with national time, while linking the night with subversion, degeneration, and danger – and pleasure – of urban time. Belgrade’s upper class patrons, as I show in the coming chapters, not uncommonly mobilized the cover of the night to take part in social and sexual transgressions but, in all matters public, sided with conservatives and elites in criticizing the afterhours entertainment. While it is not inconceivable that residents simultaneously participated in national and urban cultures, the latter strengthened at the expense of the former during the interwar years.

88 “Posle penušavge šampanjca...” Novosti, 18 januar 1929, 6.
European big city time took hold in Belgrade in much the same way as national time: as a homogenous temporality binding an imagined metropolitan community. In this case, Belgrade’s place as a receiving site of European trends gave residents the feeling that their days and nights were becoming synchronized with those of the big city. While entertainment played an important part in lending an illusion of a faster pace of life, transnational cultural networks narrowed the temporal distance separating Belgrade from big city acceleration: telegraphs and telephones enabled up-to-date reporting, fashions from metropolitan streets were reproduced in illustrated presses within a season’s time, and quickly printed musical scores enabled Yugoslav urbanites to dance in step with their European contemporaries. Writing about late nineteenth century Cracow, historian Nathan Wood offers a model of the “inter-urban matrix” that similarly lent residents an impression of sharing a synchronous culture with big cities. “What matters here,” Wood writes, “is the mere likelihood that Cracovians … could have read many of the same stories, while performing similar urban rituals like riding the tram or sitting in a favorite café.” Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, and thanks in large part to the concoction of new transnational connections and new technology, Belgraders increasingly had the impression that they were experiencing the same entertainment as Parisians, Londoners, or Berliners – at the same time.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Belgrade was more synchronized with the world than it had ever been before. For interwar residents, the experience amounted to an impression that space and time had been compressed. Observers internalized urban accelerations into everyday life in interwar Belgrade. A short story from the early 1920s noted this shifting conception of time: “Belgrade is – without a doubt – not yet a European city… but it shows tendencies in that direction. It’s still a patriarchal city, but it’s going forward and this is why it’s interesting. The

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‘old’ soul of the city is struggling, but… with the winds of western culture, it will be demolished and the west will arrive.”\(^{90}\) A visitor to the city around the same time noted the visibility of European time on city streets:

Belgrade has earned a reputation for changes, rapid changes… the extraordinary building epidemic which held sway for several years after the war, resulted in the town being completely transformed. It is not only meant reconstruction, but, one may say, a new city was raised in place of the old one. With unparalleled speed, houses appeared like mushrooms after rain, and although this was but the first step in the great evolution destined to emerge from a heap of ruins, the subsequent staged of progress still continues in a striking manner.\(^{91}\)

Tokin also evoked speed as evidence of the hectic pace of urban life in Terazije. As the narrator declared at the onset, “life was fast, and one could quickly make it, and then be swallowed up by the city quicker yet… everything was on the move, life was burning up, sped up, and feverish.”\(^{92}\)

Tokin also relied on speed as a literary device: he wrote in a choppy journalistic tone: he introduced the main characters in a series of cinematic scenes and he described the city through fragmented images of new urban spaces like hair salons, cinemas, and stadiums. Literary critic Svetlana Slapšak likens Tokin’s novel to Walter Ruttmann film Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis (Die Sinfonie der Großstadt, 1927) in its presentation of Belgrade as a city defined by its unstable and unpredictable speed. As Slapšak sees it, Tokin’s “esthetic of speed” is marked by the undeniable flow and change of time – yet one that lacks any logic.\(^{93}\)

When it came to urban entertainment, especially that arriving from abroad, dizzying speeds were not uncommon. However, entertainment was not always in step with Europe’s metropolitan centers. Some types of entertainment arrived with a delay, others were slower to develop an audience in Yugoslavia, and some simply moved too far ahead of Belgrade’s own

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\(^{90}\) Okica Munjić, “‘Doktor’ hipnotičar. Moji prvi koraci. Anegdota o tome kako sam prepoznao ‘Majmunca.’ Prvi pogled bačen na ‘doktora’ kod ‘Moskve,’” Novosti br. 531, god. III, 8 februar 1923, st. 3.

\(^{91}\) Yovitchitch, Pages from Here and There, 82.

\(^{92}\) Tokin, Terazije, 37.

\(^{93}\) Svetlana Slapšak prologue to Tokin, Terazije, xvi.
ticking urban time. In 1939, for example, the Grand Prix races were held in the Yugoslav capital, the first motorized race in nearly ten years. While this spectator event, one that stirred a sensation around the city and drew nearly one in four residents into the audience, at first glance appears to be only an instance of Belgrade’s synchronization with its big city contemporaries, it also reveals the unevenness of this synchronization. Although Bratislav Petković describes the automobile as an interwar symbol “modernization, progress, and [the] orientation towards Europe and the world,” less than one on a thousand Yugoslav citizens possessed a motor vehicle by the mid-1930s (compared to 53 in a thousand French or fifteen in a thousand Germans). Moreover, many city streets were not paved for cars. So that when the Grand Prix – its speeding cars and their foreign drivers – arrived in Belgrade in 1939, it stood not as evidence of synchronicity but rather as proof of its lopsidedness. What is more, Germany orchestrated the Grand Prix races as a political project to assert Nazi superiority to a reluctant public, rather than an act of cultural inclusion of one contemporary by another. Similar socio-political motives informed the arrival of other foreign goods, performers, and ideas such as fashion from Britain or jazz from France.

In other words, no matter how eager Belgraders were as consumers, the Yugoslav capital was peripheral to flow of hegemonic culture – as another audience for big city European fun but never its star.

**Conclusion**

Interwar writer Vladimir Velmar-Janković mused in *The View from Kalemegdan (Pogled s Kalemegdana, 1938)* that “those who live by the comparisons of how much Belgrade is not Europe or, worse yet, how it should be more like Europe in its appearance and its residents, those

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95 Miljković, “Grand Prix Beograda 1939.”
will likely suffer from a spiritual ailment, jealousy, suspicion, cynicism, helplessness, and hysteria.”96 Of course, the critique does not apply to all Belgrade elites, particularly national conservatives who lobbied for Belgrade to be less like Europe. Instead, Velmar-Janković addressed Belgrade’s Euro-centric residents – cultural elites, the bourgeoisie, and many everyday residents – who looked longingly to cities like Paris, London, and Berlin. Yet, as literary scholar Zoran Milutanović reminds us, incessant comparisons to some distant other were not unique to Yugoslav elites during the interwar years; at a moment when new connections stretched across the continent in the aftermath of the First World, all of Europe was growing metaphorically closer.97

Debates about Belgrade’s Europeanness were as prevalent during the interwar period as they are today. Most importantly, they closely informed the contestations of the city’s status as the Yugoslav capital. During the 1920s and 1930s, Belgrade was the head of an emerging international player, a growing economic hub, and a vibrant urban center. Interwar Belgrade was as European as it was metropolitan. Yet these attributes often pushed it to the periphery of the Yugoslav project for many Euro-skeptics and Euro-centrics alike. At the same time, Belgrade stood on the weaker side of the power relationships that defined Europe between the two wars. Although neither backward nor provincial, Belgrade was politically, economically, and socially peripheral to Europe’s metropolitan centers. In terms of urban culture like entertainment, this lopsided relationship pitted the city at the margins of hegemonic European culture.

97 Milutanović, Getting Over Europe, 17.
Chapter Two
Entertainment and the Shifting Politics of Culture in Interwar Yugoslavia

Introduction

In 1936, the Association of Actors of Yugoslavia wrote to the Minister of Education to address a grievance on behalf of Tatjana Gez, an actress at the National Theater in Belgrade who was also employed as a dancer at the variety stage Krokodil. Gez complained to the Association that the owner pressured her to work as a barmaid well after her duties onstage had ended, which was a breach of the 1929 code for female employees in bars, clubs, and variety theaters. Setting aside Gez’s situation and the infraction of entertainment labor laws, the Association picked up the case as a platform to forward another concern to the state. The Association protested that Krokodil and many such establishments in the city were billed as “cheerful theaters” (vesela pozorišta), but that the genre hardly merits to be termed “theater.” The Association believed that the improper use of the category was misleading and ultimately damaging to the reputation of “legitimate” theater.\(^1\) Going beyond its usual demands for lowered taxation, state endorsement, and protected status for its members, the Association engaged in a power struggle that lies at the heart of interwar cultural politics. The records of the Ministry of Education reveal that state agencies were similarly complicit in coopting the right to name and categorize culture. For instance, the Minister approved Milan Živković’s work permit for a smattering of one act plays, dances, and music concerts only under the condition that the shows be billed as “entertaining evenings” (zabavne večeri) rather than “theater performances.”\(^2\) Similarly, the Russian émigré troupe Vi-Va-Vo was ordered to remove the term “theater” from its advertisements and advised

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\(^1\) AJ, MP, f. 360, j. 111-254-936.
to stress its “cabaret character.”

In the official platforms of professional associations, as well as in the public protests of cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded members of Belgrade’s bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie, entertainment stood on the bottom tier of the cultural hierarchy. While the arts were described as serious and educational, entertainment was deemed fun and frivolous. If the arts were highbrow, then entertainment was lowbrow. And, while the arts were celebrated for their moral superiority, rewarded with state financial patronage, and endowed with social legitimacy, entertainment was pronounced to be immoral, commercial, and culturally bankrupt. Although these simple categorizations are neither an adequate measure of Belgrade’s cultural spectrum, nor the relationship between the arts entertainment, they carried the weight of interwar social debates that went beyond culture itself.

As I show, entertainment was the fastest growing cultural market in the Yugoslav capital and a direct challenge to the cultural hegemony, social salience, and everyday patronage of the arts. Implicitly, the growing popularity of entertainment undermined the city’s reigning class hierarchy. Like Tatjana Gez, a trained dancer who spent her career between the elite stage of the National Theater and the decidedly non-elite one of the Krokodil, many interwar performers capitalized on Belgrade’s cultural permeability just like venue proprietors embraced it and urban patrons validated it. In other words, the seemingly neat distinction implied by the juxtaposition between the arts and entertainment – and their urban audiences – was far messier. And it became more and more complicated during the interwar years. One of the most important variables was the city’s strengthening connection to cultural networks that brought entertainment from the European metropolis to the Yugoslav capital. The changing landscape of urban entertainment –

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3 AJ, MP, f. 617, j. 6-4-3-2.
its distinct foreignness – is what even legitimized it in the eyes of some bourgeois Belgraders. At the same time, a different type of Belgrader was the driving motor of entertainment in the city: the self-actualizing petit bourgeois urbanite. For this growing audience, the mainstream accessibility of entertainment went hand-in-hand with its social democratization; the ability to consume urban fun signaled urban participation – and belonging. So that while elites, conservatives, and the educated bourgeoisie, not to mention the church and the state, levied a fragmented arsenal of complaints about the decay of the cultural hierarchy, entertainment gained ground in interwar Belgrade as a new cultural reference point.

In this chapter, I first sketch the contours of interwar entertainment relative to the prewar period, considering the changing spectrum of repertoires, performers, and audiences. Then, I compare domestic and foreign offerings, speculating why foreignness became such a popular component of Belgrade’s entertainment. Finally, I discuss the polarizing language of contemporary actors in Belgrade – national conservatives, cultural elites, and reform-minded bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie – in debates about entertainment. I argue that it was more than just cultural categories that were at stake in interwar Belgrade; instead, I show that entertainment ushered in a social crisis that precipitated both a reshuffling of cultural politics – as well as cultural power.

_**Entertainment in Prewar and Interwar Belgrade**_

Entertainment in 1920s and 1930s Belgrade was distinct from its prewar variant: its repertoire had become more diverse, its patrons were more numerous, and its content addressed urbanites as a cohesive audience. In this section, I first outline how Belgrade’s interwar entertainment changed vis-à-vis its prewar offerings. Then, I discuss why it became more
attractive – and accessible – to a wider spectrum of audience, primarily the strengthening petit bourgeoisie, during the interwar years. Finally, I explain why entertainment played a large part in nurturing the processes of spectators’ self-actualization as urbanites and Europeans.

Prewar Belgrade had been host to entertainments from abroad such as travelling circuses, touring performers, and translations of fiction, but most of the city’s urban culture was grounded in kafanas (a local variation of a café/pub/bar/restaurant) with makeshift stages that featured folk crooners, brass-heavy orchestras, and comedians. Prewar urban culture resonated with locality far more than with worldliness.4 Historian Dubravka Stojanović argues that the kafana was a site of modernity in the prewar period because it facilitated social encounters with new cultural genres like film, panoramas and with far-away places.5 Although Stojanović posits that the kafana was the city’s “first democratic space,”6 much prewar entertainment was far from socially democratic. All but a handful of kafanas in the nineteenth century bohemian quarter Skadarlija were associated with lower class patrons just like women rarely patronized these establishments.

Interwar entertainment greatly diversified from the offerings of these makeshift stages; not only that, but there was simply more of it in the city after the war. One of the few prewar entertainers whose name has not faded from historical memory was Branislav “Brana” Cvetković (1874-1942) who led how own “funny stage” called Branov Orfeum, almost entirely written and performed by Cvetković in various kafanas.7 But by the interwar period, it was dismissed as “old fashioned” and lacking in references to the city’s “colorful political world.”8 Although Cvetković was among several prewar writers like Branislav Nušić (1864-1938) and Čiča Ilija Stojanović (1859-1930) whose work continued to be staged in the interwar period, he was now wedged

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5 Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, 301.
between a larger repertoire of domestic and translated authors, singers, dancers, and performers. Relative to Branov Orfeum, new stages were praised for their quick action, sharper dialogue, soulful jokes, and plentiful allusions to everyday life. Andrew Horrall suggests that this type of transformation was common to the interwar period and that it reflects the topicality of new entertainments; spectators came to expect leisure to be “hectic” and quick to change, like the city itself. Relative to Branov Orfeum, new stages were praised for their quick action, sharper dialogue, soulful jokes, and plentiful allusions to everyday life. Andrew Horrall suggests that this type of transformation was common to the interwar period and that it reflects the topicality of new entertainments; spectators came to expect leisure to be “hectic” and quick to change, like the city itself. Most urban observers celebrated the endless renditions of the Foxtrot, One-step, Shimmy, and the Tango as “a completely normal occurrence that must be accommodated.” New technology facilitated entertainment’s diversification: lights and electricity made it more spectacular on the whole; newspapers and magazines printed with greater frequency, larger circulations, and more current news, trends, and fashions; and the cheaper production of images, musical scores, and novels extended the boundaries of urban entertainment into the home.

Moreover, relative to prewar repertoires, interwar entertainment was overwhelmingly foreign. A March 1922 program at variety stage Kasina advertises a mélange of dancing skits that were staged by young female performers: “Slavic dances,” “Mexican tarantella dances,” “waltzes,” and “Polish folk dances.” Several years later, in 1925, Kasina offered its patrons a similar billing that included the “international dancers” Diosy Margit, Mimi Hodbod, Aurelia Dor, Terry Rosko, Kazinsky Agota, Miklos Kato, Lidia Gorlinska; the ballerinas Claire Claremont and Charlotte Klein; and the singing troupe Schimay Harmoni Four. Another program from the variety stage Palace advertised a 1927 repertoire featuring an equally worldly cast, if only in name: Dori Adorjan danced the Charleston while the Golden Dancers parodied it, Ninon de Freur staged a Romanian dance, Dodo & Grete presented English and Hungarian

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10 “Koje moderne igre osvajaju u Beograd?’” *Comœdia*, 17 decembar 1923, 10.
11 *Novosti*, god II, br. 252, Mart 3, 1922.
12 AJ, MIP, f. 6, j. 541.
dances, and the Three Westergards performed as acrobats.\textsuperscript{13} Given that most performers used stage names, it is rarely possible to corroborate their identities with those recorded in the mammoth registration files of foreign performers in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, although these entertainers may not have been transparent with their on stage personas, they were almost certainly not Yugoslav.

Illustrated presses echoed a similarly international tapestry: snippets of sensations from across the world, translated short stories, and photographs of foreign film stars. A January 1927 issue of \textit{Ilustrovani list}, for example, features a fashion column signed “from Paris,”\textsuperscript{14} a photograph of an ailing Japanese czar, and a fashionable image of three women jumping in mid-air in San Francisco. Articles were sometimes simply reprinted, at other times re-contextualized, and occasionally imitated – but always placed alongside local cultural coverage – mirroring what Beatriz Sarlo has termed “peripheral modernity” or a space of “cultural mixing.” Historian Nathan Wood terms this metropolitan relativity as the inter-urban matrix that allowed local readers a “common ground” to understand stories and sensations from cities like Paris, London, and Berlin.\textsuperscript{15}

At the same time, entertainment was increasingly becoming a market commodity to be bought and sold, just as its commodification went hand in hand with its homogenization. Popular presses advertised a revolving cast of “new” dances that were slight variations on the “old” dances. Fashions were always billed as “the latest trends from Paris,” even when these trends had

\textsuperscript{13} AJ, MIP, f. 6, j. 536.

\textsuperscript{14} This was a favorite new genre in dailies, women’s magazines, and popular presses in the interwar period that reminds us that women were becoming a recognized consumers – and agents – of presses, fashion, and foreign urban identity. A notable fashion correspondent for \textit{Politika} and Zagreb’s \textit{Ženski Svet} was Radojka M. Petrović (wife of the longtime \textit{Politika} editor Mihailo S. Petrović) who contributed regular columns titled “a letter from Paris” (IAB, ZŠS, k. 1.). Marina Vujnovic has argued that women’s magazines – but we can extend this to columns intended for a female readership – shaped women into consumers and citizens by “participating in the creation and redefinition of the new nation, Bubikopf nation.” (Vujnovic, \textit{Forging the Bubikopf Nation}, 132.)

\textsuperscript{15} Wood, \textit{Becoming Metropolitan}. 
changed little in several years. And, describing the new program at the variety stage Kasina, a character in Boško Tokin’s *Terazije* snidely commented that “in any case, the program is always new,” before detailing the content of the “stereotypical” bill.\(^{16}\) Georg Simmel argues that the desire for variety often results in nervous exhaustion or a blasé outlook, while monotony produces repetition, boredom, and the desensitization of the audiences to the constant state of newness. A 1927 article offered an apt illustration: claiming that the well-known dance teacher Petar Stojić has danced enough steps to walk around the world several times, the article hypothesized that Stojić might have already “worn out” his legs up to the hips, had he not worn shoes.\(^{17}\) Keeping up with the oversaturation of monotonous trends, the article seemed to imply, is addictive and leads to both mental and physical atrophy.

As the content of interwar entertainment changed, so did its audiences. For instance, students stretched their limited income and lingered in the café of the famous Moskva with a single black coffee all night. Cinemas were more frequently described as an acceptable venue for female patrons and, with entry tickets ranging from two to ten dinars, an inexpensive one as well. And a 1928 newspaper article noted that the variety show crowd included “trendy” and “fashionable” residents side by side with “highlanders” and youth from different Yugoslav regions.\(^{18}\) Similarly, the presses frequently reported that provincial visitors effortlessly navigated Belgrade’s entertainment establishments.\(^{19}\)

But access to entertainment came easiest to those with at least some disposable income; indeed, as one interwar resident remembered, “there was a good time [to be had] for anyone’s

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18 “’Djeram bije Terazije,’” *Novosti*, 17 avgust 1928, 3.
pocketbook. A 1921 feuilleton illustrated the encounter of an individual whose pocketbook was not expendable, the provincial lawyer Vukadim Ljubišić, with urban entertainment during a visit to the capital. After checking into the hotel London, the lawyer marveled at the hustle and bustle of the busy downtown boulevard Terazije. When he passed by the variety theater Kasina, he was tempted by the evening’s program, but debated if he should indulge in entertainment given that he could not afford much more than a beer. In the end, the lawyer’s curiosity got the better of him. But, what was worse, as soon as he is settled, the waiter, who, as it turned out, was an old friend, began bringing out food and cocktails that Ljubišić was too embarrassed to refuse. By the end of the evening, the lawyer was dizzy from worry about the bill he was sure to have amassed. However, his anxiety was quickly dispelled when the receipt showed a single spritzer.

Although this story ended on high note, it can be read as a comment on the inaccessibility of all types of entertainment to everyday patrons. In this case, the variety theater would have been thoroughly prohibitive for the provincial lawyer, had it not been for the kindness of an old friend.

At the same time, entertainment did permeate the lives of almost all urban residents, even if only by proxy. Lower class urbanites, like peasants and workers, heard jazz seeping out of cabarets even when they could not afford an entry ticket. They saw European styles of dress on the covers of magazines displayed at newsstands without having to purchase them. And they gleaned at the faces of film stars on pasted posters all over the city’s walls – far and near from the cinemas. In other words, although not all entertainment was created equally for all, its ubiquitous markers across the city lent urban and European encounters to all residents.

But it was the bourgeois and petit bourgeois audiences wielding disposable incomes who stood as the most prominent consumers of foreign entertainment in interwar Belgrade.

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20 Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 106.
Newspapers reported that the Luksor theater was packed with “a gray-haired audience” and “serious men” when the French performer Josephine Baker took the stage in 1929, some of who had paid astronomical prices for the ticket (upwards of several hundred dinars). While “gray-haired audiences” and “serious men” would have been quick to shun cabaret, variety theaters, and cinemas in the prewar period, these entertainments captivated the European gaze of bourgeois and petit bourgeois interwar spectators. In much the same way, Peter Jelavich shows how early cinema was considered to be lower middle class phenomenon in turn-of-the-century Germany until it was “ennobled” for patronage by the educated middle classes. “In the end,” Jelavich writes, “‘tamed’ film was a Trojan horse that smuggled nonbourgeois and antibourgeois values and modes of representation into the minds and hearts of the middle classes. Cinema’s visual and spectacular qualities transformed the cultural landscape, and for the rest of the twentieth century, it remained central to a novel mass culture that all sectors of society could enjoy.” In Belgrade, this was especially the case with foreign romances, mysteries, or adventure tales. Although the initial response among bourgeois and petit bourgeois audiences was cool, proprietor Ilija Djordjević reported that the demand for foreign films in city grew to be overwhelming (a demand he claimed prevented him from fulfilling the law dictating that at least 10% of screenings must be domestic productions). In contrast to affordability and accessibility that was critical for the participation of city’s lower classes in urban culture, Belgrade’s well-heeled residents were seduced by entertainment because it served as a platform to display their growing consuming power (and identity) as well as their European tastes.

22 “Đozefina Beker skuplja priloge za beogradsku sirotinju,” Politika, 4 april 1929, 7.
23 Peter Jelavich, “‘Am I Allowed to Amuse Myself Here?:’ The German Bourgeoisie Confronts Early Film,” in Germany at the Fin de Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas, eds. Suzanne Marchand and David Lindenfeld (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2004), 249.
24 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2781 (1936), f. XXXIII, j. 132.
Proprietors and publishers were the first to address a unified consumer market at the urban level, even at the price of undermining social hierarchies. Most newspapers and magazines, even ones that were distributed nationally, spoke directly to the urban reader and imparted instructions for city living, developed a collective urban voice, and nurtured associations with the big European city. In this way, entertainment shaped a single urban audience. The newspaper Beogradske novosti, for instance, ran a regular column titled “Modern Belgrade Woman” that instructed readers how to decorate their sitting rooms stylishly, what types of entertainments to discuss among friends, and how to dress.\textsuperscript{25} Nedeljne ilustracije (Weekly Illustrations) offered “scenes from Belgrade streets” and informed readers how to behave at outdoor cafés,\textsuperscript{26} while another paper encouraged Belgraders to patronize fairs and bazaars as their urban predecessors had done.\textsuperscript{27} Novosti devoted its regular column “Life in Belgrade” to reports about the newest urban venues and codifying appropriate patron behavior at cabarets, theaters, and bars. For instance, the paper reported the residents’ collective excitement about a new establishment when they abandoned their usual haunts like the Kasina, Ritz Bar, and Mascotte and “flew away” in a pack to the opening of the new variety stage Music Hall.\textsuperscript{28}

Interwar entertainment in Belgrade was distinct in its repertoire, audience, and urban market. Technology made it quicker, cheaper, and more widely distributed, while the city facilitated its permanence in the everyday life of residents. Most importantly, entertainment challenged the definition of culture in interwar Belgrade because, unlike the arts and state culture, it did not aim to enlighten or educate. It appealed, rather, only to tastes of the public with an allure of big city spectacle. Moreover, entertainment created a shared platform for urban

\textsuperscript{26} “Scene sa beogradskih ulica,” Nedeljne ilustracije, juli 12 1938, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{27} “Slike sa vašara. Proletnja atrakcija beogradjana,” Panorama, 18 maj 1935, 5.
\textsuperscript{28} “Beogradski život. Musik-Hall,” Novosti 10 septembar 1922, 3.
participation. Although not all entertainment was equally accessible to all residents, publishers and proprietors increasingly addressed a single urban audience that undermined not only class stratifications, but cultural ones as well.

The Allure of Foreignness in Belgrade’s Interwar Entertainment

After the First World War, trends from abroad – reprinted stories and images in the presses, imported recordings and scores, touring dancers and singers, and adaptations of fashions – flooded Belgrade. Many domestic performers were quick to appropriate foreign trends into their repertoires, just as they were eager to capitalize on the markets that accompanied the expansion of urban entertainment. However, few Yugoslav performers were as revered as foreign ones, and the same can be said of most other types of entertainment. In this section, I untangle foreign from domestic entertainments in the interest of highlighting what made the former more attractive to audiences than the latter. I argue that it was appealing for several reasons: as a platform for social transgression, as a site for encounters otherwise thought to be politically taboo, and as a reassertion of Belgrade’s connection to Europe.

Although the standards enforced for Yugoslav entertainers were unburdened by the constraints levied on the arts and national culture – they often required no formal training, class membership, or national allegiance – the local community remained small. In the Minister of Education’s files of work permit approvals for domestic entertainers, we see a spectrum of performers aged from the late teens to the late sixties, and showcasing the body as wrestlers, acrobats, or athletes, promising wit as comedians, actors, and impersonators, appealing to the imagination as magicians, illusionists, and hypnotists, and offering curiosities as animal tamers, panorama operators, and oddities. The majority of Yugoslav performers were men, commonly
prewar holdovers. Some, like the self-identified illusionist Miloš Radojković best known for his imitations of animal sounds, continued to stage prewar routines until the Second World War, garnering ridicule and decreasing attendance.\textsuperscript{29} Others, like the magician Sreten Obradović, greatly expanded their prewar repertoires and pushed the envelope with performances that became more and more fantastic. Younger local performers – again, mostly men – gravitated toward similar magic and comedy routines, as if oblivious to the popularity of dancing, singing, and acrobatics shows arriving from abroad. As one reporter bemoaned in the late 1920s, “witty and well-designed revues, intertwined jokes, and topical allusions are simply not available here; apart from a few attempts, we can say it’s non-existent.”\textsuperscript{30}

Few local women worked as entertainers in interwar Belgrade, and even fewer were registered with the authorities. In the files of the Minister of Education, a smattering of permits were issued to female troupe directors like Milica de Corffu who led Sansusi, spouses of male performers like Mija Djurić, or owners of marionette theaters like Antonia Valter. Evidence suggests that most local female performers, however, evaded the process of annual registration for a performer’s permit for social and administrative reasons, preferring instead to be registered as waitresses or hostesses.\textsuperscript{31} For example, Sofka Nikolić (aka Lepa Sofka) was an infamous singer who performed across Belgrade’s kafanas, often with her husband Paja. Although she is nowhere found in the state’s archives, newspapers doted on Sofka and compared her fame in the bohemian quarter Skadarlija to that of Josephine Baker in Montmartre, despite the fact that Sofka

\textsuperscript{29} AJ, MP, f. 2343.
\textsuperscript{30} “‘Djeram bije Terazije,’” \textit{Novosti}, 17 avgust 1928, 3.
\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, employers also exploited the loopholes in paternalistic laws put into place to protect the labor of female employees in bars, cabarets, and variety theaters, by hiring women as “servers” so that they could work later into the night, lodge at the establishment, and socialize with the guests. For example, Dragan Krstić, the owner of the venue Dalmatinac was accused of employing women “to have fun with the guests and to whore themselves out in the side rooms.” (IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2292 (1937), f. XXXI, j. 113/1937, IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2792 (1937), f. XXXI, j. 294/1937.)
was known strictly as a sort of folk singer rather than a risqué performer.\textsuperscript{32} Through press accounts, we also learn that Sofka and Paja were Roma musicians, or at that least they billed themselves as Roma,\textsuperscript{33} and that this community (virtually invisible in official records) had a lively presence in Belgrade’s entertainment.\textsuperscript{34}

In contrast, a remarkably different cast of performers and genres characterized foreign entertainment that reached Belgrade between the two wars. The Minister of Internal Affairs began keeping detailed records of touring foreign performers in the second part of the 1930s, thus allowing us to glean their demographics during this period. Most strikingly, two thirds of foreign entertainers who worked in Yugoslavia were women. Moreover, more than half of all performers were between the ages of 18 and 24, although young children and sexagenarians were also counted among those that toured with family troupes. Forty-five percent were registered as dancers, ten percent were acrobats, three percent were singers, and thirty-seven reported their specialty simply as “performer” \textit{(artist)}, suggesting versatility depending on demand. Of almost a thousand entertainers’ records, there were four times as many singers as magicians, ten times more actors than illusionists, and significantly more wrestlers than animal trainers.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} "Vokalni megdan izmedju Sofke i Božane," \textit{Novosti}, 27 maj 1928, 2.
\textsuperscript{34} “Kroz nočni Beograd…,” \textit{Ilustrovani list nedelja}, 12 januar 1930, ii, 25.
\textsuperscript{35} AJ, MUP, f. 43-55.
Newspaper illustrations, cinema, and fashion from the 1920s and 1930s reflect an overrepresentation of youthful female bodies. Belgrade’s popular presses liberally reprinted photographs from foreign beaches, salons, and leisure retreats and inserted commentary that appropriated them for the local audiences. A caption to a photograph of three scantily clad women jumping in mid-air reads:

In this time of jazz and Charleston, all variety stages advertise the ‘original’ Charleston. However, all those ‘original’ Charlestons are imitations or the creations of those who dance it. And so, these three sisters (all performers who dance together, and there are rarely more than three – are always sisters, even when one is Spanish and the other Hungarian) have their own special Charleston that has helped them win over San Francisco.\(^{36}\)

The three women pictured likely never performed in the Yugoslav capital, and they may not have even been variety stage performers, but the caption of the local paper shows the degree to which foreign trends permeated local readers and won over Belgrade, too.

One of the major reasons why foreign performers were more attractive to audiences than domestic ones was because their youthful bodies were not held up to the same patriarchal standards as Yugoslav ones. This is particularly remarkable in the case of foreign female

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\(^{36}\) Ilustrovani list, 7 januar 1929, 11.
entertainers. At a time when Yugoslav women were just beginning to join the nighttime audiences and few worked in the city without gendered constraints, Josephine Baker was welcomed in sold out theaters. Foreignness excused entertainment arriving from abroad from the culpability of transgressing patriarchal norms that still dictated the urban milieu just as it shielded it from local regulations. At the same time, the foreignness of entertainment was an enticing platform for Belgraders to passively transgress social norms themselves – simply by watching or listening. In fact, it was precisely the foreignness of performing bodies and the sounds of jazz that made patrons’ transgressions safer. The same can be said of a slew of other entertainments popular in interwar Belgrade, like films and romance novels.

At the same time, the foreignness of Belgrade’s interwar entertainment was also provocative for spectators because it brazenly undermined politics. According to historian Ranka Gašić, the availability of popular culture in Belgrade was roughly aligned with political alliances: in the 1920s, women’s fashion followed Parisian trends while men’s was akin to London ones, literature was Russian or French, and film, dance, and comics arrived from the United States. Gašić suggests that French influence was significantly demoted after the 1934 assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles, and replaced by stronger German presence on Belgrade’s cultural scene.37 This point is well-illustrated by the Belgrade Fair that privileged Italian, Romanian, Czechoslovak, German, Hungarian, and Turkish pavilions in 1937, showcasing cars and fashion as well as ideology. At the time, that stringent politics wielded by the Third Reich against “degenerate” culture also brought a surge of Jewish German, Austrian, and Czech revue dancers and singers to Belgrade in the second part of the 1930s.38

37 Gašić, Beograd u hodu ka Evropi. 131.
38 This could have hardly been an intended exertion of the Third Reich’s cultural influence; according to the records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 61% of all foreign performers who entered Yugoslavia after 1935 held citizenship from one of these three states. This statistic breaks down to 15% Austrian, 21% Czech, and 25%
However, while some entertainment may have arrived in Belgrade on the grounds of political alliances, much of it arrived in spite of them. For example, although its neighbors hotly contested Yugoslav borders, archival records show that Bulgarian, Romanian, and Hungarian entertainers easily received visas and permits from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to work in the state. Tokin caricatured variety entertainers at Kasina as “Hungarians, Germans, and Czechs [who] dance under Spanish, French, and English stage names.” Belgrade audiences made no protest of entertainers from politically unfriendly states; instead, entertainers like the Hungarian singer Miss Arizona were embraced less for their ethno-national identity than for the foreignness of entertainment they brought to the city. Miss Arizona was said to have “wildly excited the ‘fashionable’ Belgrade public” once she appeared in the city with a tour of Europe, America, and parts of Africa behind her. In turn, Miss Arizona came to be praised for her interpretation of the Sevillian-cum-Parisian José Padila’s “La Violetterar” as well as the troupe of “beautiful women who performed the [French] can-can” and accompanied her to Belgrade. In fact, Comœdia claimed that “La Violetterar” was “the most modern and most popular song in the world… it’s sung on all continents and in all the large European centers.”

German. At the same time, only 2% were British and even less French. It is interesting to note that many performers did not declare their Jewishness to the Yugoslav government – either by reporting another faith or omitting the information altogether – but some files are subsequently amended by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to highlight this information with no apparent purpose. The archives are not altogether clear to interpret. From the entire collection of foreign performers’ registrations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a little less than a thousand registered entertainers between 1935 and 1939, 38 are subsequently identified to be Jewish. The performers were targeted from 1937 to 1939, particularly Germans, Austrians, Italians, Romanians, Poles, Czechs. Almost all markings are done in the same hand and in the same red pen, suggesting that the process was the work of an individual rather than an agency-wide initiative. It is not clear what might have prompted the authorities to look into an individual’s record, and it is not clear how the state used this information. Some files were also marked with an order to expel the individual but, the predictably leaky bureaucracy of the interwar government prevailed and many of these performers were subsequently issued permit renewals. The weight of these somewhat cryptic notes in the archives are difficult to interpret for the individuals at hand, they might be, as Cristina Vatulescu has argued, a better indication of how the state agency recorded itself.

40 “Kako je postala pesma La Violetterar,” Comœdia, 8 mart 1925, 29.
41 “Kako je postala pesma La Violetterar,” Comœdia, 8 mart 1925, 29.
Most importantly, as is the case with Miss Arizona’s Spanish associations, the foreignness of entertainment was especially attractive because it was synonymous with Europeanness. Attending performances at variety theaters, reading for pleasure, and promenading on the main pedestrian street to flaunt fashionable outfits – and all with European, rather than local, signifiers – became markers used by Belgrade’s maturing petite bourgeoisie to assert themselves as urbanites. Nathan Wood suggests that “connection to the interurban culture of the time can be seen as evidence of an increasingly globalized society in the era of the locomotive, telegraph, telephone, and modern newspaper.” Discussing the case of late nineteenth century Cracow, Wood contends that “even if the city did not experience all of the hyperbolic sensations of Paris or Berlin, it shared enough urban ‘common ground.’” Belgrade’s urban residents, too, looked to emulate metropolitan Europe. Foreign entertainment was critical in bridging the distance and time between Belgrade and big European cities, or at least lending residents that impression.

At the same time, it is important to restate that rigid divide between what was foreign and what was domestic was not always obvious in interwar Belgrade. Local photos were printed alongside foreign ones, performers were integrated seamlessly into the same bills, and adaptations and translations further blurred these distinctions. Although Yugoslav entertainers and productions were rarely so seamlessly integrated in newspapers, performing bills, and cinemas in other European cities, the foreignness of Belgrade’s interwar entertainment grounded Yugoslav capital as a participant in the European mainstream.

Language and the Politics of Entertainment

Newspapers and memoirs of interwar urbanites suggest that residents colloquially embraced entertainment as zabavna kultura, a term that can be loosely translated as “fun culture.” The idiom derives from the more general word zabava that, depending on the context, signifies entertainment, amusement, a party, divertissement, or simply merry-making.\(^{43}\) However, other urban actors mobilized harsher language to discuss urban entertainment. In this section, I first give voice to cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents who contested the strong presence of foreign entertainment in Belgrade. Then, I turn to urbanites with completing stakes – not uncommonly profit-minded bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie – and consider how they attempted to legitimize, and rehabilitate, entertainment in the context of interwar cultural hierarchies. I pay particular attention to the idioms of these debates and I argue that language played an important part in the politics of culture in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the debates over cultural politics, no voice was louder than cultural elites and professional organizations who positioned zabava as the irreconcilable other to the arts. The prewar bohemian and National Theater actor Čiča Ilija Stojanović, for example, pompously declined an invitation to perform at a variety stage in the interwar years, declaring that he had never been an Orpheum performer (*artist*) and that he did not want to “change his profession and degrade his career.” In other words, like the president of the Association of Actors we encountered in the introduction, Stojanović objected to interwar entertainment on the grounds that it devalued “legitimate” theater.\(^{44}\) An article in the arts magazine *Scena (The Stage)* was more restrained, stating that “the theater is not a cathedral, a classroom, or a literary society – but

\(^{43}\) *Zabava* might have been used to describe anything from promenades and excursions into nature, to sports, dance parties, balls, and nightclubs. See: Knežev, *Beograd naše mladosti*, 8; Slavoljub Živanović, “Zabave u dokolivi,” in *Beograd u sećanjima, 1919-1929*, ed. Milan Bošković (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1980), 252-271.

\(^{44}\) Velibor Berko Savić, *Čiča Ilija Stanojević. Najlepša priča starog Beograda* (Beograd: Jugoslovenska kinoteka, 2010), 120.
it is neither the space for mere entertainment.”45 In other words, cultural elites discredited the value of mere entertainment relative to the arts in both form and content. Similarly, a 1932 article in the political daily Vreme expressed concern that Belgraders paid little attention to anything outside the sphere of entertainment – in this case, legitimate theater – and characterized zabava as “stupid, expressionless, and aimless… based of primitive instincts.”46 Zabava was thus defined as an amusement of uncultured masses, unsuitable for civilized society; this concern with the “cultural decay” of the public was a pressing problem for cultural elites, in no small part because it destabilized the social salience of the arts and threatened the patronage of “legitimate” culture.

The Association of Yugoslav Musicians, similarly dismissed zabava as “shallow, suspicious, and often absolutely useless pleasure” unlike the “cultural and moral importance” performed by learned musicians.47 Like many professional organizations in interwar Belgrade, the Association of Yugoslav Musicians was primarily comprised of petit bourgeois members aspiring for social legitimacy. In follows then that association members were hotly invested in publically proclaiming their alliance with bourgeois cultural values and hierarchies. For example, one of its members, the conductor Vladimir Djordjević, wrote to the Minister of Education to condemn urban music that he pegged as “simple nonsense” sung by the masses he identified as soldiers, students, kids, and revelers across the city’s neighborhoods, from Đorđićol and Vračar to Savamala and the outskirts.48 Djordjević continued with a particularly volatile accusation, claiming that entertainment is “comprised of meaningless and often banal words with which man cannot utter a baptismal name, it is accompanied by the savage shrieks and pretentions of vast

47 AJ, MP, f. 620, j. 5-82-2.
quantities of deformed cast-aways of foreign and domestic melodies, or their regurgitation, or it is the product of unmusical tambourines, singers, and Roma [sic].” Djordjević thus drew a clear line of distinction between “learned” musicians and the untrained others who supposedly lacked respect for the order and purity of culture. His insinuations also carried the heavy weight of class in respect to entertainment; the conductor was invested in insisting that Belgrade’s “urban masses” had failed even in their attempts to understand foreign culture, a privilege greedily claimed by the city’s educated residents.

National conservatives, on the other hand, discussed the foreignness of entertainment in a different way: as a threat to Yugoslav culture. The case of dancing and dance studios is illustrative of the twofold agenda national conservatives held toward most types of entertainment. They sought first to posit Yugoslav national dance as integral, authentic, and educational, and then to define foreign zabavni ples (fun dance) as its opposite. National dances, in this case, were standardized variations of regional folk dances like the kolo,49 while a revolving cast of styles like the Shimmy, Charleston, Foxtrot, and Rumba constituted “fun dance.” The president of the National Defense Committee in Belgrade complained of “a tragic occurrence” to the Minister of Education: urban youth were concerned only with dancing “western or black dances” while they were uneducated in Yugoslav national dances; conservatives interpreted this trend as a threat to national culture as much as the nation. The files of the Ministry of Education reveal a drawn out debate about the codification of official mandates for instruction at dance studios. The Minister finally ordered that the goals of dance schools should “nurture and perfect our national dance, and develop a national consciousness, in

49 AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 13-144.
our state language, among our youth."\(^{50}\) The Association of Yugoslav Dance Instructors was quick to adjust to these mandates, advising its members in the 1939 member handbook that their schools should be conducted “in the Yugoslav national spirit.”\(^{51}\)

However, what contemporary conservatives did not acknowledge is that dance schools were never exclusively a platform of entertainment. As Richard Stites suggests, popular culture facilitates a cultural hybridity of the arts, folk culture, and entertainment through its bi-directionality.\(^{52}\) Indeed, long before the state mandated that studios must teach the kolo, dance teachers had been teaching “national dances” alongside modern ones.\(^{53}\) An advertisement in *Novosti* for the manual “Major Principles of Folk (narodni) and Modern Dance” published by the Belgrade instructor Petar Stojić shows that dance studios had already embraced the bi-directionality described by Stites. According to the advert, the manual offered instruction on a variety of “modern” dances like the Tango and the Foxtrot was well on variations of the Serbian and Croatian kolo, a whole decade before the state’s panicky mandates were put into place.

\(^{50}\) AJ, MP, f. 411, j. 20-123-38.
\(^{53}\) AJ, MP, f. 409.
Finally, reform-minded residents – an alliance of socially conscientious bourgeois and educated petit bourgeois – connoted zabava as abandon and frivolity, juxtaposing entertainment to morality and equating it with a crisis of society. An illustrated editorial cartoon titled “Belgrade’s Having Fun” printed on the front page of the daily Novosti directly correlated jazz clubs, urban crowds, and dance floors with social and sexual corruption. In the first frame, a jazz band performed in the lively interior of the club Ritz. The next image presented a crowd lining up to enter the club Mascotte, and following frame showed a club interior with couples dancing and an orchestra performing. But this festive mood quickly gave way to a grim one. The fourth frame showed a couple embracing on a park bench in the moonlight, while the fifth image depicted the feared consequences of this encounter: a woman carrying a newborn into the woods to be abandoned. The last frame featured a gallant peasant man rescuing a child that holds a sign declaring him to be “a son of bars and dance clubs.” The message was clear: urban sites of entertainment corrupted the morals of spectators, especially women, and lead to consequences unacceptable in Yugoslavia’s patriarchal society. Moreover, the narrative postulated that young
woman in the fifth frame – a critique aimed at lower middle class residents – was quite aware that an out-of-wedlock child was a grave social transgression (this is why she discarded the child). In this way, the thrust of the editorial cartoon was even more potent because the guilty party was culpable of choosing pleasure over respectability and, then, even motherhood. Among other articles, editorials, and letters published in Belgrade’s interwar presses, the voice of reform-minded residents was as panicky of that of national conservatives.

Although many bourgeois and petit bourgeois urbanites fervently advocated for social reform, education, and discipline, their tirades implicitly betrayed a sense of helpless defeat – and, to a degree, resignation. Historian Lynn Abrams interprets this moral panic as a response to entertainment’s encroachment on the boundaries of bourgeois values. At the same time, she argues that “it was the urban bourgeoisie who, while decrying the drinking and dancing of the lower classes, began to take their own recreation into the public arena.”

A 1928 article that appeared in the women’s magazine Žena i svet blamed “posh parties” (mondenske zabave) for a spike in alcoholism and the “cult of cocktails” among both men and women. In this case, the magazine insinuated that bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents – the very strata of society that were expected to be the guardians of respectability – were often just as complicit in undermining the efforts at reform and discipline.

In fact, Belgrade’s bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie were fragmented on the question of entertainment’s place in society. Despite the fact that the educated urbanites never ceased to publically advocate for the maintenance of the existing cultural hierarchy, and their own social place in the city, others toyed with its boundaries. Most notably, Belgrade’s business-oriented residents came to be responsible for bringing much of the entertainment available in the city to

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55 “Mondenstvo. Šik u akloholozirnju,” Žena i svet, 15 maj 1828, 11.
the marketplace as publishers, entrepreneurs, and agents. While many of bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie residents expressed shock that money “poured like rain” at many interwar variety stages, members of these same classes owned and operated the variety stages in question. John Mackenzie shows that a similar process was underway in interwar Britain, as middle class entrepreneurs who controlled and disseminated the bulk of commercial entertainment began to reconcile their relationship to popular culture and increasingly catered to the tastes – and financial means – of their own class.\textsuperscript{56}

An alternative discourse of entertainment came precisely from these bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie urbanites who stood to benefit financially from its wide consumption in the city. In financial records of Belgrade’s cabarets, several names appear time and again, suggesting that these establishments were the providence of the wealthy few. Karlo Šteiner, also known as Karlo Henrich directed the pricey downtown clubs Ruski Car, Ritz Bar, and Lursor. On the other hand, the same Ilija Djordjević that capitalized on cinemas in the 1930s, was also the owner the upscale clubs Vračar and Kasina in the late 1930s. These proprietors mobilized a different vocabulary to bill performances at their theaters, directly challenging the rhetoric of national conservatives, cultural elites, and their fellow bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. For example, the director of the cabaret Mon Repos\textsuperscript{57} employed the term \textit{veselo pozorište} (cheerful theater) in a poster advertisement for the program that included an eclectic offering such as the “eccentric duo” Rie et Savycky, the prima ballerina allegedly of the Viennese opera Herma von Heuer, and the Spanish dancer Mia Degreć.\textsuperscript{58} The director of the cabaret was confident in coopting “theater” to advertise entertainment, and perhaps used the term precisely in the interest of authenticating it.

\textsuperscript{57} As the club’s ownership changed hands, so did its name: Mon Repos also appeared in Belgrade’s history as Papagai, City, and San Sousi.
\textsuperscript{58} AJ, MP, f. 357, j. 55-3-32.
a legitimate activity for the theater-going crowd. On the other hand, the director may have relied on the adjective *veselo*, translated as happy, cheerful, merry, light, or facetious, to dub Mon Repos as something other than mere *zabava*.

Moreover, many of cabaret proprietors targeted wealthier patrons with advertisements. In a 1921 ad for the variety stage Kasina published in *Novosti*, the venue was described as “the favorite place of respectable Belgraders” that boasted “an excellent artistic (*umetnički*) program for December, not yet seen in the capital.”\(^{59}\) Several years later, the director of Kasina continued to publicize the stage as a “first-rate, European” establishment,\(^{60}\) a description that directly aimed to attract bourgeois and petit-bourgeois patrons. Other variety theaters and cabarets took a similar approach into the 1930s. The Ritz Bar claimed to be “the most loved and most intimate establishment in the city” with its repertoire of “worldly, first-class attractions” and Palace

\(^{59}\) *Novosti*, 3 decembar 1921, 8.

\(^{60}\) *Novi list*, 10 januar 1923, 4.
asserted it was “the first choice among respected audiences.” In addition to printed advertisements, cabaret programs appealed to the tastes of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. An undated Kasina leaflet from 1925, for example, presented an image of a luxuriously attired woman holding a bottle of champagne in one hand and saluting the sunrise with the flute in her other hand. Pictured in an environment of lush gardens, the image of the woman stood as a positive representation of elegant decadence and nighttime reveling, a far cry from the social degeneration and immorality that reform-minded urbanites imagined. On the other hand, the cover of the program from the variety theater Palace from around the same period addressed patrons with a different appeal. In this image full of sharp lines and jagged edges, a tall and slender woman wearing a cropped haircut evoked both the style of urban dress as well as the forms of European avant-garde or futurist art. This image, like the one tooted by the director of Kasina, reinforced the advertised claims that Belgrade’s cabaret repertoires were not only acceptable forms of leisure but also comparable to European variants.

The language of illustrated newspapers and magazines also worked to reshuffle cultural hierarchies for their own profit. As was the case with cabarets, a handful of publishers held a monopoly over Belgrade’s illustrated presses. Ivan Zrinić, the owner of the publishing press Udruženje Ilustracija, also edited the bulk of the capital’s entertainment publications, including *Ilustrovani List* (Illustrated Paper), *Comedia*, and *Rec i Slika* (Word and Image). His wife Jelena Zrnić was the editor-in-chief of *Žena i svet* in the 1920s and another women’s magazine, *Ženski svet* (Women’s World), in the first part of the 1930s. Not surprisingly, the diction of many illustrated presses spoke in unison about entertainment as an acceptable urban activity, not only for the targeted petit bourgeois audience but also for bourgeois residents. Instead of juxtapositions with “moral,” “national,” or “trained” culture, the presses premised their
discussion on the integrity of entertainment and the city. *Ilustrovani list* qualified *zabava* as a component of the urbanite’s fast-paced life, nestled between automobiles, cinemas (*kinomatografi*), and *kafanas*. An article in *Novosti* declared that only two types of Belgraders exist: those who prefer indoor entertainment such as comedians and orchestras, and those who prefer outdoor entertainment such as sports. The author thus left no room for residents who did not like entertainment, and continued to assert that “the Belgrade public enjoys watching and listening to performances about their own colorful lives.”

Some popular newspapers even credited *zabava* with therapeutic qualities for modern life – and notably not just for the city’s workers – a claim almost never ascribed to the arts. An early 1920s article in *Novosti* cited the socio-political headaches of the day and declared that “in spite of the administration and the cobble-stoned streets… we’re having fun.” Another article suggested that the responsibility to “divert and exhilarate” (*razoditi i razveseliti*) society falls precisely on performers. And, the magazine *Film i moda* (*Film and Fashion*) argued that “small stages should serve as space of amusement after a day of work, where people can stop by for a beer and a bite, and enjoy light and cheerful skits.” Between the lines, many popular presses undermined the arts with the claim that entertainment had a monopoly over the audience’s attention. Although no single cultural genre in interwar Belgrade held the undivided attention of the audience, the presses agitated for entertainment to become a more competitive alternative to

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61 “Ne hitajte! Da ne biste brzo izgubili zdravlje,” *Ilustrovani list*, 17-24 mart 1921, 11. Peter Jelavich offers a more nuanced interpretation; taking the case of the variety show, Jelavich suggests that entertainment reflected the fragmentation, disconnection, and desensitization of the urban psyche at the beginning of the twentieth century, not unlike that described by Georg Simmel (Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 25-26).


65 “Naša mala pozorišta,” *Film i moda*, 13 jun 1928, 4.
the arts and national culture.

Finally, Yugoslav performers and their representatives also lent their voice to the unharmonious discussions of entertainment during the interwar period. Records show that among domestic entertainers, the term umetnik was most commonly contested. Umjetnik traditionally denotes a trained artist (painter, musician, writer), and the derived adjective used in phrases such as umetničko veče (artistic evening). Professional associations fiercely guarded the term for “serious” culture that, by extension, shielded their own social cache. For example, the Minister of Education ordered that the name of the Professional Entertainment Union of Artists, Experts, and Amateurs (Zabavna zadruga S. O. J. umetnika, veštaka i amatera u Beogradu) be amended to exclude the term umetnik.66 Artist, on the other hand, was accepted nomenclature that cast a wide net of possible talents and skills, but implied a lack of classical training and artistic merit. Artist may be best translated as “performer,” with the understanding that the interwar definition carried little allotment of creativity or originality; artisti were simply workers, a far cry from performing artists today. But, as with proprietors who dubbed their clubs as theaters, entrepreneurial performers freely used umetnik with the deliberate intent of claiming cultural legitimacy, state endorsement or tax breaks, and public recognition. The up-and-coming professional group Association of Yugoslav Performers, for example, used the term in their official title in the 1920s (Udruženje Umetnika Artista u Beogradu) and attested its support to the free development of artističke umetnosti (performance arts).67 On the other hand, the more established Association of Actors complained to the Minister of Education in 1936 that many performers with permits to stage artističke večeri are actually billing themselves as vesela pozorišta and thus obviously undermining the sphere of the state-endorsed umetničko theater, but

also the formality of issuing separate permits for the arts and entertainment.\textsuperscript{68}

Some members of the Association of Artists even went as far as to claim that, in addition to “amusing the audience” with athletic and entertaining performances, its members were equipped to stage educational shows.\textsuperscript{69} The magician Sreten Obradović persisted in letters and petitions to the Association of Actors demanding to be granted status as an \textit{umjetnik}-artist, citing a desire for both professional recognition and a reduction of income tax.\textsuperscript{70} By lobbying for the status of \textit{umjetnik}, Obradović not only challenged the hegemonic power to name, but also the access to the rights of other cultural workers. His usage of this vocabulary reflects a moment when entertainment had gained enough social salience for its practitioners to claim the right to cultural idioms guarded by professional organizations. Entertainment, as Marline Otte put it, “defined and expanded the boundaries of what was socially and culturally tolerated.”\textsuperscript{71} At first, entertainers unraveled the exclusive claims to nomenclature, and then scrambled the cultural hierarchy subordinating entertainment to the arts, making words like performer (\textit{artist}) more legitimate and increasingly necessary in discussions of culture.

While historical actors did not always speak with one another, their discussions collectively shaped the role of entertainment in interwar society. The voices of Belgrade’s cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie, paint entertainment, at best, as a social nuisance, and, at worst, as a political agitation. But many of Belgrade’s interwar residents were not so quick to dismiss entertainment. Its strongest supports were found among business-oriented bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents, somewhat surprising given the distain of their educated counterparts towards entertainment. Interwar venue

\textsuperscript{68} IAB, UG, k. 50, j. 736.
\textsuperscript{69} AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 2-37.
\textsuperscript{70} IAB, UG, k. 51, j. 870.
\textsuperscript{71} Marline Otte, \textit{Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890-1933} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.
proprietors and publishers played critical roles in rehabilitating entertainment – and especially foreign entertainment – to the city’s audiences. Invariably, they were complicit in “seducing” Belgraders into experiencing entertainment as an acceptable activity and a domesticated – even luxurious – component urban life.

**Conclusion**

Belgrade’s cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie publically rejected entertainment as a threat to the city’s existing cultural, national, and social order. Yet their passionate investment in the arts betrays their urgency to maintain their deteriorating salience in the city. As I argue in this chapter, entertainment ushered in a transformation of interwar Belgrade’s cultural hierarchy. Not only did a new diction drive these debates – so did new actors. Bourgeois and petit bourgeois entrepreneurs were squarely positioned in the marketing of entertainment in the city, while a strengthening audience of petit bourgeois consumers took shape as urbanites. But it was entertainment in interwar Belgrade, and specifically its foreignness, that played the most important part in this equation: it effectively “seduced” the city’s patrons with promises of social transgression, political taboos, and European signifiers. In the words of Paul Boyer, the city of the early twentieth century “was no longer seen as a massive challenge to the social order – it was the social order!”[^72] Similarly, over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, entertainment gained ground in cultural politics, undermining both the power of hierarchies and their advocates in the city, consequently becoming a new reference point of culture.

Chapter Three

Managing Entertainment in the State, in the City, and in Society

Introduction

In a 1920 letter to the Minister of Education, the Belgrade branch of the Association of Yugoslav Musicians, a professional organization of bourgeois and petit bourgeois instrumentalists, lobbied for an amendment to the state’s blanket taxation of culture. The president of the Association complained that “artists who, without question, have a high and lengthy education” should not be burdened with the same tax as cinemas, circuses, magicians, horse racing, acrobats, and panoramas. The president distinguished “learned” performers as the “pioneers of humanity’s social beauties” who harbor an elevated cultural value that was formative for both the development of a national consciousness and the moral integrity of the public. On these grounds, the president believed that Association members were entitled to an exemption from the standard 10% cultural tax. In fact, the president postulated that it would be in society’s best interest to increase the tax on entertainment in the same proportion as it is reduced for all “learned” culture. Yet, the thrust of the Association’s qualm was not about taxation at all, but rather about the equalization of classically trained musicians with performers who rouse only “fun and pleasure.” The issue of taxation was, instead, a tangible grievance that the Association hoped would lead both to stricter regulation of entertainment in the interwar city and the cementing of cultural hierarchies subordinating entertainment to the arts.

But it was more than just uncertainty about cultural hierarchies that drove debates about entertainment in interwar Belgrade – competing moral and national ones were also at stake. The

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1 A portion of this chapter was published as “Municipal Regulation of Entertainment in Interwar Belgrade,” *Istraživanja* 24 (2013): 417-426. It is used here with permission.
2 AJ, MP, f. 620, j. 5-82-2.
president of the Association of Yugoslav Musicians summed up the need for stricter regulation of entertainment lest it weaken the patronage of “serious” culture, but also lest it drive society to immorality and deter national consciousness. Some of the same actors – cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded as well as business-oriented bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents – participated in the discussions of how it should be managed in the city and the state. However, the driving agents dictating the regulation of entertainment were officials in state agencies, municipal administrators, and representatives of civic organizations. While it was not uncommon for educated members of society to pull double duty as cultural elites, national conservatives, well as state servants, I consider their voices here within administrative platforms.

In this chapter, I explore how the state, the city, and civic cultural organizations attempted to regulate the availability, accessibility, and accountability of entertainment in interwar Belgrade. Because the contours of entertainment itself were so ephemeral during the 1920s and 1930s, its management amounts to a series of negotiations rather than a set of firm regulations. I begin by analyzing the state’s poorly defined cultural policy and how different social agents brokered it; I explore why professional associations were eager to parrot the state’s national agendas, in this way bolstering them, and how church leaders exerted their influence the state’s practices toward national culture. Although the state was never indifferent to culture, I argue that it was relatively lenient in its oversight of all types of culture, including entertainment, and that it succeeded in only indirectly managing it though laws about labor and citizenship. Next, on the level of the city, I show that the urban administration interpreted and implemented state agendas, particularly in the momentum of the centralizing reforms of 1929, through the management of closing times, performers’ residence permits, and public behavior. I consider how these regulations shaped space, time, and movement in the city, but also how they were
rejected and subverted by proprietors and patrons. Then, I turn to cultural organizations like the Association of Yugoslav Musicians and show how they contingently endeavored to manage entertainment in society by excluding certain types of performers from professional organizations (and the privileges that came with membership). However, I also show how entertainers responded to this social marginalization with the establishment of parallel organizations keenly constructed within the discourse of the prevailing cultural, national, and moral hierarchies. Just as entertainment had shifted the playing field of cultural politics, I argue that the management efforts of the state, city, and civic organizations came to be shaped by entertainment more than they succeeded in shaping it.

*Negotiating and Implementing the State Culture Policy*

The state was not indifferent to culture, but rather saw it as a tool for building and sustaining the unified Yugoslavia. However, the state’s interwar cultural policy was underdeveloped and lacked cohesion. In truth, state agencies were overwhelmed with other problems – irredentist groups threatened Yugoslavia’s new borders, fragmented political parties challenged its structure, and nationalism undermined its foundation – and they faced postwar rebuilding, an unstable economy, and a volatile interwar political climate. The Ministry of Internal Affairs prioritized state security and considered culture only insofar as it compromised politics. The Ministry of Education attempted to reconcile the authority of competing cultural elites in the unified state. And, the Ministry of Public Affairs entered cultural debates only to advocate for economic protectionism of domestic workers. In this section, I first discuss how the state’s cultural policy was interpreted and negotiated. I examine why arts organizations adopted the state’s national agendas so eagerly. Then, I show how the church shaped the state’s ideas
about national culture and its management. However, I suggest that only two major concerns consistently guided the state’s regulation of entertainment during the interwar years: labor and citizenship. I argue that the state neither hindered nor emboldened the availability and accessibility of entertainment in interwar Belgrade, but that it acknowledged only its accountability to supporting domestic entertainers in face of ascending foreign competition.

Working with the rich archival materials of the Ministry of Education, the umbrella agency of culture in interwar Yugoslavia, historian Ljubomir Dimić identifies four successive approaches to culture that correspond to political changes: a ten-year period lacking a cultural policy altogether (1918-1928), Yugoslav nationalization prompted by King Alexander’s declaration of dictatorship (1929-1934), an abandonment of state models of culture by Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović (1935-1939), and, finally, a fragmented regional nationalization in the years before the Second World War. However, the state consistently saw culture as a vehicle for the production of a unified Yugoslav national culture, an agenda that reached its zenith with King Alexander’s declared dictatorship in 1929. While the dictatorship mandated redrawn internal state lines, disbanded parliament, and instituted a new legal code in an attempt to centralize the state, it also aimed to enliven the ideology of Yugoslavism in cultural production. As one scholar writes, “the king had resolved on force now, and this was manifested by the suppression of nationally oriented organizations, such as athletic associations, teachers’ societies, and even signing clubs, and their replacement by ‘Yugoslav’ organizations and by the active repression of the opposition.”

In Belgrade, professional associations and other cultural organizations showed little resistance to adjusting their rulebooks in accordance with new state mandates. In fact, even

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before 1929, many civic organs of culture had nurtured an alliance with the state. Already in 1924, the president of the Association of Actors pledged the organization’s commitment to the Yugoslav nation by declaring that “serious” actors have served and continue to serve an important role within the state and society – from raising morale at the war front to supporting national culture during peace time. More than that, he claimed that actors had already been “unified and nationally conscious while [Yugoslav] unity was still nascent.”

In the same year, the League of Musicians had announced their promise “to work toward developing a national music culture” and to perform works by national composers. While the arts were not synonymous with national culture, it is not surprising that professional associations were willing to conjure the national spirit, advocate for national education, and lend support to national workers without formal cultural mandates. Part of this has to do with the fact that many champions of the arts in Belgrade corresponded closely with the state’s economic and political elites. Moreover, as Alex Dragnich suggests, the Yugoslav idea was “mainly a middle-class movement” that coincided with the cultural ideas of that same class. The development of the national project paralleled the strengthening of bourgeois and petit bourgeois society in interwar Belgrade, as well as their conceptions about social respectability and cultural value.

At the same time, it should be underlined that the arts proved to be more pliable to state interests, especially after 1929, because many cultural institutions relied on its financial support at times when public patronage was uncertain. The importance of state patronage for the arts was not new in the interwar period. Historian Dubravka Stojanović shows that the prewar cultural elites, much like other free professions, were weak socially and politically and thus relied on the

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5 AJ, MP, f. 618, j. 1-1-190.
6 AJ, MP, f. 620, j. 4-3-3.
7 Maltby, Passing Parade, 17-18.
state for employment and financial support. In most cases, theaters, orchestras, studios, schools, and troupes were endowed with a coveted state-endorsed stamp (povlašćenje) that entitled the group to a reduced taxation, a guarantee of employment, and state funding. But state-endorsement also came at a price: the state reserved the right to monitor and edit content. For example, according to the “Law on Theaters,” performances were required to be in the state language and to “to stage quality productions, primarily Slavic,… [that] serve the national idea.” While many Yugoslav entertainers, as I show in a proceeding section, also advocated for their own status as legitimate workers, laid claim the state’s financial support, and founded their own professional associations, entertainment did not rely on the state’s patronage in the same capacity as the arts. Indeed, because entertainment was easily accessible and cheaply available, it evolved into a successful market commodity maintained by consumers. The viewing public of film, for instance, was said to be 30% larger than the one of theater in the early 1930s. Similarly, the financial records of the Association of Actors show that the organization’s division for the arts was frequently in debt while the one for entertainment uncommonly multiplied its earnings. The waning salience of the arts relative to other types of culture was not lost on urban observers; as early as 1922, an editorial cartoon in the daily Novosti criticized the Belgrade public for skirting national performances. In the cartoon, an orchestra performed atop the stage while only a few lonely spectators made up the audience. The message was clear: the arts did not draw the masses – or their billfolds.

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9 Stojanović, “Krugovi i čvorovi,” 167-195.
11 IAB, UG, f. 24.
Although not all professional associations embraced the responsibilities that state financial patronage carried (for fear that it might compromise integrity of creativity), folk culture was a medium that satisfied both Yugoslav national agendas as well as the ones of arts organizations. For the state, folk culture came to represent synthetic Yugoslav national culture that integrated a mixture of regional inheritance.\textsuperscript{12} The Ministry of Education happily funded folk dance, a form of culture imagined to be “old and real,” in the name of bolstering national identity in the city.\textsuperscript{13} But the reformulation of folk culture into national culture also signaled “an ideological shift aligning it with bourgeois aspirations and identity rather than the lower class.”\textsuperscript{14} Historian Rob Sackett suggests that the flowering of folk culture in cities mirrored the middle class nostalgia for the “harmonious, rural, [and] preindustrial.”\textsuperscript{15} In other words, folk culture aligned with the social ideals of strengthening urban bourgeois and petit bourgeois classes: it was

\textsuperscript{12} Wachtel, \textit{Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation}.

\textsuperscript{13} AJ, MP, f. 411.

\textsuperscript{14} Scott, \textit{Sound of the Metropolis}, 10.

an organic manifestation of national belonging, it reinforced the moral codes of patriarchal respectability,\textsuperscript{16} and it was removed from the world of consumption so rampant in Belgrade.

In addition to cultural organizations, the church wielded an audible stance on the state’s cultural policy. Despite the fact that interwar Yugoslavia had no official state religion, it had neither proclaimed a separation between the state and the church. In Belgrade, the Orthodox Church stood both as a symbol, as well as an agent, of the nation in interwar society; as historian Jovana Knežević writes, the church was seen as “the traditional carrier of national consciousness” and it “considered any subversion of patriarchy a fundamental threat to national survival.”\textsuperscript{17} The church exerted a strong opinion on the developing state, and especially in terms of what constituted national culture (although it was not always clear if it advocated for Yugoslav or Serbian national culture). The opening of the Cvijeta Zuzorić Association for the Friends of the Arts pavilion in Kalemegdan Park in 1927, for example, elicited approval from church officials. Representatives from the Orthodox Church joined the royal court and political leaders in celebrating the pavilion’s opening as the new space of national culture; the Patriarch Dimitrije is reported to have blessed the pavilion as “the holy home of every Serb who values and respects art.”\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, the church did not unanimously align its support with the arts. As the city prepared for the inauguration of Ivan Meštrović’s statue The Victor, church leaders suggested that its depiction of a nude male body incited moral decadence and sexual rage despite the fact that members of the Cvijeta Zuzorić Association celebrated it as a specimen of art. Other conservative critics also pointed out that it was questionable that a Croatian artist could represent Serbia’s triumphs in the Balkan Wars. In turn, leaders of the Orthodox Church refused to bless

\textsuperscript{16} Boyer, \textit{Urban Masses and Moral Order}.
The Victor, but instead held the statue responsible for bringing on God’s wrath of natural disasters – floods and earthquakes that afflicted Europe around the same time.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the church voiced a critical stance toward modern urban life, and especially toward entertainment, as an assault on patriarchal order and national consciousness. When it came to new urban fashion, church leaders were not shy to pen editorials protesting short skirts and makeup in the religious publication Vesnik (Herald) but also in Belgrade’s respected daily Politika. In their estimation, women’s skirts were not to hang more than 25 centimeters off the ground and popular urban activities like smoking were deemed immoral for the farer sex.²⁰ The church’s view framed entertainers, especially foreign ones like Josephine Baker, as a tool of western corruption. In light of Baker’s 1929 performance in the capital, one conservative author asked if “the descendants of Kosovo martyrs and avengers really have nothing better to do than to effortlessly accept that what the indifferent West forces on under the guise of some sort of culture.” He prompted readers to think about Baker’s performance as an insult to the nation, and one that could hardly be considered culture. “Is it worthy of honorable Belgrade,” he postulated, “to welcome an eccentric ballerina as if she were a princess of royal blood, or to parade her around the historical Terazije like a circus bear?”²¹ A female author joined this public discussion and pointed the finger at Belgrade’s women for spending their leisure time on entertainment rather than reading national authors and respectable publications.²²

But while the Orthodox Church stood as a prominent advocate of morality, it held little leverage on urban culture and much less on the public in the capital. While scholars have widely documented the failure of the church to exert decisive leverage on cities around the world in the

²⁰ Čupić, Gradjanski modernizam, 90.
²² Marina Božić-Špaic’eva, “Naslednice Džozefine Beker,” Žena i svet, juli 1929, 16.
aftermath of industrialization, Belgrade stands as a poignant example in interwar Yugoslavia. For instance, Josephine Baker visited only two cities in the unified state in 1929: Belgrade and Zagreb. In the capital, “radiant faces” followed her as she moved on and off stage; despite some objections from church leaders, her performances were showered with more praise than criticism. In Zagreb, however, Roman Catholic priests were among the crowds at the train station awaiting Baker’s arrival, said to have been stationed there to shame the gathering public’s “deviant” desires. From there, Baker’s first Zagreb performance was poorly received. *Politika* reported that seminary students bought out the first rows and overwhelmed the venue with their protest: “Shame! Down with Baker! Is this culture?” At one point, a stink bomb was thrown on stage, producing considerable commotion that led to the students’ arrest and a lukewarm conclusion of the performance. News of the incident were heard as far as the United States, where *Time* magazine wrote that students from the Zagreb Technical College pelted Baker with cow beets in a visible public protest against the degeneration of national culture. In response to the sustained vocal objections in Zagreb, Baker cancelled her two remaining performances (one had been scheduled to be a charity fund raiser).

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Although the state feared that new forms of entertainment like the cinema were evolving into “new religions” of the twentieth century, much like social elites and church leaders, it did little to manage culture, let alone entertainment. Even in 1929, the year the King declared a dictatorship and imposed notorious censorship statutes on much of Yugoslav print media, its repercussions on entertainment in the city were minimal. Instead, Radio Belgrade began its fulltime broadcast with a repertoire of mixed programming resonating with jazz, the first talkies were screened in the capital’s cinemas, and, indeed, Josephine Baker took the city by storm. Some magazines, like the women’s illustrated Žena i svet appropriated national signifiers by picturing Queen Maria on its cover as a metaphorical mother of the unified nation; she appeared dressed in a regional folk costume and announcing her second pregnancy. But competing images were never at a loss in Belgrade’s popular culture. For example, the same magazine also featured girls frolicking at the beach in bathing suits, elegantly dressed ladies in the city, and women partaking in sport on its covers around the same period, just as publicity images of Josephine Baker reached the height of circulation in the late 1920s. In addition to seeing Baker’s

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28 Dimić, Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 326.
photographs, Belgraders were also privy to the famous sketches by Paul Colin that accompanied the published memoir. These illustrations featured Baker as an abstract, semi-nude form with exaggerated features and a posture inclined toward a pounce. More than that, the sketches are both comical and erotic – neither of which could be said of the contrasting image of the queen.

Although Belgrade was invested with symbolic meaning as the Yugoslav capital, the state paradoxically held little sway over the city and its culture. Even the King implicitly renounced the capital and its unruliness. Although sovereigns had lived in Belgrade’s center for decades – both when the city was the capital of Serbia and later when it became the head of Yugoslavia – King Alexander I challenged this expectation as a part of his dictatorial reforms. Reportedly, as Stephen Graham writes, “Alexander did not like the trams hurtling past his home, nor the swarms of people sitting at tables on the pavement at the corner of the street, nor the forming of unofficial delegations outside the palace gates.”

Abandoning the royal residence in Belgrade’s very center, a stone’s throw away from the shopping promenade on Knez Mihailova Street, the famous Hotel Moskva café, and the Parliament, the King broke ground on a new palace in the city’s outskirts in Dedinje (on Topčider Hill) and, according to Graham, never again inhabited the city center after the winter of 1929. The King’s flight into the countryside can be read as a metaphorical rejection of Belgrade. As I describe in the following section, the urban administration was met with more than few challenges in its management of the city; the King’s abandonment of the city symbolized that the state has resigned a degree of its control in the city as well as its subversive cultural, national, and moral hierarchies.

The state practiced only an indirect power to dictate the availability and accessibility of foreign entertainment in Yugoslavia, but it acknowledged its own accountability in this task.

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through the management of citizenship and labor laws. The state’s early agenda aimed to protect national workers, and thus endowed domestic culture with a greater, national value. But the development of an intelligible cultural policy was confounded by a lack of clear definitions of categories like “Yugoslav” and “foreign.” In 1921, the Ministry of Internal Affairs offered a terse definition of nationals as those who are “by tribe or language Serbian, Croatian, or Slovenian,”31 motioning toward the state’s official name (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, to be changed in 1929 to Kingdom of Yugoslavia). In a region struggling to “unmix” masses of populations after World War I, “tribe” membership and language were hardly accurate marks of belonging. The Yugoslav state was aware of the complexity of its citizenship, and state records from the early 1920s show debates about the significance of borderlands, ethnic ties with enemy states such as Italy and Hungary, and citizenship rights of those living in emigration. Although a postwar grace period allowed persons of “good moral and political standing” to opt in or out of Yugoslav citizenship, police records show that citizenship questions were not resolved by the early 1920s. An internal note from 1924 voices a concern for “persons whose citizenship has not yet been determined” and suggests that they face everyday barriers such paying tax, earning a livelihood, and movement across borders.32

Not unlike “Yugoslav,” “foreigner” was a flexible category without a firm definition. It was also shrouded in danger and mystery even in the eyes of state servants. In a 1925 report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, an officer advised that foreigners can be spotted “when one looks at the hairstyle of the young ladies, and at the intelligent faces of the men… it is easy to recognize the face of danger and the possibility of trafficking and espionage.” He elaborated that

32 AJ, MUP, f. 37, j. 959.
fur coats and cleanly shaven faces are often markers of foreign smugglers or spies. Foreign entertainers were not uncommonly described as elegant, glamorous, and rich in interwar newspapers and conservative presses sometimes speculated, just as the police officer had, that these appearances disguised a veritable threat to the state. In a 1928 article about the arrest of the Russian dancer Natalia Korta for “suspicious behavior,” the daily Novosti fed on fears of communism that prevailed across Europe during the interwar years and proclaimed Korta to be a “Soviet spy.” In the text, she is described as “an ordinary variety show dancer” who collaborated with the enemy, betrayed her contacts, and endangered the city as a roving communist. The article postulated Korta’s decadent behavior as exemplary of foreign degeneration, while her presence in the capital was deemed dangerous. Interestingly, despite these negative representations, travelers usually obtained passports and visas with ease, although the state’s relationship to foreigners changed over time and mirrored the shifting political alliances so that, for instance, German and Czech citizens received exemptions from entry visas once these states granted Yugoslavs reciprocity in the early 1930s.

Economic interests were cited in debates over who did or did not constitute a Yugoslav because citizenship brought the responsibility of taxation and the privilege of employment. Like the surveillance of borders, these regulations were loosely enforced; especially common in Belgrade, reports from institutions and individuals complained that unqualified foreign workers were issued permits while Yugoslav workers remained unemployed. Nationalist, right-leaning presses validated these concerns in the first decade of the interwar years by mobilizing the category “foreigner” as undefined though inarguably separate from the vague sense of the

33 AJ, MUP, f. 57, j. 41-42.
35 AJ, MUP, f. 34, j. 268.
national “us.” Although not unanimous, most reports blamed an ambiguous “foreign” presence for the shortage of jobs, money, and morality. A 1923 article in Balkan proclaimed that “our country has been flooded with foreigners” and that “our sons” are “left with the crumbs” or forced “on the street.” Without offering any insights into the distinction between “foreign” and “our sons,” the author imagined Yugoslavia as a utopia for foreigners to encroach on national resources.\(^{37}\) A year later, Beogradske novosti declared that foreigners have taken advantage of Yugoslav hospitality and have found “a real Eldorado where they live better and more luxuriously than any local son.”\(^{38}\) An article in Večernje novine (Evening News) went even further and suggested that foreign workers were liable for bringing Hungarian irredentists, Russian Germanophile secret organizations, and Bulgarian espionage into the state, and suggested that they should be expelled.\(^{39}\)

This type of xenophobic comments was not uncommon in the interwar period’s political context of nationalism and economic protectionism. It is important to note that disparaging attacks were often targeted at other Yugoslavs, like Croats, who would have been considered “foreigners” by Serbian nationalists in Belgrade. Interestingly, the first decade of the interwar years is described as a period of economic stabilization and industrial development\(^{40}\) and some scholars interpret the persistence of xenophobia as evidence of the fundamental conflict between Serbs and Croats.\(^{41}\) The tension was not lost on King Alexander, who issued the order to ban Balkan and other newspapers that “incite hate between tribes” as soon as he assumed the

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\(^{38}\) “Napolje s njima!,” Beogradske novosti, 28 februar 1924.

\(^{39}\) “Revizija stranaca,” Večernje novine, 30 mart 1924.


\(^{41}\) For an argument of conflicting Serb and Croat ideologies predating the unification of Yugoslavia, see Banac, The National Question. For a discussion of Serb-Croat compromises, see Djokić, Elusive Compromise.
dictatorship. The King’s agenda of creating Yugoslav national unity (*narodno jedinstvo*) acquired greater urgency with the onset of the Great Depression in Yugoslavia in the early 1930s. Domestic performers capitalized on the state’s reinvigorated economic protectionism and complained about competition from their foreign colleagues. The magician Sreten Obradović wrote to the Minister in 1932 to object to the success of his competitor, the Czech performer Fred Marion. He claimed that in addition to Marion, “a whole legion of performing [Czech] scums” was working in Yugoslavia. Obradović took this opportunity to ask the state “to prove, for once, that it’s not only a selfish step-mother” by lending financial support to his own tour.

Similarly, the late 1930s Cooperative of Artists, Experts, and Performers pleaded for financial contributions: “considering the large number of performers, foreign citizens, who come to our country every day and take large sums of [earned] money abroad, [state support is needed to] underwrite the agendas of local entertainers.”

Domestic performers took advantage of the state’s predisposition to bypass professional organizations and obtain work permits and financial assistance directly from the state. According to archival records, all Yugoslav entertainers were eligible to apply for yearlong work permits and easy extensions that entitled them to employment anywhere in the state – and most of these requests were granted. Indeed, the state was serious in its promise to employ nationals, and enforced a liberal criteria for distributing permits to Yugoslav performers – even when they appeared to be unpopular, boring, or even vulgar. The Minister of Education was also prepared to overlook certain issues of morality – such as a criminal record or reports of unethical behavior that would have blacklisted a foreign applicant – to grant as many work permits as possible to Yugoslavs. Likewise, the state was generous in lending financial support to unemployed

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42 AJ, MUP, f. 77, j. 54.
43 AJ, MP, f. 411.
44 AJ, MP, f. 411, j. 73-52-37
performers, or in supporting the Association of Actors in similar efforts. But, despite the concessions made with the intent of nurturing the national economy, Yugoslav entertainment was never relieved of taxation and, despite repeated petitions, the state never came to support a school for performers, as was the case with various “legitimate” dance, music, and art schools.45

Underpinning the attention given to citizenship, state agencies were unsettled on whether foreign performers posed serious competition to national workers. Especially in the first decade of the interwar period, the responsibilities of individual agencies were unclear and policies of processing work and residence permits were porous. The Ministry of Public Affairs claimed jurisdiction over foreign entertainers’ permits on the grounds that they were workers and should be allowed permits only in the absence of Yugoslav workers with equal qualifications. The Ministry held the “right of discretion” to decline permits to foreign workers as a means of economic protectionism if it deemed that an equally qualified Yugoslav performer should be available. However, when the Ministry asserted its intent to determine the value of a foreign cultural worker’s skills,46 the Ministry of Education, the umbrella organ for culture, challenged that this function fell under its jurisdiction and that even “foreign arts influence the development of our domestic arts.”47 Moreover, the Minister of Education argued that the power to decline entry into the state was actually in the power of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and should only be exercised “on the basis of political reasons.”48 A compromise was later reached wherein all three ministries were required to sign off on an individual foreign performer’s permit request in addition to the Yugoslav State-Endorsed Arts Agency and the Association of Actors – a system of checks and balances.

45 AJ, MP, f. 360.
46 AJ, MUP, f. 55, j. 1223.
47 AJ, MUP, f. 55, j. 1221.
48 AJ, MUP, f. 55, j. 1221.
However, the state remained ambivalent about foreign cultural workers, as was evidence by its the ever-changing policy on registration. In the 1920s, performers were only required to register with the police upon entry, just like any foreign traveler, while work permits for temporary engagements were often not required. The first years after the King’s 1929 coup showed a decrease in foreign performers because the borders were less permeable to individuals, but this absence was compensated by a large volume of imported films, fashion, and fiction. By the mid-1930s, entry laws relaxed and foreign entertainers once again flocked to Belgrade to collect work and residence permits. In 1936, the state passed a law requiring all foreigners to complete an Employment Card declaring their profession as a prerequisite for applying for a Yugoslav work permit.\(^{49}\) The Employment Card was among the few documents that were monitored, and was expected to match the vocation declared in the applicant’s passport. This requirement was colloquially referred to as an “entertainers’ passport,” and, unlike in many other European states, performers whose state passports identified them otherwise as students or homemakers (and not some type of performer) had difficulties obtaining entry and work visas in Yugoslavia. Foreign entertainers were also required to submit a dossier to the Ministry of Internal Affairs – or, what is more likely, their agent or local venue manager submitted the dossier – that included personal information and a set of approvals from state agencies and professional organizations. Here, the performer reported everything from their religion and marital status to previous military service, but it was not uncommon for the forms to only be partially complete or to show inconsistencies. In the state archive’s vast collection of foreign performers’ registrations, approvals, and dossiers, there seem to have been few problems. Almost all applicants received the five-part approval and many were granted multiple extensions. The

\(^{49}\) AJ, MUP, f. 33, j. 387.
paper trail was a perfunctory form of surveillance, just like the taxes that accompanied each submission and every two-week extension were of great importance to the state.\textsuperscript{50}

What is most interesting is that foreign performers’ files paint a wildly colorful picture of entertainers who came through Yugoslavia. The performers held citizenship from at least 30 different states (a great many were Austrian, Czech, and German), and it was not uncommon for them to claim a minority ethnicity (\textit{narodnost}) of the given state. The complexity of these performers is even more striking when we take note of their birthplace, declared confession, or maternal and spoken languages. Many entertainers might well be termed cosmopolitan by today’s standards; in the interwar years, they were evidence – and challenge – to the great postwar “unmixing.” Here it is also notable that the performers’ socio-political diversity did not alarm the Ministry of Internal Affairs, their professions did not provoke the Ministry of Education, and their vast numbers did not enrage the Ministry of Public Affairs. Moreover, Yugoslav State-Endorsed Arts Agency and the Association of Actors were willing to certify – whether it was true or not – that the foreign performer was not infringing on the work opportunities of Yugoslav entertainers. Indeed, the performer dossiers show an eclectic portrait of the foreign performer in Yugoslavia, and reflect back on a state that was too distracted by other problems to monitor “fun and pleasure.”

The Yugoslav state was certainly invested in culture during the interwar period, particularly as a tool for bolstering national unity. It was aided in this pursuit by professional associations who stood to gain both financial patronage and national legitimacy from an alliance with the state. The Orthodox Church, similarly, lent its voice to cultural debates, especially in criticizing cultural breaches to patriarchal values and public morality. However, the state’s

\textsuperscript{50} AJ, MUP, f. 40-56.
policies on citizenship and labor in the 1920s and 1930s, intended to crystalize national membership, strengthen the economy, and secure political support, were among the few practical regulations used to manage entertainment from above. The state’s urban extension in the capital, the Belgrade City Authority, applied more targeted means for managing entertainment. However, as I describe in the following section, its initiatives conflated entertainment with urban ills and, in any case, they were met with both resistance and subversion.

Urban Regulation and Ordinances for Fun in Interwar Belgrade

Belgrade’s urban administration, an ancillary of the state, was held to task for regulating the everyday life in the city. Among other things, Belgrade City Authority’s Criminal Police had jurisdiction to maintain the safety of persons and property, to monitor public order, to determine crime and punishment, to uphold public morality, and to regulate illegal trafficking, prostitution, alcoholism, gambling, and drugs. After King Alexander declared a dictatorship in 1929, urban order became a more central concern of the municipal police as the city aimed to reign in erratic closing times of nighttime venues, illegal activities like gambling and prostitution, and immoral behavior, usually between men and women. As urban authorities saw it, entertainment venues like cabarets and cinemas were the root of many urban ills that put into question national and moral hierarchies in the city. Unsurprisingly, efforts to regulate the city’s entertainment did not eradicate the city’s many problems but oftentimes only succeeded at tapering the visibility of entertainment. Moreover, urban codes intended to control urban life – space and movement, gender and sexuality, and fun and pleasure – were neither unanimously enforced nor unanimously respected. In this section, I show how several 1929 urban ordinances – of closing time, of female entertainers’ labor, and of venue operating standards – were manifested in
interwar Belgrade as a struggle between the City Authority, proprietors, and patrons over the accessibility, availability, and accountability of entertainment.

Restrictions on closing times were hotly contested in interwar Belgrade. After a decade of indifference, new municipal codes of 1929 required all nighttime establishments to close by 2 A.M. on the grounds that the late nights brought about excessive drunkenness and disturbance. In the months before the new closing time was to go into effect, a passionate reveler, who signed only as “Dude from Skadarlija” (*Tip iz Skadarlije*), penned an op-ed in the daily *Novosti* and expressed disbelief at the proposed ordinance; he dubbed Belgrade a “café-democracy” where ministers and government officials often enjoy wine, music, and “other nighttime pleasures.” Similarly, the author saw the availability of nighttime fun as integral for the city’s writers, artists, intellectuals, and actors, and threatened that they will “pack their bags” and turn their backs on Belgrade in the face of such regulations. But the author also spoke for the ordinary urban resident, “all the city’s Mišos, Markos, Savas, and Vladans,” who enjoy staying out well past 2 A.M. 51 Another article put it simply: “Belgraders like to have fun at night.” 52

After the closing time ban went into effect, newspapers reported a domino effect: offenders were jailed and many business owners reported revenue loss. An article decried that negative economic repercussions were felt across the city – from hotels and cafés, to coachmen and food vendors. For instance, Ljubomir Simić, the manager of the café-bar Crnogorac, was fined and jailed for disregarding the new closing time regulation. In his own defense, he claimed that his livelihood depended on nighttime operation because his main patrons – performers from

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the neighboring variety stage Palace (sometimes known as Palas) – did not arrive before 2 A.M., when the theater drew its curtain. The journalist went on to elaborate that nightlife was not only a part of the city’s rhythm, but also a necessary niche in the city’s economy. According to the article, the demand for night entertainment was too great and pointed to illegal “pop-up night houses” that continued to serve drinks and play music throughout the night. Unlike registered bars and clubs, these “pop-up night houses” were not licensed or taxed, and the article speculated that the closing restrictions would force law-abiding establishments into this same underworld in order to stay afloat financially. The immediate rejection of the new closing time ordinances can be described as a subtle yet significant form of subversion, as proprietors undermined municipal regulations and explicitly aligned themselves with the power of the entertainment market, rather than the authority of the urban administration. In disobeying for the sake of profit, the proprietors also put their faith in the continued late night patronage of the urban public and the rooted place of entertainment in the city.

Belgraders did not disappoint. Spectators reacted against the sudden regulation of urban time by continuing to go out and stay out until dawn. Newspaper and magazines documented nightlife, their enthusiastic coverage hardly revealing an awareness of the new municipal codes about closing times. A detailed cover story about “nighttime Belgrade” in the weekly magazine _Ilustrovani list nedelja_ (Illustrated Sunday Paper) featured more than twenty nightspots across the city, the places of entertainment where patrons went after an evening at the theater, operetta, or film. The author identified himself as a “night vagabond” and gleefully set out with a group of friends on “a night of debauchery paid for by the editorial offices.” And, indeed, the author was met with lively crowds throughout the night. At the downtown hotel Ekscelizor, “powdered residents in tight tuxes marvel[ed] at the music and coolly dance[d] the diagonal waltz, … as if at

53 “Mesto novčane globe, policija hapsi kafedžije za otvorene radnje polse 2 časa,” _Novosti_, 29 novembar 1929, 3.
some dacha.” At the Slavija and Ruska Kruna further to the west, the author took part in a “dirty joke and good wine,” while, at the pub Kragujevac, ladies who allowed themselves luxuries like fur and limos sat next to hard-working tradesmen and listened to the passionate singer Cica Stojanović. Other venues were notable for their orchestras, beautiful patrons, or exotic décor. But, what is most interesting is that this nighttime story moved through Belgrade along with the ticking of the clock – from the elegant clubs and café-bars of the center, to the pubs in the southern part of city and finally to the various outskirts – over the course of the night. Well after midnight, the tour of the city’s night establishments took the author and his entourage to “where the roads remain unpaved.” Here, young men from the periphery and girls in colorful dresses continued to dance and laugh along with “sour wine and an out-of-tune Roma upright bass.” With seeming defiance of the ordinances, the author stayed out until dawn, when “the first roosters announce[d] the new day,” precisely because the peripheral proprietors showed a similar disregard.

In other words, the municipal regulation of urban time had a powerful effect on the Belgraders’ use of space: as the night wore on, nightlife remained accessible but grew more distant from the center, or went underground. Although scandals, intrigues, and illicit activity continued to appear in newspapers, the center became the only portion of the city where nightlife was visibly managed after 1929. Respectable downtown revelers, like the Austrian chocolatier Wilhelm Kutch [sic], moved the party into private quarters. While investigating Kutch’s frequent trips to Vienna, the police found that he hosted private fetes (lumperajka) at his apartment in Dorćol, a neighborhood adjacent to the city center, but they failed to produce a law that prohibited him from doing so. Distance from the center, in turn, came to signify a proportionate

54 “Kroz noćni Beograd…” Ilustrovani list nedelja, 12 januar 1930, ii, 25.
55 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2781 (1936), f. XXXIII, j. 303/36.
challenge to order, security, and good citizen behavior, and it was in Belgrade’s outskirts where residents mobilized the cover of night to challenge the state’s order of moral hierarchies. The pace of nighttime amusements, prostitution, and drinking showed no change in peripheral neighborhoods like Propok near the rail station, the western Jagatan-mali, the eastern Danube shore Pištolj-mali before and after 1929; instead, irregular policing and porous surveillance remained more common. These neighborhoods came to acquire a reputation of immorality and danger in the popular presses, not altogether divorced from ethnic, religious, and class components, but they also fostered an alternative space where entertainment remained available and accessible not far from downtown.

Of course, municipal codes regulating entertainment were often undermined at all times of day and in all parts of the city. Police files point to endless raids of backroom gambling, some successful and others not, that uncover the popularity of this “luxurious” activity. Owners and servers often hid, warned, or helped patrons escape in light of encroaching police controls because gambling ultimately attracted customers, and their business, to bars and clubs. Prostitution was a more serious urban problem in the interwar years, and one not uncommonly linked with “fun and pleasure.” Historian Aleksandar Miletić suggests that “Belgrade authorities combated prostitution by targeting night cafés, so called Variétés, as they suspected that night performances were only a pretext for prostitution.” Among other laws regulating public order after 1929, prostitution, pimping, and procuring of women and children was made illegal. In response to the heightened regulation of prostitution in the city, the activity withdrew into private

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56 See Neuberger, Hooliganism.
58 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 139/1939.
60 Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 62.
places, underground, or away from the city center. In his memoirs, Dimitrije Knežev remembered going as far as Zemun’s infamous brothel Kuća Ljubavi (House of Love), on the other side of the Danube, as a part of a boyhood inauguration among students into “real citizens of the metropolis.” Many Belgraders, including Knežev’s school friends, were well versed in the nighttime schedule of the ferry shuttling passengers upstream towards Zemun, just as they knew to follow the smell of tobacco, the rhythm of the waltz, and the chatter of the crowd to “the street of love.” Interwar Belgrade residents held Zemun’s prewar Austro-Hungarian legacy responsible for the “cheerful atmosphere” and its reputation as the Eldorado of love where “sexual fun” was thought to be more liberal. Zemun cultivated this reputation because its separate administrative body did not deem prostitution illegal. The women employed at the brothels were a central appeal of Zemun’s nightlife: they were usually rumored to be Hungarian or Slovak. Their foreignness was fundamental for enabling the social transgression of both moral and national hierarchies, more so than even a visit to a brothel engendered.

Meanwhile, back in the capital, the City Authority struggled to regulate the boundaries of acceptable behavior of female entertainers. As Barbara Engel suggests, the enforcement of patriarchal order was often carried out through the regulation of women. And, indeed, nothing challenged the already unstable authority of patriarchal society as the visibility of female workers in places of entertainment where they were immediately suspected of prostitution (although the police often lacked evidence necessary for an arrest or a medical exam). After 1929, a seven-point code for employees in bars, clubs, and variety theaters in Belgrade stipulated that all female employees were to be reported, women could not be lodged at the same address

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61 Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 133.
63 Barbara Alpern Engel, Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work, and Family in Russia, 1861-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 197.
where they are employed, female performers were to stop working by midnight and servers by 2 A.M., billed schedules were to be approved by the city authorities, female employees were subject to screenings of skin and venereal disease, and female workers were not to sit with guests at any time. Although this lengthy list of codes for employee was intended to protect women, it also betrays a patriarchal imposition of moral hierarchies that were designed to protect society from female entertainment workers as well.

Unregulated female entertainers unearthed several layers of unease for the urban authority. For instance, those who disobeyed the last statute – mixing with guests off stage – challenged the conventional practice of spectatorship and, with it, of patriarchal morality. Under these pretensions, Djenadija Čolak, a 23-year old singer at the pub Suvi Djeram was fined and imprisoned for two days after she was caught drinking with guests after her show, while Ana Hanover, an 18-year old singer at Dalmatinac was similarly charged after she was found drinking with patrons at another pub. These women were suspected not only of compromising themselves but also that of the audience and society. Echoing the polarized patriarchal approaches to women in spaces of entertainment – as both victims and culprits – post-1929 municipal regulations can be read as an attempt to protect the former and disarm the latter. In the case when the female entertainer was also a foreigner, the state and municipal authorities saw a clear opportunity to enforce not just moral, but national hierarchies. A police memo hints at the degree to which national respectability was at stake when the Greek performer Adela Bozaldis was accused of mixing with the patrons in 1937. The police reported that Bozaldis was seen “in the company of different men with whom she visits different establishments, and it is suspected

65 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 133.
66 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 131.
that the named here has adulterous relations with them and lives an immoral life." Bozaldis was consequently charged with “exploiting our hospitality” and her work and residence permits were revoked. Unlike a Yugoslav performer who would have been fined and imprisoned in this case, the Greek entertainer was only expelled from the country and granted no further work permits.

Yet, like as was the case with other interwar regulations, most proprietors disregarded the codes for female workers, just as city officials loosely monitored them. Managers often submitted performer dossiers to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, making no effort to hide that the entertainer’s local lodging was, in fact, located at the same address as establishment where they were contracted. The restrictions on working hours were similarly disregarded. Police records indicate that performers not only mingled with the public later and later into the evening, but that they also developed intimate relations with local residents. For instance, the law student Spasoje Stefanović wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1936 to request a permanent resident permit for the singer and dancer Ana Cinkova from Bulgaria, on the grounds of their forthcoming marriage. Stefanović explained that he met Cinkova while she was performing at the Ruski Jar and Palace in Belgrade, and pledged that he would bear the responsibility of supporting her from now on. Interestingly, the Minister approved the request, under the condition that Cinkova refrain from work at Belgrade’s bars and variety stages. The conditional residence permit alluded to the compartmentalized allocation of foreign female entertainers’ roles. Although Stefanović promised to shield her from further work in the entertainment industry, the Minister also asserted that after a marriage to the Belgrade law student, dancing and singing became incompatible professions. The fact that the Bulgarian performer did apply for a

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subsequent work permit and that her request was granted is a testament to the leaky administrative enforcement of municipal codes by both the city and the state.

Finally, a number of the post-1929 municipal regulations of entertainment were vaguely aimed at reforming the state’s accountability over establishments, including patron behavior, health codes, and, indeed, content. An article dated several months before the institution of the new regulations illustrated a typical evening atmosphere at a Belgrade cinema in the late 1920s. Many screening rooms were makeshift cinemas – spatial adaptations in restaurants, pubs, or variety stages – that were packed to exceed capacity. The audience crowded at tables, while busy waiters served “Viennese schnitzel, čevapčići and spritzers” from an improvised kitchen or bar. The commotion of taking orders, eating, and paying checks, coupled with the audience’s general habit of whistling and hollering during projections, distracted from the film screenings. The author deemed this atmosphere provincial – how films had once been in Paris, and how they were now screened in Priština or Debro; in other words, he argued that the local manifestation of the cinema as a part-pub, part-restaurant, and part-variety stage was ill suited for a capital.\(^69\) While the author spoke in the name of film-lovers, he also revealed the awkward encounter between entertainment and the existing built infrastructure in Belgrade: this meant that performances were consumed out of context, shows were staged in improper setting, and films were watched over the constant buzz of chewing, clinking, and clapping.

Although the City Authority was not necessarily interested in standardizing entertainment venues to the level of other European capitals, the core incentives were to rein in the unruliness, disorder, and immorality of the city. Most regulations that appeared after 1929 were presented as concerns for sanitation and safety, but indirectly worked to shape the experience of fun. For example, the cinema Avala was granted a conditional work permit extension on the grounds of a

\(^{69}\)“Arhitektura bioskopa i naši kafanski bioskopi,” *Novosti* 18 avgust 1928, 4.
projection room inspection and the implementation of several new regulations: all screenings were to be reported to the police a day ahead of scheduled screenings, films were to conclude by midnight, smoking was to be prohibited, food brought into the hall was to be “covered and hygienic,” yelling, stomping, and whistling was to be prohibited, and children could not be allowed to projections of inappropriate films. A similar set of regulations was requested of the cinema Kasina, in addition to a limited capacity of 842 seats (712 on the floor and 130 on the balcony), hygienic standards of food sold at the cinema, and the mandatory employment of a licensed projector operator. And, indeed, the bulk of these regulations were progressive initiatives to make film screenings more safe and pleasant, and many of them addressed the complaints of the film fan from 1928, such as distractions during film screenings. But there was a good deal of subjectivity in the new codes of conduct and, invariably, patriarchal standards of respectability prevailed. Moreover, there was a significant degree of resistance to enforcement in entertainment venues; police records show that improper behaviors such as sexual harassment of female servers, dancing after midnight, and fornication in back rooms remained common.

In addition to the management of patrons and venues, the City Authority endeavored to manage the content of urban entertainment – with least success. Cinema was an especially provocative target because it stood as an unprecedented form of leisure in the interwar years. Initiatives to censor films “for security, health, moral, and political reasons” appear in the Yugoslav archives as early as 1921, and the Belgrade City Authority petitioned to block films deemed to be offensive to religion, in poor artistic and moral taste, or that were thought to

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70 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2776 (1936), f. I, j. 1.
71 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2781 (1936), f. XXXIII, j. 298.
72 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 125.
73 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 174.
74 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 136.
misrepresent Yugoslavia in 1925. By the early 1930s, censorship of film “for public good” was paired with another question: national consciousness. The president of the state-endorsed group Yugoslav Film sent a concerned note to the Minister of Education in 1933 claiming that upwards of 90% of movies screened in Yugoslavia are of German origin (25% would have been a more accurate estimation). But the president did not call for a ban on all German film in Belgrade – this would have effectively sabotaged all domestic cinema owners. Instead, he proposed that a team translate foreign films into Serbo-Croatian, reasoning that translation work would create jobs for domestic workers just as it would allow for underhanded censorship, a proposal that the minister found agreeable. However, due to the sheer quantity of films on the domestic market – by one account, there were 722 registered films in 1933 – it is unsurprising that archival records show that most domestic and foreign films simply went unchecked.

In the early 1930s, the state replaced its concern with arriving foreign features with an interest in nurturing domestic filmmakers. Cinemas were legally required to devote 7% of all screenings to domestic films in 1931, and 15% by 1932. Because owners were fined time and again for noncompliance or for failing to screen any Yugoslav films at all, the regulation finally stabilized at a 10% – a requirement that nonetheless often went unfulfilled. The proprietor Ilija Djordjević excused himself by pleading that the demand for new film in Belgrade was overwhelming, and that there were simply no Yugoslav films to be screened. He was right: only a smattering of domestic films was produced in the interwar years, as the Yugoslav film industry was far outpaced by American, German, and French productions. And it was not only

75 AJ, MP, f. 632, j. 6-158.
76 AJ, MP, f. 383.
77 Boško Tokin, “Prošle godine u Jugoslaviji je prikazano preko pola miliona metara filma,” Vreme, 2 mart 1933.
78 Ljubomir Dinić, Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 336.
79 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2799 (1939), f. XVII, j. 29-39.
80 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2781 (1936), f. XXXIII, j. 132.
the lack of domestic films that posed a problem for meeting quotas. Most Yugoslav production
failed to fulfill the demands of the public mystified by romances, mysteries, or adventure tales,
but rather offered state-sponsored narratives of health, sports, and education. Even the much-
anticipated Belgrade the Capital of Yugoslavia (Beograd Prestojnica Jugoslavije) was a de facto
propaganda film that was praised in newspapers but had little popularity among the public.

By challenging, or in some cases altogether rejecting, the 1929 urban codes of closing
times, operating standards, and content, Belgrade proprietors and audiences undermined the
authority of the city administration and, with it, that of the state. Indeed, the regulation of the city
was deeply intertwined with questions about national, moral, and cultural hierarchies. But
opinions about these hierarchies were not unanimous and Belgrade served as a platform for
negotiating the policies dictating the availability, accessibility, and accountability of
entertainment. As I have shown in the case of top-down state regulations, and now with those
targeted at the city, entertainment often triggered a power struggle that resulted in the assertion
of agency among proprietors and audiences. Despite the fact that many state and city elites
persisted in their protests, the battle for Belgrade’s urban culture had, by all accounts, been lost.

Professional Associations and the Indirect Management of Entertainment

Professional associations were active in their opposition to entertainment as subordinate
to “learned” arts, following the argumentation that “classical” or “serious” music cannot be
consumed in the same manner as its opposite, what Theodor Adorno termed leichte Musik.81 In
Belgrade, the rift between the arts and entertainment began to widen in the 1920s and 1930s as
an unprecedented quantity of foreign entertainment arrived in the city. Cultural organizations

81 Scott, Sound of the Metropolis, 4-6.
responded to the influx of entertainment with alarm, not only because its availability and accessibility challenged the salience of the arts and its patronage, but also because it threatened to unravel the class relations were implied in the maintenance of cultural, national, and moral hierarchies. In this section, I first consider how professional associations levied their power to maintain these hierarchies by enforcing strict membership rules and excluding entertainers from the financial and practical privileges it carried. However, I also show the responses of Yugoslav performers: when they failed to garner support in the state and society, they were accountable for establishing their own associations, agencies, and networks. I argue that, even as it was being pushed to the margins, entertainment was increasingly rooted at the very center of Belgrade’s interwar society.

Entertainment disputed the cultural hegemony of the educated bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie, as the falling patronage of the arts threatened their moral and intellectual leadership. In the struggle to maintain social salience, members of professional associations were vocal in demarcating the difference between trained and untrained cultural workers, often reproducing the qualifications required for group membership as the qualitative measure for the arts. While many associations had rulebooks that outlined membership requirements, the rules were motivated by the drive to exclude certain types of members. For example, the Association of Dance Teachers informed the Minister of Education in 1927 that it no longer accepted members who were “artists first and teachers second.” In a clear effort to professionalize the organization, the Association began to privilege certified teachers, those with “proper education and training,” for membership and, eventually, for employment.\(^8\) Moreover, in the coming months, the Association president filed several reports against supposedly “untrained” dance teachers who were not even registered

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\(^8\) AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 10-8-[27].
with the Association; it is perhaps not surprising that all three of the named individuals were described as entertainers or teachers of foreign dance styles.\textsuperscript{83}

By the late 1920s, most cultural organizations followed suit in demanding “proper training” for membership, what had become a caveat for discretionary exclusion for domestic employment. In 1929, the League of Musicians announced that orchestra directors were required to complete mandatory training and exams before they could be certified by the organization, and asked the Minister of Education to enforce the same standard when issuing work permits. In turn, League members employed as directors were required to contract only other League musicians with adequate certifications. The organization explained its commitment to “formal training” as a prerequisite “for the proper social and artistic development of music” in Yugoslavia. Without revealing the expected standard of “formal training,” perhaps leaving it deliberately vague, the League asserted that musicians deemed unqualified or unskilled should be denied employment.\textsuperscript{84} Significantly, orchestras and musicians during the interwar period often performed at cinemas, clubs, and variety theaters – veritable places of entertainment. In light of this, the proposal reads as a desperate attempt to levy cultural control in these venues. In other words, the League sought to control the class and taste of the performers, in the hope that it would similarly shape the class and taste of the patrons.

In addition to maintaining cultural hierarchies, professional associations claimed that their members upheld national and moral ones. For instance, Association of Actors promised to propote only “serious arts establishments aligned with the goals of national culture.” In turn, the Association dismissed private theaters outside their oversight as dilettante but also as anational. The core of the problem was that proprietors who did not hold Yugoslav citizenship sometimes

\textsuperscript{83} AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 15-31-28.
\textsuperscript{84} AJ, MP, f. 620, j. 3-11-[29].
managed private theaters in Belgrade and that they, more seriously, failed to nurture the national spirit.\footnote{AJ, MP, f. 618.} Along a similar line of argumentation, the conductor Vlajko Vasić, a vocal member of the Association of Musicians, sent a petition signed by 362 association members to the Minister of Education in 1940 contending that “all sorts of [untrained] musicians and singers… are devastating our national music and song” and effectively duping the public with falsified arts. Vasić accused these “fake” performers of being morally dubious, ironically because the exclusion from professional organizations also unburdened them from paying taxes.\footnote{AJ, MP, f. 3270, j. 8-241-41.}

Contrary to its intent, the marginalization of entertainers – both foreign and domestic ones – from the social structures governing culture in interwar Belgrade emboldened proprietors and performers to establish alternative professional associations, unions, and collectives. The Association of Yugoslav Performers was founded in 1923, the placement agencies Jugoras and State-Endorsed Yugoslav Agency for the Arts (\textit{Povlašćena Jugoslovenska Umetnička Agencija}) specialized in entertainment bookings, and the Collective of Yugoslav Artists, Craftsmen, and Amateurs (\textit{Samopomoć}) became informal organizational platforms for performers in Belgrade. Membership was usually limited to Yugoslav citizens and was intended to bolster employment, protect labor rights, and offer disability and retirement support. Contrary to the prevailing mood of economic protectionism, the organizations sometimes petitioned for the eligibility of foreign members in the hopes that it would buffer the job prospects of local performers.\footnote{AJ, MP, f. 411.} Similarly, Natalija Djordjević proposed to open a placement agency specifically catering to foreign

\footnote{AJ, MP, f. 411. The president of the Association of Performers, Milan Amanović argued that foreign performers are often necessary to complete certain bills and effectively aid in placing domestic workers. It is likely that Amanović was implicitly petitioning for his own troupe Amano that advertised diverse amusement like “stomach speech,” manipulation, and illusions (AJ, MP, f. 411, j. 122-93/31).}
performers in Belgrade in 1935.\textsuperscript{88} Although these types of request were usually dismissed by the Ministry of Education and the umbrella group Association of Actors, local performers generally welcomed the incorporation of foreigners among their troupes, programs, and tours.

The most active of these organizations, the Association of Performers (\textit{Udruženje Artista}), was founded in the 1920s to offer entertainers a degree of social, economic, and political protection. It might be termed the most diverse of professional associations in Yugoslavia at the time, open to directors, acrobats, magicians, wrestlers, comedians, clowns, stunt devils, organists, and a seemingly endless list of other professions that were categorized as “athletic and educational… all that serve to entertain the public.” The organization was established in 1923, to the great delight of prewar performers who had been rallying for it for years, and professed to represent a revolving cast of seasonal members that varied between 60 and 400. The Association of Performers rulebook mirrored the language and structure of other professional Associations of the period. Membership, of course, was limited to Yugoslav citizens who abided by “moral standards” and the organization’s codes of conduct such as maintaining a current membership and reporting performers who worked without a permit.\textsuperscript{89} In 1929, on the eve of state nationalization, the president of the Association reaffirmed the group’s goals “to help its members (our citizens) to overcome the influence of foreign elements on our artistic stages and to nurture and strengthen our own artistic potential, enabling it for the struggle against foreign competition within the borders of our state and abroad.”

While the Association of Performers responded to the 1929 political reorganization with a pledge of national allegiance, as did most other professional organizations, it was among the first to attempt to subvert the state’s strict rules about labor and citizenship. In a bold

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{88} AJ, MP, f. 411.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 2-37-[29].
\end{itemize}
announcement in the early 1930s, Association declared that it would begin admitting foreign performers as members. The president suggested that foreign performers were in high demand at local establishments and that they opened opportunities for Yugoslav performers to be billed as supporting acts. What is more, the Association asked permission to employ foreign performers lacking documents such as the “performer visa.” The response from the Minister of Education was negative: the Association was initially placed under the stricter surveillance of the more “serious” Association of Actors, until the latter seized all control over the management of entertainers, foreign and domestic, in Yugoslavia. Thereafter the Association of Performers continued to function independently but without state endorsement though the 1930s, but the state’s retaliation lead to the transfer of official management to the authority of Association of Actors, an organization with unbending citizenship requirements for members. Individual entertainers attempted to negotiate this polarizing socio-cultural milieu by endowing their own work with the signifiers endorsed by professional associations.

Another professionalization initiative Yugoslav performers undertook in the interwar years was an attempt to open performance schools in Belgrade that would further legitimize members within existing cultural, national, and moral hierarchies. In 1933, the self-professed “ballet-master, dance teacher, and star of Parisian, London, and Berlin luxury revues” Rudolf H. Ungar, also known by his stage name Rod Riffler, argued that a performance school in Belgrade would be “in the interest of the Yugoslav citizens and the Yugoslav state” because it would enable domestic performers to fill more spots on the entertainment circuit. Ungar nominated himself as a possible director of the school on the grounds of his celebrity in both domestic and

90 AJ, MP, f. 411.
91 AJ, MP, f. 360, j. 29-105-930.
foreign presses. Finally, in 1937, the collective *Samopomoć* succeeded in briefly opening a school for entertainers in Belgrade that was headed by the non-Yugoslav instructor Olav Mebus and offered a three-month course for aspiring performers. The Minister of Internal Affairs initially approved the school, arguing that “considering the large number of entertainers who are foreign citizens and who come to our country daily and take profits abroad, it would be beneficial to support domestic entertainers and the progress of their school.” It was the Association of Artists who protested the school, suggesting that it was not properly accredited and that it did not meet the standards of training Belgrade audiences expected. But it was not worry that the school would fail to uphold standards of entertainment that bothered the Association. Rather, a performance school with the goal of developing an elite domestic entertainment cast threatened to undermine the last vestiges of power held by professional associations to dictate the cultural hierarchy. With trained Yugoslav entertainers, the Association had reasoned, there would be no other option but to admit them into membership – a concession it was not yet ready to make.

With or without a school offering accredited instruction for aspiring Yugoslav entertainers, civic cultural organizations brandished a diminishing accountability over the management of entertainment in interwar Belgrade. While professional associations were persistent in their rejection of entertainers both from organizational membership as well as from prevailing cultural, national, and moral hierarchies, their power to dictate these hierarchies was quickly decreasing. During the interwar years, entertainers became more prominent cultural agents in their own right: they established their own associations, upheld their own professional standards, and even lobbied state funding. Moreover, they parroted the language of arts

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93 IAB, UG, k. 50.
94 AJ, MP, f. 411, j. 73-52-37
organizations – speaking to themes like professional training, national sentiment, and social respectability – as they crafted a permanent place for entertainment in Belgrade that challenged the prevailing hierarchies from within.

**Conclusion**

Entertainment changed the dynamics of cultural politics in interwar Belgrade, but it also shook up the national and moral hierarchies ardently championed by elites and conservatives. While the state, the city, and cultural associations brandished different approaches for managing entertainment, their efforts were no match for its strengthening role in the city. The state’s investment in national culture, for example, did not limit the availability or accessibility of entertainment arriving in Belgrade from abroad. Its laws governing labor and citizenship favoring Yugoslav workers, instead, only claimed a degree of state accountability in shaping the market. The municipal administration, an axillary of the state, exerted an effort at policing the order of the city’s entertainment with ordinances curtailing opening hours, working permits, and standards of operation. However, these urban ordinances were frequently undermined, creatively subverted, and loosely enforced. As I show in the following chapter, municipal regulations succeeded only in demarcating the city center for upper class leisure. Finally, professional associations employed the only power within their reach: as they subordinated entertainment in cultural hierarchies, so they excluded entertainers from cultural associations that carried financial and professional benefits. Yugoslav entertainers responded by bypassing these organizations and petitioning the state’s sympathetic ear for financial support. Others organized professional associations and networks specifically for entertainers. That is to say that the efforts at managing entertainment in interwar Belgrade did very little to actually govern it. Instead, state, the city,
and cultural associations had to come to terms with the popularity of entertainment, its place in
the city, and the new social values it engendered.

Just as entertainment redefined cultural politics by serving as a new reference point in
these debates, it shaped the practice of state, city, and civic management. For example, it placed
the nighttime at the forefront of discussions about patriarchal morality and, similarly, it brought
the category of gender into the debates national respectability. Yet, most importantly,
entertainment retained a large degree of agency because it was itself a market economy. It did
not have to rely on state patronage like the arts. Its popularity spurred Belgrade’s proprietors and
patrons to challenge municipal codes in the interest of financial gains. And the success of foreign
entertainers emboldened their domestic contemporaries to organize competing associations and
networks outside existing ones coveted by cultural organizations. In other words – and to the
dismay of those who wished to see it tightly controlled by the state, the city, or society – it was
interwar Belgraders who primarily governed entertainment with their billfolds.
Chapter Four

Places of Entertainment: Practicing Space, Class, and Gender in Belgrade

Introduction

The Woman from Sarajevo (Gospodjica, 1945) is only among a handful of Ivo Andrić’s (1892-1975) texts set in the Yugoslav capital, and the one that gives us the best idea about the author’s impressions of Belgrade between the two wars. The novel opens with a snippet from an early 1920s newspaper where the obituary of the central anti-heroine Rajka Radaković appeared; Andrić prompts the reader to imagine how residents haphazardly skimmed over the announcement of Rajka’s death as it appeared side-by-side with urban scenes of “murders, tragedies, and bloody events.”¹ At a later point in the novel, the author paints scenes from nighttime kafanas, where “young, cheerful, ambitious people… lost hours and whole nights in lively discussions, with coffee, cigarettes, and red wine.”² And, Andrić concurrently describes the city streets on “that narrow, elevated strip of land above steep inclines of the Danube and the Sava” as the places of daily interaction between migrants and immigrants, religions and traditions, and locals and travelers.³ These physical sites are a central component of Andrić’s Belgrade, but it is the way that they were used as spaces that conjures a portrait of the city – the one the author and real life interwar residents likely lived.

In this chapter, I study urban spatial practice, particularly of entertainment, in interwar Belgrade. Like Andrić’s conception of city places that become spaces through their use, I argue that residents practiced commercial, public, and private places as spaces of entertainment in the Yugoslav capital. The 1920s and 1930s were a period of quick urban expansion accompanied by

² Andrić, Gospodjica, 178.
³ Andrić, Gospodjica, 175-6.
public and private investment in building that was, however, largely unsynchronized. Historian Tanja Damljanović Conley suggests that loose zoning specified urban neighborhoods for certain functions such as administrative, governmental, educational, and residential areas. An entertainment district, a demarcated site where clusters of venues like clubs, cafés, cinemas, restaurants, and theaters were sanctioned, did not exist in interwar Belgrade. At the same time, in the absence of a historic aristocracy and a powerful bourgeoisie, the commercial demands of an entertainment district like West End in London or Kurfürstendamm in Berlin would not have been sustainable. Instead, I show that commercial venues scattered across interwar Belgrade and that entertainment was just as often practiced outside their walls – in public and private places.

I begin the chapter with a theoretical discussion of space and consider how scholars have conceptualized class and gender hierarchies in studies of spatial practice in and outside urban entertainment districts. Then, in the three subsequent sections, I explore how interwar Belgraders used commercial places like variety theaters and cinemas, public places like streets and parks, and finally private places like homes as spaces of entertainment. I argue that the practice of entertainment in diverse commercial, public, and private places had a different effect on social hierarchies in the Yugoslav capital than in entertainment districts of big European cities. I show that in the absence of a demarcated leisure area, entertainment was more accessible to a wider swath of Belgrade’s residents – from the small bourgeoisie to the maturing petite bourgeoisie, workers, and recent migrants – than to their big city contemporaries. Similarly, in the absence of a district deemed to be “safe” for respectable urbanites, women’s participation in entertainment was more diverse, but also more transgressive. Although class and gender continued to shape the practice of entertainment during the interwar years, I argue that its permeability across urban

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places also shaped these hierarchies, and the practice of entertainment and the city itself, to be more democratic.

**Urban Space In and Out of the Entertainment District**

Urban history in the last several decades has been defined by the spatial turn that prioritizes the inclusion of space alongside time as a tool of analysis. According to Michel de Certeau, practice transforms place into space: “the effects produced by the operations that orient [space], situate it, temporalize it, and make it … a practiced place.”⁵ Everyday actions like walking produce space by endowing place with meaning. De Certeau also differentiates between a “voyeur” and a “walker,” where the latter is active in the production of urban space: the “urban walker,” he suggests, “constructs the space of the city with his footsteps, which entwine with those of the rest of the urban crowd into a ‘poetic geography.’”⁶ In other words, space does not simply exist, but it is made through its social practice. Moreover, because it represents one moment in time, the same place can be practiced in a variety of ways. In addition to walking, de Certeau considers consumption as a type of practice – one that can be applied broadly to fashion and magazines, as well as to performance and bodies – that produces space in time. Pierre Bourdieu postulates a similar concept of the “knowing subject” such as a cultural critic, who transforms an event into a representation.⁷ Michel Foucault has discussed this as spatial mutability or “heterotopia,” a concept he defines as “a place where the other real sites that can be found within a given culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”⁸

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The urbanist Henri Lefebvre has also been influential in conceptualizing space. He prioritizes the production of space as a set of social experiences. Like the definition put forth by de Certeau, Lefebvre’s interpretation is premised on the fact that the production of space is not determined by physical place, but rather that meaning is filled by its users. Most importantly, however, Lefebvre argues that the practice of space transforms human relations. While production “from above” imposes meaning on the built city, from the architectural design to socio-cultural organizations, and endows space with symbolic meaning (such as a place of worship or a court), Lefebvre argues that everyday users produce space through the way they respond to these physical places. The theoretical concept of space is thus inherently shaped by contestation, negotiation, and appropriation of practice that defines not only how individuals use place, but also how they relate to one another in the process of spatial practice, a practice not necessarily seamless or cohesive.

Scholars have considered how space is produced alongside the practice of class and gender in the city – but also how these socially constructed categories dictate spatial practice. Entertainment is a poignant site of the mutual production of these social categories. Historians have shown that entertainment districts – commercial neighborhoods located in dynamic real estate areas, well-linked to urban transportation, clustered with venues such as theaters, cafés, and brothels, engrained in the social imagination, and sanctioned by the urban administration – are closely tied to the practice and production of class in the city. As numerous scholars argue, urban reform of entertainment districts since the nineteenth century signaled a bourgeois project to create legible or “safe” pleasure spaces for the growing numbers of middle class residents in

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the city center.\textsuperscript{11} Judith Walkowitz examines how the idea of London’s West End, came to be demarcated as a space for the practice of bourgeois respectability in the mid-nineteenth century when the area saw a boom of department stores, tea rooms, and other commence, while the East End was recast as its counterpart of lower class degeneration, crime, and immorality.\textsuperscript{12} As an entertainment district, the West End came to symbolize an urban site where class dictated spatial practice; in other words, bourgeois patrons reinforced class hierarchies when they used the demarcated urban area to practice entertainment, while lower class residents in the same sites transgressed them. In the case of Odessa, Roshanna Sylvester argues that the city’s entertainment district had long been “a shared urban territory… [that] encompassed a diverse assortment of establishments catering to a wide variety of tastes.”\textsuperscript{13} But, by the 1910s, the area was claimed as an essentially bourgeois neighborhood. Invisible boundaries were erected to keep out non-paying customers, while lower class residents and “immoral” amusements were expelled to separate districts further from the center. Not unlike in London, the demarcation of Odessa’s entertainment district as a space for the practice of middle class leisure signaled a class-based segregation of the city – and urban fun.

Outside an entertainment district, or, in its absence, scholars show that class relates to spaces of entertainment differently. Instead of being defined by the practice of class, historians suggest that places of entertainment are practiced as socially democratic – although they are not necessarily democratizing. In an analysis of a horseracing track outside an urban entertainment district, Louise McRenyolds argues that “pricing policies determined where spectators could sit,


but racing was a fundamentally democratic because it brought people of various backgrounds together to participate in the same activity, to share the common objective of identifying the superior horse.”

The track was not coded for class-based practice like a department store, but it was an accessible site for residents of different means. Scholars of sport describe a similar process underway in purposed stadiums specifically built to host competitive games in urban areas after the mid-nineteenth century. Although the commercialization of sport, on the one hand, made stadiums places for the practice of social democratization where all patrons could watch the same game, it similarly continued to segregate spectators by ticket price and thus by class. The track and the stadium are thus urban sites where class hierarchies are less salient for the spatial practice of entertainment, but not altogether dispensed.

On the other hand, historians identify the street as an urban place of amusement where spatial practice does undermine class hierarchies. Vanessa Schwartz argues that the boulevard, like other accessible urban places of “spectacular realities,” allowed all urbanites to see and participate in the production and consumption of popular culture equally. Unlike a commercial venue in an entertainment district, or even the stadium outside it, the boulevard is defined by its policies of entrée libre and prix fixe. Leif Jerram describes the street as an egalitarian stage where masquerade had the potential to blur class markers. “New ready-to-wear fashions,” Jerram writes, “that had become widespread between the wars were part of a ‘democratization of taste’ which allowed women to make powerful statements about themselves through their clothes…

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16 Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*. 
[and] show off this new confidence in a public way.” While upper class urbanites and social reformers might have scoffed at street spectacles and masquerades as lower class activities, this fear betrayed the fact that leisure outside an entertainment district, or in its absence, was increasingly reformulating urban class hierarchies. This was true in St. Petersburg, a city notable in that it was not socially segregated, where “drunks, criminals, and prostitutes walked beside bureaucrats, officers, and intellectuals” on the main thoroughfare Nevskiï Prospect. The same can be said of Belgrade’s Knez Mihailova Street, a central urban artery that transformed into a promenade after 5 P.M., where bourgeois residents shopped, the petit bourgeois sipped coffee, and workers passed through on their way to the fairgrounds at Kalemegdan Park.

However, despite that the streets are the ultimate public space, theoretically open to all residents, their practice is not necessarily socially democratizing. Mark Steinberg suggests that the street in turn-of-the-century St. Petersburg was a spectacle, one that was “democratically accessible but also aesthetically and morally debased.” The implication here is that, indeed, any resident could take part in the practice of the street regardless of social standing, but that class hierarchies nonetheless continued to hover in public discussions creating top-down meaning. As John Lampe writes, wealthy Europeans deemed the cultural level of the Yugoslav capital as “too low, perhaps too democratic as well as too unsophisticated for ranking with London, Paris, and Vienna.” That is to say that Belgrade’s streets were permeable to residents regardless of class, but that this did not necessarily serve to democratize class hierarchies in spatial practice of the city as a whole. Indeed, taking a page from the book of their wealthy European contemporaries, Belgrade’s small but visible bourgeoisie continued to claim much of the city center for

18 Steinberg, Petersburg Fin de Siècle, 65.
19 Steinberg, Petersburg Fin de Siècle, 82.
themseleves, primarily in discourse, seemingly ignorant of the fact that this struggle had already been lost at the onset of the interwar years.

Gender is another category whose production is closely intertwined with the practice of urban space. Like class-based demarcations, the maintenance of gendered urban spaces was of upmost concern in the nineteenth and twentieth century metropolis. Scholars have shown that the unease over women’s participation in public places stemmed from bourgeois values that deemed only private ones to be acceptable for “respectable” female residents. While male as well as female actors have always shaped cities, public entertainment was predominantly the province of men. In early modern Europe, entertainment venues like theaters, operas, and cafés were only accessible to women from very highest crusts of society whose social participation was legitimized by rank. Female patrons were expected to be accompanied by male chaperones in the city and, even then, most women who took part in urban entertainment were considered to be of questionable moral qualities. This was even more so the case by night; as Craig Koslofsky writes, “the bourgeois gender order of the night contrasted sharply with the freedoms of elite women to use the night as they wished. Non-noble women active in the night in the city, for work or leisure, were suspect – and increasingly so.”

In industrialized Europe, gender hierarchies began to shift. Entertainment districts catered directly to the upper classes in response to advocacy for “safes” city centers, especially for women. Elizabeth Wilson describes department stores as “public space pretending to be a private interior.” And, indeed, the department store is a poignant example of bourgeois women’s changing spatial practices of gender hierarchies – from Walkowitz’s protagonists searching for

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22 Wilson, The Sphinx in the City, 56.
adventure, self-discovery, and meaningful employment\textsuperscript{23} to Erika Rappaport’s female subjects shopping for pleasure.\textsuperscript{24} By the late nineteenth century, clustered galleries, libraries, restaurants, tearooms, and parks of entertainment districts functioned as other semi-public urban spaces where women were invited to cross into the distinctly male realm of the city.\textsuperscript{25} By the interwar period, Mica Nava argues that dance studios, theaters, and jazz clubs served a similar function.\textsuperscript{26} However, while more and more women took part in the practice of leisure in the city, upper class residents were socially and economically sanctioned to participate in these new gender practices. Other female residents, all the while, continued to elicit roused cries about public morality just by their presence in these urban places.

But it was not just a matter of women emerging from the threshold of the home and into the city – it was also a matter of when. Like the division between private and public, historians show that the one between day and night was just as important. Unsurprisingly, this temporal hierarchy overlapped with the spatial one, and was also closely tied to class. After the early modern period described by Koslofsky, the nighttime continued to be a contested terrain for non-aristocratic women despite the fact that electricity had replaced dim gas lighting in most cities by the nineteenth century. In entertainment districts of big European cities, the visual experience of the night came to be defined by brightness. Yet, despite the surge of light in the nighttime city, public discourse continued to decry the urban afterhours as a time of moral darkness. Historian Peter Baldwin speculates that “the nocturnal city conspicuously exaggerated some of the distinctive social aspects of urban life: the anonymity of the individual, the relative weakness of

\textsuperscript{23} Walkowitz, \textit{City of Dreadful Delights}.
\textsuperscript{24} Rappaport, \textit{Shopping for Pleasure}.
\textsuperscript{26} Mica Nava, \textit{Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalization of Difference} (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 33. Instead, some scholars suggest that the most poignantly divisive category of new types of urban entertainment was generational. See: Jerram, \textit{Streetlife}, 209.
community oversight, and the encounter with a diverse mix of strangers.” Even the most accessible urban places by day, like streets, upset gender hierarchies after dark; the nighttime street was seen as a space of sexual chaos where women could not only fall into prostitution as victims, but could become predators themselves. As Steinberg puts it, the urban night was a defined by contradictions of time and space as “a landscape of ominous shadows and bright lights, of danger and pleasure, of loosened moral control and promised freedoms.”

Entertainment venues like cabarets, dance halls, and cinemas operated later and later into the night, but they remained off limits to women veering toward the side of cautioned respectability. But for urban women who ventured into the city after dark – as many, indeed, did – the night became a site for the transgression of spatial gendered hierarchies more so than just their daytime presence in urban entertainment districts.

The spatial practices of gender, too, were more socially democratic in Belgrade than in contemporary cities with entertainment districts because leisure was not roped off only for the wealthier classes. Cinemas were especially salient urban places of changing gendered spatial practice. Not only were they found across the city, but their cheap admission tickets also made them an accessible urban venue where most residents could afford to participate. Women who attended the movies, especially those who watched screenings of Western film (as most in interwar Belgrade were), performed a potent challenge to patriarchal values: they abandoned the private sphere and its responsibilities in order to consume culture of questionable moral content in public. In fact, conservative presses, religious leaders, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois urbanites regarded the cinema in much the same way they saw women’s emancipation.

28 Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siècle*, 107.
29 Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siècle*, 67.
as an upmost social concern. Discourse in Belgrade’s patriarchal milieu imagined women as children, suggesting that both needed to be protected from the “evil influences of the cinema and the street.”

Women’s magazines, on the other hand, were important as spaces for women’s participation in practicing suffrage, citizenship, and, indeed, consumption in the city because they extended this possibility into the private sphere of the home, to almost any literate woman with a minimal disposable income. Mariana Vujnovic argues that women’s magazines served as “alternative public spheres” that blurred the divide of public and private, and also reached across class lines. Female readers could follow urban entertainment trends, and even participate in them through the pages of these illustrated presses, as a proxy for spatial practice. But even this platform often came under conservative scrutiny; for instance, the Belgrade publication Žena i svet was forced to alter its content in the early 1930s toward domestic rather than urban themes in order to satisfy the nationalizing demands of the censors.

More than places where entertainment can simply be found, spaces of entertainment are sites where entertainment is practiced. The category of space helps us animate places of entertainment as dynamic urban sites shaped by and alongside the practice of class and gender. In the absence of an entertainment district, Belgrade prompts us to examine the nuances of spatial practice, such as movement around alternative sites of entertainment, the blurring of permissible and prohibited regulations in the city center, and – most importantly – the challenge of class and gender roles by a mixed strata of urbanites. Ultimately, I argue that entertainment permeated commercial, public, and private spheres and that it was, in turn, more democratic for Belgraders than it was for their contemporary urbanites in big European cities.

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31 Vujnovic, Forging the Bubikopf Nation, 132.
The Darkness of the Cinemas and the Visibility of Variety Stages

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Belgrade’s bohemian quarter Skadarlija was the closest iteration of a commercial entertainment district in the city’s modern history; on a crooked street in the city center, the quarter boasted a concentration of kafanas and catered to a mostly male clientele of poets, artists, and politicians. Although Skadarlija remained popular in twentieth century, its role in interwar Belgrade has been exaggerated; like Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman who call for the study of Vienna “beyond the coffeehouses” in a recent volume, I advocate for the study of Belgrade beyond Skadarlija. By the interwar period, prewar bohemian kafanas were outnumbered and overshadowed by new commercial venues that spread throughout the city and opened their doors to a more diverse group of residents – particularly to a wider swath of social classes and to more women. Commercial venues in Belgrade ranged from affordable ones like cinemas to expensive ones like variety theaters. Unlike in cities hosting an entertainment district, however, these venues scattered across Belgrade as accessible urban sites. Moreover, they engendered social transgression in markedly different ways. In this section, I explore the darkened halls of the cinema and brightly lit variety stage, with a particular focus on the intertwined practice of space, class, and gender.

The cinema was a new commercial venue in the interwar years. Although films had been screened in Belgrade since the last decade of the nineteenth century, these projections were hosted by small theaters and café-bars with a makeshift white screen, a provisional orchestra, and several benches. Early film screenings were a novelty that attracted new patrons to establishments previously reserved for men and the upper classes, but the prewar industry had not been developed enough to significantly alter the practice of these commercial places.

32 Dimitrijević, Romantično boemska Skadarlija; Djurić-Zamolo, Hoteli i kafane.
33 Holmes and Silverman, Interwar Vienna.
Cinemas, on the other hand, were endowed with the specific intent of showing films and distinguished by their darkened interiors, homogenous rows facing the screen, and the isolation of the spectator in the deluge of sight and sound. The first cinemas dotted the city center around Belgrade’s well-known hotels, theaters, and café-bars from the main square around the National Theater and Hotel Moskva, down the main thoroughfare Terazije, and to the dense area around Slavia. Existing hotels, clubs, and theaters sometimes designated separate halls for film screenings – as is the case for the cinemas at the Kasina, Metropol, and Vračar – but others like the Korzo, Koloseum, and Avala were opened for the sole purpose of showing movies. By the mid-1920s, Belgrade was home to ten cinemas (most with the capability to screen “talkies” by the early 1930s), a number that oscillated slightly but remained relatively stable through the interwar period. The popularity of cinema was instantaneous: by the early 1930s, there were a total of 388 cinemas in Yugoslavia that sold some twelve million admissions annually.\(^{34}\) It is interesting to note that around the same time, Zagreb had nine cinemas and Sarajevo only four.

By comparison, in prewar France, there had already been a total of 1,000 cinemas and more than 2,000 in prewar Germany.\(^{35}\) In London alone, there had been 94 cinemas (and 500 other places where films were screened) in 1912. In interwar Britain, there were 3,000 cinemas in 1926 and 5,000 by 1939. According James Nott, film accounted for two thirds of British interwar entertainment spending.\(^{36}\) Indeed, cinema was quick to become an integral component of the entertainment industry in cities and across the world.

When residents attended the movies, in Belgrade as elsewhere, they were transported to unfamiliar environments, they entered exciting plotlines of romances and thrillers, and they met

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34 Boško Tokin, “Prošle godine u Jugoslaviji je prikazano preko pola miliona metara filma,” Vreme, 2 mart 1933.
an international cast of actors. A mid-1920s article in the arts magazine *Comœdia* claimed that cinema spoke “an international language” of images and that it rivaled the romance and the crime novel as the most accessible form of entertainment. But just as the surge of new films began to flood Belgrade – most of them foreign – critics began to debate their merits. A commonly cited criticism levied against films was that it led audiences to skirt Yugoslav culture in favor of attending screenings of foreign movies (although the lack of domestic productions was inadequately discussed and never remedied). Brane Dimitrijević, a frequent cultural commentator, parodied the proposals of conservatives in respect to foreign films: “A moral person should not be allowed to see what America looks like, how people live in Asia, or how a field is farmed in Africa. They should not be allowed to enjoy the sights of Sweden in the middle of Belgrade, or to admire ocean waves… In a word, a respectable person should not be allowed to see neither new nor familiar things on the movie screen.” Dimitrijević’s lampoon captured the defensiveness of critics seeking to root the audience’s attention in domestic culture.

In spatial terms, the cinema was becoming an alternative urban epicenter, and one that also exerted a powerful pull of the public away from sites of the “legitimate” arts such as the theater, concert hall, and gallery. Notably, because cinemas popped up around the city, this pull also destabilized the primacy of the very center. Moreover, as cinemas were integrated into the city’s geography, they became destinations that attracted not only more patrons, but also a more heterogeneous clientele including petit bourgeois and working class men, women, and children.

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38 For example, in 1933, there were 722 registered films screened in Yugoslavia. Of these, 199 were of German origin and 227 were American, while only 282 were Yugoslav productions. However, this last figure includes shorts and adverts, most of which were “educational” in content (Boško Tokin, “Prošle godine u Jugoslaviji je prikazano preko pola miliona metara filma,” *Vreme*, 2 mart 1933.).
39 There are only five surviving domestic films that would have been screened in Belgrade’s interwar cinemas: *Kradorde* (1911), *Ulrih i Vladislav Hunjadi* (1911), *Sa verom u Boga* (1932), *Grešnica bez greha* (1930), and *Nevinost bez zaštite* (1943) (Radina Vučetić, “‘Sinner without Sin’ or The Sin of Emancipated Women,” *Serbian Studies* 25, 1 (2011): 100.).
As Louise McReynolds observes, “the cinema, with its astonishing capacity to engage a socially mixed audience, was an international phenomenon that revolutionized the nature of experiencing culture itself.” Unsurprisingly, the educated bourgeoisie and cultural conservatives were shocked by the darkness of the movie halls and bemoaned the immoral activities suspected to occur therein. As Peter Jelavich suggests in his discussion of early twentieth century film in Berlin, the educated bourgeoisie deemed the cinema “an antipanopticon that allowed the populace to plunge happily back into obscurity.” In other words, cinema became not only a new point on the urban map, but also a local site where the practice of entertainment elicited a challenge to upper class propriety.

An editorial cartoon titled “Belgrade’s Cine-Mania” caricatured the public discourse about “inappropriate” spatial practices in the city’s cinemas. The portraits of Belgraders’ film fever are symptomatic of the public attention new commercial venues were receiving and the debates that their use and misuse generated within the larger context of the city. In the first frame, several children admired a street poster for a screening at the Opera, while another image showed distracted pupils at school discussing the new film at the Kolarac rather than the day’s lesson. Both scenes contradicted the accepted notions of children’s place in society – they are not to be unaccompanied in the city nor consumed by non-educational diversions – and correlate to the public fears associated with these new “manic” practices. In fact, reformers believed the bulk of cinema content was damaging to children’s health. Dr. Andrija Štampar (1888-1958), the driving figure of Yugoslavia’s Ministry of Public Health, argued that residents under sixteen should not be admitted into cinemas. But Štampar also recognized the medium of film as a potential tool of education; at a conference on social hygiene in Paris in 1919, he included film

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41 McReynolds, Russia at Play, 12.
42 Jelavich, “‘Am I Allowed to Amuse Myself Here?,’” 232.
as an instrument of instruction and later lobbied for state funding to produce educational movies as well as to translate foreign ones. What Štampar failed to acknowledge, however, was that educational films posed almost no appeal to interwar Belgraders, and much less to children.

In addition to portraits of film fever among youth, the editorial cartoon also addressed class hierarchies in two images that pointed to the wide participation of Belgrade’s residents. A man in the poor neighborhood Ćubura was shown as he scraped up enough money to see a film and a bourgeois or petit bourgeois couple appeared at a café discussing their annual passes to the Kasina. These two caricatures were intended to show that film “mania” spared no social strata, from social elites to those on the margins. For the small circles of educated bourgeoisie and cultural conservatives, film was criticized as eluding conceptions of art: it often had no authorship, it was fragmented both in its narrative and its production, it was overly sentimental, and it prioritized visual over verbal presentation. The patronage of film by upper class residents, in other words, signaled social decay alongside the triumph of non-bourgeois values like adventure, frivolity, and sensuality. At the same time, the inclusion of the impoverished Belgraders was a comment about the ease of access to these venues and the acceptance of the halls as democratic spaces for the practice of entertainment.

But the most poignant public discourse captured by the editorial cartoon “Belgrade’s Cine-Mania” was that of the cinema as a danger to patriarchal hierarchies of gender and sexuality. In one frame, a single man on the street ogled the female body on the poster for a film titled Secrets while deliberating whether he ought to see it “without the old lady.” Another presented an image of a police officer sneaking away from duty and into the darkened halls of

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44 Jelavich, “‘Am I Allowed to Amuse Myself Here?.’” 241-242.
the nearby Koloseum with a woman. The implication was that the cinema’s magnetism pulled respectable men away from private and public responsibilities, while it sometimes even enabled single women to partake in these transgressions. A similar caricature of cinema patrons appeared in a feuilleton published in Novosti. The story introduced a Belgrade lawyer, one Mr. Stanojević, who was particularly fond of spending time in dim cinemas with “lady friends.” “Most people go to the cinema to watch the film,” the author wrote, “but Mr. Stanojević went to close his eyes and to rest his head on the chest of his friend Dobrila.” The screening did not interest him, the story went on, but the lawyer was said to be drawn to the space of the cinema itself where the extremes of urban life intersected: anonymity and intimacy. Yet, the extramarital transgressions of petit bourgeois men were not to only hazard to public morality engendered by the cinema. Women, in this case, Mr. Stanojević’s companion Dobrila, were also deemed a danger. Between the lines, it is implied that Dobrila, as well as the woman sneaking to the cinema with the police officer in the cartoon, was of questionable morals – a predator rather than a victim.

Conservative Belgraders internalized this type of critique. Police records of the Belgrade City Authority show that women employed at cinemas were frequently suspected of having looser sexual practices. In a real life example, the homemaker Matilda Ušić pointed the finger at Lujza Begović, a cashier at the cinema Vračar, when her husband Anton went astray. Despite the fact that the investigating officer found no evidence of Lujza’s wrongdoing, the common tropes about the cinema as an urban space where gender hierarchies were transgressed, emboldened Matilda to accuse Vračar’s female cashier of luring the husband away from his patriarchal respectability. “If there is justice,” Matilda pleaded, “I beg you once again to protect a married women and to expel [Lujza Begović from Belgrade].”

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47 IAB, UGB, k. 2779, f. XXIV, j. 95/36.
Indeed, reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents were skeptical of women’s participation in urban places of entertainment altogether. An article in a women’s magazine railed against cinema as a “selfish pleasures” alongside fashion, sports, and theater and questioned how coiffed women can be good mothers and good wives. The radical solution, albeit as dramatic as it is comical, proposed that men should resort to “walling in” women – concretely severing their link with the city.48 While the article recognized that women were victims of the dangerous delights of urban entertainment, it postulated that they abandoned respectable domestic duties in order to perform illicit public ones each time they attended the cinema. Together with other conservative mandates that marked the King’s proclamation of a dictatorship in 1929, cinemas came to be targeted as excessive in “sentimentality, sensuality, and emotions,” as operative for “awakening” the sexuality of urban men and women, and as dangers for spreading venereal disease.49 Critics began to take issue with the films themselves, citing the exposure of the female body,50 the romanticization of sexual encounters,51 and false representation of familial roles52 as serious triggers for the misuse of the darkened halls and the detrimental transgression of patriarchal hierarchies of both gender and sexuality.

But cinema also had its urban champions. In fact, as semi-private commercial venues, cinemas were often thought to enable men and women alike to consume entertainment within the bounds of respectability. An article from the early 1920s warmly embraced the new experiences of cinema: the buzzing of the projector machine, the flickering of the first pictures on the screen, the shushing of the audience, and the serenade of the orchestra. The author identified that the

cinema’s “secretive darkness” as another new attraction, rather than a danger. As Lauren Rabinovitz argues, “the cinema’s basis for pleasure lies not in the norms of passive spectatorship … but rather in its physical effects of jouissance, a decentered perceptual pleasure that occurs across the body.” More than just a new experience of sight and sound, advocates of the cinema’s darkness suggested that it allowed the audience to indulge in other types of physical pleasure that toyed with acceptable gender relationships but did not transgress them. In the early 1920s, many observers commented on the innocent playfulness of this new form of urban entertainment. One article shed a bit of light on the unintended uses of the darkened halls: “The couples wiggle, come closer, and embrace… and in some cases they convey their passion through their lips. Then, the heart begins to beat in the same rhythm with the projector and the flickering screen.” The narrative was devoid of judgment and sympathized with the couples whose intimate moments were interrupted by the end of the screening, leaving them to fix their hair, straighten their shirts, and search for their missing hats. But the author was also keenly aware that the darkened cinema had become a space for performing romantic encounters in the city between the private sphere of the home and the public places of the streets. It was in these commercial spaces that the author described two parallel films playing out – one on the screen and one in the hall of the cinema. In some cinemas, the back rows even remained unofficially reserved for lovers. As a sympathetic observer mused, “that’s how it’s everywhere, and here in our Belgrade.”

56 Jerram, Streetlife, 225.
The public tension over women at the movies manifested in other forms of popular culture like jokes and feuilletons, suggesting that these debates concerned a broad audience – but also that they were sometimes a laughing matter, a form of entertainment themselves. In one sketch in the satirical newspaper Šišani Jež (Shaved Hedgehog), a woman expressed exasperation at having been fondled at the movies, all the while she is happily nestled between two suitors. Another postulated that the question “Are you going to the cinema, Miss?” is no longer an innocent proposition, but rather a loaded question.\(^{58}\) Similarly, in the Novosti feuilleton about the misadventures of the fictional lawyer Stanojević, the final twist comes when his spouse arrives at the cinema. Having learned of her husband’s transgression, Mrs. Stanojević decided to seek revenge in the same darkened halls. Like Dobrila, the lawyer’s wife engaged in adulterous exploits that came to unfortunate ends when her lover suddenly vanished. The familiar patriarchal interpretations of women’s participation in the city – that single girls and married women did not bode well in commercial spaces of entertainment, where they carried the double-edged burden of being both the predator and the victim – were at the core of this social satire. But the story also mocked the dramatization of darkened halls of the cinema as a veritable urban problem that led both men and women to transgression: “in Belgrade,” the author wrote, “infidelity comes by the thousands, but there are hardly four cinemas!”\(^{59}\) The innuendo of these jokes reversed the serious concerns of conservatives and suggested that the cinema was a permanent urban site for the spatial practice of new social hierarchies. While the darkness of the cinema may have concealed the diversity of patrons, public discourse did not let it be forgotten that women, too, were brazenly attending screenings in these halls. By the time this social

\(^{58}\) Šišani Jež, 29 februar 1936, 4.

problem had been commodified as comic relief, it signaled that the cinemas, along with their changing spatial practices of class and gender, had become firmly rooted in Belgrade.

The spatial practice of the cinema can be compared with another type of interwar entertainment establishment: the variety theater. The most visible distinction lies with the higher entry and accessory costs of attending these venues, a distinction that made them inaccessible to a large portion of urban audiences. Unlike the democratizing practice of the cinema, variety stages were implicitly reserved for bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie patrons. But the spatial practice of these urban places was just as much of a challenge to the patriarchal social order. Class hierarchies were undermined as upper class residents, or those aspiring to upper class status, patronized culture that was often described as the opposite of the arts. At the same time, male and female patrons of the variety theaters stood to reshuffle gendered sociability when they blurred divisions separating them from the largely female cast of performers. Although quite different from the practice of the cinema, variety theaters were spaces where a different set of urbanites unsettled class and gender hierarchies all the same.

Variety theaters combined elements of the prewar Orpheum, operetta, and live music common in kafanas into an identifiably interwar genre of upper class entertainment that conflated vaudeville, cabaret, and music hall. While the three genres of entertainment venues are, indeed, similar, and took influence from one another, there are some differences. The music hall is most often described as a British stage show with considerable audience participation that evolved from saloons and peaked during the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century with a repertoire of popular songs, comedy, and specialty acts. Vaudeville was a risqué American genre popular from the 1880s to the 1930s that featured separate unrelated stage acts, ranging from acrobats and singers, to dancers and animal trainers. And, cabaret was popular with European and American elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a similar mixture of music, comedy, dance, and drama. As historians have shown in the case of France, Germany, and Poland, cabaret was fertile ground for subversive ideas about society, politics, and sexuality. The variety theater takes from all three genres in a decidedly domesticated and rarely provocative mixture of entertainment aimed at those, as Igor Mrduljaš has suggested, with “deeper pockets.” Peter Jelavich has described the variety show as reflection of the urban psyche at the turn of the century: fragmented, disconnected, in need of constant stimulation. In Belgrade, the variety theater was advertised as cabaret, vaudeville, or music hall, but
per evening that included a repertoire ranging from comedy skits and magic tricks to duets and dances. Although the program varied from theater to theater, variety performers were, like films, mostly foreign. Belgrade boasted a hierarchy of variety theaters, a great many of them catering to wealthier audiences. Theaters were clustered in the city center around the pedestrian Knez Mihailova Street and the central boulevard Terazije, but several operated near Slavia Square and in the neighborhood Palilula. In the early interwar years, average admission ranged from ten to twenty dinar, or three to four times as much as a film screening. In addition to the expected patronage of food and drink, an evening’s tab could amount to as much as 500 to 600 dinar.\(^62\) Depending on the size of the venue, the main floor crowded more than a dozen small tables, while the periphery of the halls might have included box seats.

Variety theaters were attractive to upper class Belgraders for several reasons – each a contradiction to the spatial practice of bourgeois values. First, they often advertised as an upper-class cure for a malady common to many urbanites: boredom. A mid-1920s article slyly complained about the quality of Belgrade’s five variety stages, claiming that residents lack

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\(^62\) See: Mrduljaš, Zagrebački kabaret, 72.

“those night-time refuges of boredom, like in Paris, where the biggest stars appeared and captivated viewers.” Avid bourgeois and petit bourgeois patronage was also a product of sophisticated advertising that used the language of the arts rather than entertainment. That is to say that variety theaters was rarely described as entertainment (zabava) but instead framed as “credible” or “artistic” culture. For example, an ad for the variety theater Kasina in January 1922 guaranteed world-class performances intended to dazzle the respectable Belgrade public. Similarly, upper class patrons were drawn to the distinctly foreign entertainment of the variety theaters as a desire to “stand on the same level as other cultured European nations.” Like film patrons, spectators in variety theaters sought out encounters with the sounds and sights of far-away places – often those of the big European city – in their own local establishments.

Although Belgrade’s variety theaters were only mildly provocative relative to Parisian and Berlin stages, they challenged the spatial practice of upper class sexuality in Belgrade. For a class defined by its aspirations to respectability, is rather surprising that bourgeois and petit bourgeois Belgraders formed the base patronage of variety theaters known for sexual innuendos,

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65 Novosti, 1 januar 1922, 1, 3.
scantily clad bodies, and debaucherous displays. In an article published in the mid-1920s, the author sketched a scene from a variety theater: “the program starts. The half-naked woman swirls on the stage. She twists her hips as if swimming, she pulls up her skirt deliberately, and she thrusts out her belly and shakes her breasts. Her body glows and trembles, … on her lips, a smile is directed at the audience and eagerly calls for them to ‘take me, take it!’” The author was well aware that the onstage eroticism elicited desire, passion, and curiosity among the public, and described how the audience awaits the end of the performance when the “nymphs” descend from the stage to the dance floor. The article suggested that dancing quickly transitioned to coupling, which invariably ended with “an absolutely ordinary” sequence: the street, the apartment, the bed sheets. What is most interesting is that the sexual transgression spanned the urban environment, from the commercial theater, to the public streets, and into the private realm of the home. The implication was that the city – not only the cinema or the variety stage – had become a space where sexuality was visible, accessible, and consumed. In Belgrade’s patriarchal milieu, this form of unchecked sexuality was usually associated with lower class unrefinement and upper class delinquency. However, commercial spaces postulated a platform for the wealthy spectator to gaze at the sexualized body, usually of foreign women, and offered the possibility of physical encounters that were perfectly sanctioned. The fact that variety theaters catered to bourgeois and petit bourgeois patrons, and their wallets, afforded a guise of respectability and lent privileged guests a site for the practice of transgressive sexuality.

But variety theaters also elicited anxiety among conservatives that the transgressions of the upper classes would spiral into degeneration. Less than a year after the opening of the variety theater Metropol and its bar Parizijen in late 1923, the daily Beogradske novine reported that

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drug use in the city was no longer fictional and that it had become a reality of nighttime urban life. Stopping short of naming the Metropol, the author identified the address where the theater was located (Đečanska Street, number 23) and suggested that it was an infamous place for playing cards and “snorting.” He described the diverse cast of patrons, among them a bald man with slow and lazy movements, a thin blonde with gazelle eyes, and a brown-haired young man so addicted to cocaine that it appeared that “if he stopped breathing in cocaine, he would stop living.”68 The sensationalism of this article, to be matched only by a long-running feuilleton in the same newspaper titled “Cocaine-Mania,” suggested that variety theaters were imagined as incubators of upper class participation in the underworld of sex, drugs, and gambling. The memoirs of Dimitrije Knežev further immortalized Đečanska Street as a members-only gambling saloon that was protected by an armed Cossack and served by a hostess wearing expensive jewels and an elegant dress. Behind a hidden door, one said to lead to an opium den, Knežev speculated that men and women had spread out on sofas and ottomans and “fornicated in ecstasy... some women lay naked, in spasms.” Knežev claimed that hashish, morphine, and other opiates were also present at the den, and suggested that they were smuggled to Belgrade from Istanbul and Paris. He linked the entire operation to two Russian émigrés – Aleksej Tolberov and Aleksandar Polstren – who, he suspected, were actually operatives in a Soviet ring.69 Knežev admitted that the two men where never convicted, and I have found little evidence to corroborate this spectacular underworld of gambling, drugs, and sex at the Metropol or the Parizijen.70

However, the accuracy of this fantastic tableau is not so much of consequence as the allegations

69 Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 249.
70 Historian Predrag Marković suggests that opium was mainly an affliction of wealthy Yugoslavs who has spent the war years in Paris, while cocaine was most often associated with Russian émigrés. See: Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 110-111. This information is corroborated in Toma Milenković and Momčilo Pavlović, eds., Beloemigracija u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941, Tom I-II (Beograd: Institut za avremenu istoriju, 2006), 115.
that were levied against it: variety theaters did privilege Belgrade’s bourgeois and petit bourgeois audiences with a certain freedom to transgress class, gender, and even sexuality, just as they continued to elicit social anxiety in Belgrade’s patriarchal milieu.

But being on the center stage of urban dramas was, indeed, part of the pleasure for wealthy patrons. While the cinema was shroud of darkness, the variety theaters lay bare in the spotlight that shone on both the performers and the audience. It was there that upper class Belgraders, like their European contemporaries, physically intermixed with the performers and effectively became part of the spectacle. Because being seen at a variety theater amounted to a performance of social affluence, spectators observed their company at nearby tables for affirmation of class belonging. As James Traub suggests, “the very publicness of pleasure” was what made the practice of these spaces exciting.71 Women were known to show off their fashion sense, men were keen to flaunt attractive companions, and the clubs were notorious for lavish displays of spending that matched the extravagance of onstage acts. As one historian writes, “nightclubs symbolized how urban boundaries were never as fixed as some residents might desire. Like the ‘boulevard’ press, they performed the moment, as disposable as the income that audience paid for a table”72 In the case of Belgrade, the presses were complicit in nurturing the fluid boundary between spectator and stage by reporting, and sometimes embellishing, the extravagance of variety theaters. A featured article in Vreme, for example, exploited the tragic fate of the young Zagreb woman Zlata Mandl who was seduced by the luxurious lifestyle of the Belgrade entertainment manager Josef Šajil. The newspaper described the couple’s outings to the city’s variety theaters and stressed their debaucherous excess with money, champagne, and jazz. However, the young woman’s whirlwind urban romance came to a halt when Šajil disappeared.

71 Traub, The Devil’s Playground, 29.
72 McReynolds, Russia at Play, 210.
without a trace, leaving her with nothing more than a venereal infection.\textsuperscript{73} Although critical of the compromised morality of the upper classes, the story is indication that variety theater spectators were as much the spectacle of urban entertainment as the stage acts.

Although commonalities abound, the practice of spaces of entertainment in Belgrade’s commercial places differs from that in European cities boasting demarcated leisure districts. Residents followed the lead of their big city contemporaries and mobilized entertainment venues as spaces for confronting the limits of class and gender hierarchies. But, in the absence of an entertainment district, venues scattered across the city and became physically more accessible to a larger portion of urban residents. While the cinema engendered a democratic darkened space, conservatives criticized, satirized, and finally resigned its popularity among patrons, including women of all social backgrounds. The variety theater, on the other hand, served as a platform of upper class transgression – both cultural ones dictating taste as well as patriarchal ones dictating respectable gender and sexuality.

\textit{Shared Streets and Parks}

Unlike commercial venues, public places in the city were under the jurisdiction of the urban administration and, by definition, shared by all residents. They did not require an entry fee or hold an expectation of commercial transactions. Public places occupied the spaces between those that are privately and commercially regulated, allowing urban residents to move through and within them. Scholars have studied the importance of public places for the practice of social categories as well as sites of social transgression.\textsuperscript{74} But, while the practice of entertainment in

\textsuperscript{74} Lynda Nead, \textit{Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Deborah Epstein Nord, \textit{Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City}
public places is too often absent from historical studies, it furthers the understanding of the intertwined relationship of urban space, class, and gender. During the interwar years, Belgraders mobilized streets, squares, parks, rail stations, and beaches for the purpose of entertainment, using these places in many unintended pleasurable ways. In doing so, they challenged gendered hierarchies of public behavior, laid claim to a democratic city center, and integrated entertainment as a lived practice of the city. In this section, I consider the street and the park as two different examples of public places where residents undermined the hierarchies of class and gender through the practice of entertainment.

Interwar Belgrade was not socially segregated. Not only did the city lack an entertainment district, it had few spatial boundaries demarcating class and gender. While some interwar neighborhoods in Belgrade came with distinct reputations – Čubara, for example, was known for its Roma community, and Dorćol was characterized by its Jewish residents – there was considerable ambiguity in the way public places were used, even in the center, that challenged not only the modern imperative to categorize place according to its use but also the power of patriarchal class and gender hierarchies to dictate the spatial practice of the city. An early 1920s article in Novosti bemoaned that the city had not yet defined itself into socio-economic neighborhoods, and thus lacked demarcated residential, commercial, administrative, industrial, and working class quarters and streets. The author claimed that unregulated city streets, where modern buildings stood side by side with wooden shacks, and the city’s poor and wealthy residents called one another neighbors, was a particularly egregious example of social mixing. Moreover, the author suggested that this was inconsistent with usual patterns of urban

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(ITHACA: Cornell University, 1995); Dorothy Rowe, Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man (New York: Knopf, 1977).
development.\textsuperscript{75} And, indeed, historians identify urban spatial segregation as a common trend of big European cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,\textsuperscript{76} often in dialogue with broader mechanisms of the modern state such as legibility, surveillance, and governmentality.\textsuperscript{77}

In the absence of spatial boundaries designating urban areas by class and gender, Belgrade’s public places were permeable to almost all residents, but not always in the same ways. Most urbanites mixed in the streets in such a way that undermined even the invisible boundaries between social classes as well as those between men and women. At the same time, while public places were democratic, their practice was not necessarily democratizing. For instance, while the urban poor were certainly present in Belgrade’s streets and parks, they were not privileged to practices these places as spaces of leisure. One journalist pointed out that “in the main streets, spotted with banks and expensive shops, full of woolen textiles from England, pointed shoes, gold jewelry, perfumes, various liquors and champagnes; in that center, of rich snobs, well-paid agents, imposters, and speculators, are also home of the sad and hard lives of Belgrade’s poor, ‘people of the bottom,’ who can’t afford a respectable city life even with hard work.”\textsuperscript{78} Another contemporary observer highlighted the juxtaposition of spatial practices by the wealthy and the poor in the Yugoslav capital: as a party crowd returned home through the sleepy streets after a night of debauchery, the author suggested that the first newspaper vendors opened up their kiosks and homeless workers awoke from their street beds.\textsuperscript{79}

But for most Belgraders, especially the growing numbers of the petite bourgeoisie and workers, the city’s public places were the ultimate egalitarian spaces of entertainment. Crowded

\textsuperscript{76} John Lukacs, \textit{Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture} (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 64.
\textsuperscript{78} “Na dnu Beograda,” \textit{Novosti}, 2 decembar 1922, 3.
\textsuperscript{79} “Kroz noćni Beograd…,” \textit{Novi list}, 12 januar 1930, ii, 25.
streets offered a shroud of anonymity to individuals not unlike that of the darkened halls of the cinema. In Boško Tokin’s novel *Terazije*, the masses on the city promenade gave the cross-dresser Rista enough concealment to stroll unnoticed in the costume of a maid. His manipulation of public streets was two-fold: he used it as a space of gender transgression, as well as a space of masquerade.\(^80\) As Richard Sennett might suggest, the invisibility of the individual in a crowd allowed others to consume the streets as a stage. An early 1920s article cited the street seating of cafés Moskva and Balkan, the promenade on Knez Mihailova Street, and Savamala beaches as entertainment places in their own right.\(^81\) And, a decade later, the presses continued to tout the evening stroll, sidewalk cafés, and shopping as prominent attractions of the urban masses for the urban masses.\(^82\) The concealment of the individual in the crowd liberated some residents to behave as voyeurs. For example, a newspaper article chronicled the experiences of three provincial businessmen who confessed that their visit to the capital was provoked by a “passionate desire to see the city” – the stages of its theaters and the urbanites on its streets. But the men’s curiosity was foremost fueled by carnal desires to consume the female body. In clubs like Bulevar, Ruska kruna, and Zagreb, the men reported expecting to behold naked female performers, while they imagined Belgrade’s streets were a place where open staring was similarly condoned. In other words, the provincial visitors presumed a veritable performance on the streets – as they reported, one of “plump” women of a Sultan’s harem.\(^83\)

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\(^80\) Tokin, *Terazije*, 69-70.
\(^81\) “Beograd u maju,” *Novi list* br. 362, 24 maj 1923, 3.
\(^83\) “Oduševljenje i nesadanije Beogradu petorice đuveč-kardša,” *Novosti*, 23 septembar 1928, 3.
Although the streets were occasionally the site of organized entertainment such as races, daredevil stunts, and animal performances, entertainers themselves sometimes publically appeared in the city and caused the streets to transform into makeshift stages. The urban public took part in these spectacles as both an audience and an attraction. During the visit of the Serbian-born European actor Svetislav Petrović (1894-1962) to the Yugoslav capital, the presses reported that “impatient” men and women were said to have gathered at the train station to welcome the star, prompting city authorities to declare a “serious situation” in the surrounding streets. The diversity of the assembled crowd was a point of interest, as newspapers described that “shimmy youth and shimmy old-timers” awaited Petrović’s train alongside married women and spinsters, serious women and debutantes, and men curious to see the actor’s clothes and mannerisms. While many members of the crowd were dressed in street clothes, some women hoped to make an impression on Petrović and wore manicured up-dos, painted faces, shaped eyebrows, and blood-red lips. A passer-by oblivious to the actor’s visit might have found the gathered crowd at Savska street a spectacle in its own right, and the presses certainly treated the waiting fans as a newsworthy event. The mounting excitement of the spectators was described as

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84 Svetislav Petrović lived and worked in Berlin after the First World War. He initially earned fame as a silent film actor and later successfully transitioned into sound film. Petrović appeared on the international movie circuit, starring in American and European films from 1918 to 1962. He was also known as Swetislaw, Iwan or Jwan Iván Petrovich.
fun but disorderly, and only to be matched by the climatic arrival of Petrović’s train. From the station, the crowd followed the actor to the hotel Srpski kralj and again waited as “their hearts raced in anticipation” to catch another glimpse of the star. In the presses, the focus remained on the crowd and the “sensational” atmosphere of the streets in front of the hotel; the spectators were ecstatic when Petrović finally appeared in his window and they greeted him in unison: “Long live Svetislav!” Little else was reported about the actor’s visit, but the Belgrade crowd appeared again and again as eager participants in visits, celebrations, and events – a testament to the practice of public streets as spaces of entertainment.

City parks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on the other hand, have long been studied as exclusive bourgeois sanctuaries that negated the classification of parks as public places altogether. Similarly, parks are discussed as contentious spaces of gender in the city, considered safe for upper class women and children but not entirely isolated from the

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86 “Jedno pre podne sa Svetislavom Petrovićem... u ‘Srpskom Kralju,’ na groblju Neznanog Junaka, na Avali, u redakciji ‘Nedelje,’...” Novosti, 9 septembar 1929, 2.
dangers and delights of boulevard culture. In the early 1920s, one part of Belgrade’s large downtown fortress-park Kalemegdan was, indeed, roped off for the practice of bourgeois respectability, while its neighboring section housed an unregulated fairground that entertained the urban masses indiscriminately. Under pressure from urban reformers, the city sponsored several renewal projects in the interwar years that first built the Cvijeta Zuzović Arts Pavilion in the late 1920s, then displaced the remaining tents and mechanized swings in favor of the Belgrade Zoo in the mid-1930s. Yet, while these reforms aimed to standardize the entire park as a playground for bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents, the practice of Kalemegdan in the late 1930s remained democratic rather than segregated. As I track Kalemegdan’s spatial transformation during the interwar years, I consider the park as a space of entertainment, one where residents negotiated class and gender hierarchies alongside the park’s metamorphoses.

At the beginning of the interwar years, the larger area of Upper Kalemegdan (*Veliki Kalemegdan*), perched at the base of Knez Mihailova Street, was a leafy urban retreat for bourgeois residents, where chaperoned rendezvous and idyllic promenades were commonplace. The only sounds said to permeate between the oaks were delicate discussions about art, literature, fashion, and love. Upper Kalemegdan was romanticized as the ideal of upper class restraint, refinement, and respectability. Lower Kalemegdan (*Mali Kalemegdan*) constituted the steeper eastern part of the old fortress, where carousels, performers, and food vendors catered to the working classes, peasants, and children. The lower part of the park was often associated with a cacophony of sounds: music from different tents, the wild spinning of the carousel, and the howling of the magician Miloš Radojković’s matched only by the thunder of spectators laughing, chasing, pinching, and teasing one another. Visitors consumed funnel cake and lemonade, rode

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on the electrical swings, held hands and kissed amidst the crowd, and laughed at the sounds of Radojković’s gastro-interpretations of roosters, frogs, and donkeys.

Fig. 4.5: Upper Kalemedgan was an urban sanctuary for upper class Belgraders, a reprise from the hectic disorder so common on city streets. Well-heeled residents strolled through the park, enjoying its quiet idyll and spacious rolling green (IAB, ZMSP, k. 8, j. a-V-49.). Fig. 4.6: Patrons of Lower Kalemegdan were mixed, but more commonly lower class residents such as workers and peasants as well as a disproportionately high number of children. The Lower Park was home to carnival rides, a mishmash of performers, and food vendors. Unlike Upper Kalemegdan, it was defined by a cacophony of sounds, sights, and smells (IAB, ZMSP, k. 8, j. a-V-117.).

The Lower Park was separated from the upper section not only by spatial use, but also by the new trolley tracks built by the city in the early 1920s. A 1923 article in Novi list speculated that a visitor from the “upper world” would wearily observe the carnival-like atmosphere and gawk at the spectators “dirtying themselves in the uncultured masses,” while an accidental visitor from the “lower world” was expected to express dismay that Upper Kalemegdan “ladies and gentlemen can be so stupid that they don’t know how to have fun.”

In this case, the author celebrated the placement of the new trolley tracks as a tool of urban regulation that would enforce the separation of the park’s seemingly contradictory spatial practice of class.

Historical evidence, however, shows that many urban residents paid little mind to the newly built tracks or the invisible social borders that divided Kalemegdan. In fact, most popular presses celebrated the Lower Park; *Novosti*, for instance, wrote about the “universal appeal” of the “Shimmy Slide” that opened in 1928 and revered that the fairgrounds had the capacity to “mend all fronts and bridge all divisions.” Many popular newspapers also came to the defense of the Lower Park when it was criticized for its unruliness. Even after reports of crime at Lower Kalemegdan, the presses legitimized its carnivalesque amusements; for example, during a scandal involving the kidnapping of two young girls by a tent manager, the presses maintained that the area a “probably necessary” part of the city. They called for greater police surveillance of “commerce” and procuresses in the park, but hardly suggested that the mixed practices of Lower Kalemegdan should be eradicated.

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Similarly, both parts of the park were equally privileged in feuilletons, films, and memoirs from the period. In short stories, Upper Kelemegdan appeared an artery of the city center, a place where fictional affluent Belgraders spent time between visits to kafanas, nightclubs, and balls.\textsuperscript{92} It was also the place where residents fell in love,\textsuperscript{93} as it was a part of the city they nostalgically remembered when they moved abroad.\textsuperscript{94} In the few Yugoslav films that were produced during the interwar years, Kalemegdan was featured prominently among other urban sites. For example, Boško Tokin and Dragan Aleksić’s (1901-1958) film \textit{God Be With Us} (\textit{Budi bog s nama ili kačaci u Topčideru}, 1924), described as “a loving satire of the Belgrade that we all know well,” aspired to include images of city streets from Topčider Hill to Lower Kalamegdan.\textsuperscript{95} Likewise, the filming of \textit{The Phantom of Durmitor Mountain} (\textit{Fantom Durmitora}, 1933) took the crew from the wooded outskirts of Dedinje to Kalemegdan and finally down to the boulevard Kneza Aleksandra.\textsuperscript{96} And memoirs of interwar residents reflect an inclusive sentimentality toward both parts of the park; in memory, and as we will see, in history, the park’s division has been preserved superficially. The interwar resident Djorjde Živković remembered Lower Kalemegdan as an extension of street fairs, like the one near Saint Mark’s Church, with shooting ranges, baked sweets, and electric swings.\textsuperscript{97} Milan Djoković similarly recalled that the park was an accessible public site for younger residents, a contrast to the expensive hotels like the Srpski kralj that lined its perimeter. Djoković reminisced about family excursions to the Upper Park and visits to the magicians’ tents, alcohol stands, film projections

\textsuperscript{93} Danica Marković, “Nepoznata lepotica,” \textit{Žena i svet}, maj 1930, 8-13.
\textsuperscript{94} Vera Pavlović, “Posle deset godina,” \textit{Žena i svet}, april 1935, 49-51.
in Lower Kalemegdan with friends.⁹⁸ And, Dimitrije Knežev wrote about the foreign flair of the colorful attractions in the lower part of the park: Charley Chaplin that appeared on the makeshift movie screens, panoramas that brought Paris, Vienna, and Rome within reach, and fads like “fast” photography that immortalized patrons into souvenirs.⁹⁹

The use, or rather misuse, of Lower Kalemegdan as a public place in the city center began to be contested in the late 1920s by cultural elites, national conservatives, and reform-minded bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents. The Lower Park’s core offense was that it undermined the patriarchal order of class and gender: it hosted carnival entertainment that distracted patrons from higher cultural pursuits, it brought lower class residents to the very center of the city, and it was a known as a boom for unregulated amusements, illicit romantic encounters, and occasional scandals. Some critics called for the sanitation of the city’s central public places, implicitly of “Dorćol Jews and Armenian coffee mill vendors, … Slovak maids and their suitors,” and activities ranging from cheerful to vulgar,¹⁰⁰ as a way of advocating for the public park’s role as a sanctuary of respectability in the city. Proposed reforms ultimately hoped to model the whole park by the standards that already governed Upper Kalemegdan; like the unsegregated streets, critics increasingly saw the Lower Park as an urban sore that had yet to be upheld to European standards of social order.

Designs on a reformed Lower Kalemegdan were set with the founding of the Cvijeta Zuzorić Associations for the Friends of the Arts. The organization was formed in the early 1920s by a group of elite women and the author Branislav Nušić who worked as the Director of the Arts and Culture in the Ministry of Education in the years after the First World War. Krista Djordjević, a prominent member, recalls that the Association’s goal was to raise public

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⁹⁹ Knežev, *Beograd naše mladosti*, 121-123.
¹⁰⁰ Knežev, *Beograd naše mladosti*, 123.
awareness about literature, music, and art, as well as to integrate a Pavilion into the city. Fundraising for a permanent gallery began in the early 1920s when Nušić organized a now-notorious party “One Hundred and Two Nights” at the Kasina theater that resembled a variety show more than an evening of the arts. Its repertoire ranged from ballet to jazz, sideshow amusements such as an “orchestra of burping,” and extravagant décor and dining that occupied guests until dawn and captivated the attention of Belgraders, ultimately netting substantial earnings for the association. Although it remains unclear when and how the decision for the Pavilion’s location was reached, the selection of the grounds of Lower Kalemegdan spelled a significant reform of the park. Djordjević remembered that the city eagerly signed over the rights to the land for twenty years to the Association. Building began in 1927, and the Arts Pavilion ceremoniously opened in 1928 on the same grounds that had once hosted the Lower Park’s mechanized swings. A newspaper reported that “it has been decided that Lower Kalemegdan will be an oasis for artists from now on. As one group of patrons has departed, another one has arrived.”

The privatization of the park correlated to its embourgeoisement, and it marked a step toward the reinforcement of upper class spatial hierarchies in the city center. Instead of a mishmash of performances, food, and rides for a mishmash of spectators, one part of the grounds was now demarcated as a public site for the arts and the spatial practice of bourgeois values.

In the second part of the 1930s, Lower Kalemegdan received another spatial makeover when the Belgrade Zoo opened. Belgraders had ample opportunity to encounter animals at traveling circuses, variety stages, and even street performances, but they clamored for a zoo, citing the need for “cultural education” that would bring the world closer to the Yugoslav capital.

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101 IAB, ZMG, k. 2/II, j. 4.
102 “Boemska zabava,” Novi list, 18 februar 1923, 2.
A 1928 proposal suggested that Lower Kalemegdan was an ideal host for a future zoo because it was well connected in the city by public transportation. With almost a decade’s delay, Lower Kalemegdan did, indeed, become its home in 1936. The Zoo opened with a small collection of animals acquired with the support of elites, the state, and political allies: Queen Maria endowed two giraffes, Politika’s editorial offices donated a lion, the Zagreb Zoo send a lioness from among its own collection while the Parisian one contributed a panther, and notable residents were credited with making other such gifts. An array of royal, military, diplomatic, and administrative representatives appeared at the zoo’s inaugural opening, but in the coming years, crowds of middle class Belgraders were its everyday patrons.

The Belgrade Zoo played an important role in redefining the capacity of Lower Kalemegdan and the city center as a whole. While scholars usually discuss zoos as colonial projects, Simona Ćupić suggests that the Belgrade Zoo was a more accurate expression of capitalism, one that reflected the strengthening power of the city’s petite bourgeoisie and workers as consumers. In other words, the Zoo was not unlike Belgrade’s commercial places of urban entertainment that attracted patrons’ gaze with enticing, worldly sights and sounds. The management was well aware of Lower Kalemegdan’s association with unruly fun, so they advertised the Zoo on the premise of education and offered reduced entry rates for students, soldiers, and underprivileged children. The Zoo promised to “display of all the rarities from the world’s continents that are often not even included in textbooks.” It also hosted “respectable” spectacles; for example, when two bear cubs were acquired, a “baptism” was organized and local

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106 Ćupić, Gradjanski modernizam, 130.
108 Ćupić, Gradjanski modernizam, 127-129.
celebrities were invited to serve as godparents.\textsuperscript{110} Although zookeepers reported on the less-than-
perfect comportment of visitors (they would, for example, feed animals rocks, nails, and other
objects), Lower Kalemegdan’s new tenant offered its visitors enlightenment and signaled the
integration of domesticated fun for diverse urban patrons in the city center.

In a city lacking an entertainment district, streets and parks were places where class and
gender hierarchies were publically negotiated. Although not uncontested by urban elites,
Belgrade’s unsegregated streets and Kalemegdan Park were sites of democratic spatial practice,
one that came to the forefront during the interwar years. The struggle for the social control of
the city is perhaps most poignant in Lower Kalemegdan’s metamorphoses: it transformed from a
rowdy carnival, to an “oasis” for the arts, and finally to the zoo that equally attracted Belgrade’s
upper and lower classes.

\textit{Reading the Romance and Selling Sex}

The practice of entertainment in the private places, particularly in the home, was another
indication of spatial practice that undermined gender and class hierarchies in the Yugoslav
capital. Although not unique to Belgrade, I argue that the spatial practice of entertainment in the
home played a more important role in the absence of sanctioned entertainment district, especially
for women. In this section, I first explore the domestication of entertainment and argue that the
consumption of music, fashion, and fiction in the home lent women and younger residents a
platform to safely participate in urban entertainment without patronizing commercial venues or
taking part in boulevard culture.\textsuperscript{111} I then explore the privatization of prostitution following the

\textsuperscript{110} “Šaljivo ‘krštenje’ dva mačeta u beogradskom zoološkom vrtu,” \textit{Politika} 29 mart 1937, 11; “Uginulo je ‘kršteno’
\textsuperscript{111} Robert W. Snyder, \textit{The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York} (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1989), xv.
urban reforms that aimed to expunge it from the urban fabric by making it illegal. I consider how sex continued to be sold in private places and argue that it reshaped the class and gender hierarchies of the urban home. As we will see, both examples illustrate that the home was used as a space of entertainment, a practice that integrated public leisure into the private sphere.

Memoirs of interwar residents are ripe with recollections of home parties (žurevi) where artifacts of urban entertainment crossed the threshold of the private home. Although affluent families sometimes hired amateur musicians, Slavoljub Živanović remembered that the most important component of these gatherings were gramophones. Other residents recalled listening to radio programming that brought music, and notably foreign music, into the private realm and allowed residents to dance to popular songs without having to visit the city’s dance halls and nightclubs. Film was also a form of urban leisure that crossed over from the cinema and into the home through its soundtrack. One resident remembered that “when sound film won over Belgrade in the early 1930s, almost every film would launch one or two hits: a melody or a song, that boys would learn and later sing at home, with friends, at parties.” The fading boundaries isolating private places from the city were often facilitated by technologies that made entertainment as easily purchased as it was consumed.

For women, magazines and newspapers were an important vehicle for practicing the home as a space of entertainment, ones that their contemporaries in London could do in reading rooms in commercial districts. Nada Doroški remembered that women “premiered” their dresses

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112 The semi-public late afternoon parties called matinea, dansing, and čajanke similarly domesticated urban entertainment and extended its reach to a wider audience – particularly women and younger residents – who may not have been in the position to attend clubs, bars, or variety theaters.
113 Paunović, “Pevači i muzičari,” 80-88.
115 Dimitrije Knežev, for example, notes that favorite record labels among his friends were the German Polidor, the British Deca, the French Fate, the American His Master Voice and Columbia, and the Yugoslav Electroton (Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 103.).
116 Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 176-177.
at the theater or special public gatherings, but that they followed fashion in private through the pages of the magazine Žena i svet or the daily newspaper Politika.\textsuperscript{117} Scholar Sarah Frederick demonstrates that interwar women’s magazines were ambiguous in their redrawing of the divide between public and private: “they defined women’s roles – housewife, schoolgirl, mother – in newly restrictive ways, but they also generated new possibilities for different identities, whether through consumption of the products advertised there or by using the publications as vehicles for artistic creation or political activism.”\textsuperscript{118}

Advice columns and romance novels were a notable venue by which Belgrade readers, especially women, practiced entertainment in the home. Milica Jakovljević (1887-1952), known by the pseudonym Mir-Jam, was among the most popular interwar columnists for magazines such as Nedeljne ilustracije, Panorama, and Novosti. One resident described Mir-Jam as a Yugoslav Anne Landers and credited her with providing readers positive illustrations of “domestic love and psychological fiction.”\textsuperscript{119} Others likened her to a Serbian Jane Austen.\textsuperscript{120} Scholars study Mir-Jam’s texts as a mirror of the development of the interwar urban petite bourgeoisie. Others suggest that she was an accidental activist of women’s literacy; Celia Hawkesworth notes that Mir-Jam was an “influential writer who did much to encourage ordinary women to read.”\textsuperscript{121} In Belgrade’s patriarchal milieu where the 1844 Serbian Civil Law

\textsuperscript{118} Sarah Frederick, Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women’s Magazines in Interwar Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 6.
\textsuperscript{119} Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 234.
\textsuperscript{120} Unlike most romance novelists, Mir-Jam remains a household name among Belgraders, inspired in part by a television series adaptation of her novel Wounded Eagle in 2008-2009. Similarly, several of her novels remain in print today. Moreover, the value of the romance novel should not be underestimated as a historical source that continues to shape popular the understanding of gender, society, and the city during the 1920s and 1930s; the jacket of a recent reprint of Wounded Eagle reads, “the world has changed, but Mir-Jam entertains still us, the same way that world authors entertain us, except that she is closer and more recognizable; we remember the world of her preoccupations so that her novels have a cultural-historical worth” (Jakovljević, Ranjeni orao).
\textsuperscript{121} Celia Hawkesworth, Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), 163.
subjugating woman to man after marriage was still in effect, women’s emancipation saw ample resistance in public discourse.\textsuperscript{122} This is why Mir-Jam’s columns addressing urban questions such as love and sex, those otherwise deemed inappropriate for respectable bourgeois and petit bourgeois women, were all the more important for bolstering women’s participation in the city. But Mir-Jam was most popular as a novelist. Her texts were notable for their prominent display of locality: Belgrade was the unmistakable setting of her novels and typical urban scenes – such as trolleys and flower sellers – figured as familiar markers for readers. In one of her most read novels \textit{Wounded Eagle}, Mir-Jam presented the twenty-four-year-old heroine Andjela Bojanić as a budding member of the city’s petit bourgeois circles, a character with who the urban reader doubtlessly sympathized. Professor Nadežda Todorovoć, Andjela’s forty-nine-year-old never-married aunt who raised her after her mother’s death, was another central female character. Although the two women experienced occasional bouts of generational misunderstanding, they were linked by their perseverance in the city as single women. Confident of her own abilities to earn a living, Andjela exclaimed that “there are so many girls living on their own. I will also try. Maybe I’m destined to stay alone … And there are many lonely girls and women today, and they are still happy.”\textsuperscript{123} The author also played into the anxieties of urban women’s sexuality by giving voice to rumors suggesting that they become promiscuous, seductive, and sometimes even dangerous.\textsuperscript{124} Yet a full cast of shocking twists and uncanny coincidences ultimately led to romantic fulfillment for all major characters. The most pleasurable aspect of reading Mir-Jam and other romance writers was perhaps that it allowed for the experience of the city to be written with a happy ending. It might be said that romantic fulfillment via marriage – invariably returning women into the fold of respectability – was a neutralization of urban life itself. But, as

\textsuperscript{122} Vučetić, “‘Sinner without Sin,’” 97.
\textsuperscript{123} Jakovljević, \textit{Ranjeni orao}, 79.
\textsuperscript{124} Jakovljević, \textit{Ranjeni orao}, 281, 303.
Janice Radway argues, reading the romance is bound up in contradiction: when we focus on the
text, it does, indeed, read as a reinforcement of patriarchy, but, when we consider the act of
reading, especially the act of reading for pleasure, reading the romance becomes a subversive
activity that empowered women to practice – and enjoy – the confines of the home as spaces of
entertainment.\textsuperscript{125}

Mir-Jam’s vocal critics objected just to this subversion of gender hierarchies presented by
her texts. Aside from being dismissed as kitsch, Mir-Jam and other popular female journalists
and novelists were accused of seducing Belgrade women with immoral ideas about marriage,
motherhood, and domesticity. As one letter to the editor claimed, popular fiction inclined
Belgrade mothers to mimic their daughters’ dress and behavior and to abandon roles of
“respectable femininity.” More than that, the author of the letter postulated that reading texts
such as those penned by Mir-Jam pushed women to transgress all acceptable gender roles. “The
flirtatiousness of many of our Belgrade mothers doesn’t end with short shirts, powders, make-up,
smoking, etc.,” the letter continued, “she goes further toward the unimaginable: some of them
even snatch away their daughters’ suitors.”\textsuperscript{126} This criticism revealed more about social unease
toward changing norms of gendered behavior in the city than it does about the magazines and
romance novels. Yet, this anxiety stemmed from the destabilized notion of the private sphere as a
place where women were no longer safe from the temptations and dangers of the city.

Branislav Nušić caricatured public reactions to the changing practices of the home. In the
opening scene of his satirical 1924 play “Belgrade Now and Then” (“Beograd nekad i sad:
Vesela igra u dva dela”), Milica, a middle-aged woman, answered a send-away questionnaire in
a magazine on the topic of women’s employment, not unlike those published in \textit{Žena i svet}.

\textsuperscript{126} Brana Milosavljević, “Mama ili kćer,” \textit{Žena i svet}, april 1929, 11.
Milica was in accord that women should be are able to work in all public sectors as traders, clerks, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and professors; she continued to protest that women remained barred from work as clergymen and soldiers. Her husband Nikola raised no protests to his wife’s comments, but her father-in-law Stonajlo, however, retorted that the magazine should publish “useful articles about raising chickens” and wondered aloud why women’s voices should be counted in a survey at all. Stonajlo, an archetype of the older provincial generation, was further perplexed when Milica ventured to the city alone to attend a meeting of a gathering of the Advanced Women’s Council after instructing her out-of-town guests to order food from a restaurant (because she would not be home to cook). Although Nušić’s intent was to parody the generational clash of petite bourgeoisie Belgraders and their provincial elders, the play revealed that the blurred boundary between the home and the city was on the minds of interwar observers. Other scenes showed a similar confusion about changing gender roles in the interwar city. The couple’s daughter, for example, had no interest in domestic tasks, but rather dreamed of a career in modeling and appearing on front-page features. The son, on the other hand, lacked interest in work or current events, but rather indulged in alcohol in the city’s nightclubs. In these caricatures of a Belgrade family, urban culture permeated all the boundaries of the home, making it a space where entertainment was practiced at the loss to patriarchal gender norms.¹²⁷

Prostitution stands as a contrast to the domestication of urban entertainment; it was an altogether different type spatial practice of the home in interwar Belgrade. I recognize that prostitution is a form of labor and that prostitutes are workers. I include prostitution here as a form of entertainment because it is often imagined as the embodiment of illicit public pleasure. I agree with James Traub that the process of selling sex – from a performance of innuendos on a

theater stage to prostitution in public and private places alike – in part constitutes
entertainment. 128 While entertainment districts have historically maintained a symbiotic
relationship between sex and visible urban venues like theaters, restaurants, and clubs,
prostitution in Belgrade lacked a localized urban site. 129 Cinemas, variety shows, and dance
schools in Belgrade were urban places where transgression of sexual mores was often suspected,
but little archival evidence beyond speculation linked entertainment venues with prostitution. On
the other hand, a wealth of evidence authenticated that prostitution was practiced in the private
realm; especially after the 1929 wave of reforms that made prostitution illegal in Belgrade, the
home came to be practiced as a space of entertainment that undermined both gender and class
dictates of private places.

In the early 1920s, Belgrade was plagued by poverty and prostitution was a common
form of clandestine labor used by some residents, predominantly women, to supplement
wages. 130 Jovana Knežević demonstrates that interwar perceptions of prostitution as a threat to
public health, order, and morality was shaped by its practice during the First World War. While
city administrators had established a “sanitation police” as early as 1925 and charity
organizations offered asylum to “fallen” women and girls in the first decade after the war, the
state was relatively tolerant of prostitution and serious attempts at abolition did not occur before

129 Timothy Gilfoyle, City of Eros: New York, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920 (New
York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992). Although I was unable to find corroborating evidence, like many port
cities, Belgrade was rumored to have had a nineteenth century red light district near the loading docks on the Sava
River that perished in a fire.
130 Rising rates of prostitution in the years during and after the First World War are a reflection of greater social and
economic problems. Interwar medical elites cited modernization, poverty, inadequate family conditions, limited
options to earn a living wage, and prowling procurers among the factors engendering prostitution in the city. As the
physicians Bogoljub Konstantinović claimed, prostitution was “interwoven with an entire series of problems in
private, social, and state life” (Cited in Knežević, “Prostitutes as a Threat,” 316.).
the late 1920s. On the brink of sweeping social reforms that aimed to purge a range of urban problems from the streets such as suspicious locales, late night reveling, and loitering, there were reportedly around 80 brothels in Belgrade.

In response to new urban regulations that made prostitution illegal, residents who relied on sex work to earn a living or to supplement meager wages breached the line dividing a public activity like prostitution from the private space of the home. Most importantly, residents challenged prescriptions for use of private places by using the “safe” domestic realm for illicit practices. Movement in the city changed as well, widening the circuit of public space by transforming residential neighborhoods and private homes into satellites of urban entertainment. Judging by the amount of issued citations in the 1930s, prostitution remained as active – in private, underground, and peripheral places – as it had been in the 1920s, if not more so.

A cross-section of Belgrade City Authority reports reveal the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds of women practicing prostitution in the 1930s, as well as the uniform shift of its practice into private places. Amajlija Jurić, for example, was found to be pimping her own 15-year old daughter at their apartment not far from the rail station, Kumria Blagojević and her daughter Randjelija Jovanović ran a prostitution rink in their home in Palilula whenever their

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131 Belgrade administration at the turn of the century was surprisingly lenient toward prostitution. The Serbian government favorite regulation over abolition and passed several municipal laws that differentiated public prostituted and clandestine prostitutes. The former declared their profession openly, registered with the police, and underwent biweekly medical exams. Although discrimination and bias of medical and police authorities toward these women should not be overlooked, public prostitutes were not restricted from working at brothels or from their own home. However, it is interesting that the number of registered brothels in the city decreased from twelve in 1900 to six in 1908. As Jovana Knežević suggests, the decrease in visible places of prostitution indicates that there was ongoing pressure to remove prostitution from the city and that most form of organized sex industry were “retreating from the regulated into the clandestine realm.” It is perhaps not surprising that the numbers of clandestine prostitutes (those not registered or regulated by the city) grew proportionally (Knežević, “Prostitutes as a Threat,” 319.).

132 Knežević, “Prostitutes as a Threat,” 320.

133 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2792 (1937).

134 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2779 (1936), f. XXIV, j. 3.
husbands were away,\textsuperscript{135} and Omrza Miljka was accused of disrupting the moral order of her neighborhood in the sprawling southwester part of the city.\textsuperscript{136} Some investigations took the City Authority across the Danube, towards Pančevo, where Dara Djordjević, known as “Mommy,” facilitated various sorts of sexual transgression in her well-furnished apartment in the early 1920s, and Malka Sladojević continued to provide a similar service several doors down well into the 1930s.\textsuperscript{137} While tightening regulations installed a sense of top-down patriarchal order in public discourse, prostitution did not decline; instead, women scattered across the city, nestled in shrouded public houses, and opened up business in private homes.

The city administration and urban observers were clearly agitated by the unraveling of the traditionally conspicuous link between sexual promiscuity and sex work, like the erosion of the traditionally conspicuous distinction of public practice and private space. Anxieties about the changing practice of private space became a dominant point of discussion in the second part of the interwar period. The usual suspects – women living alone in the city, those who were employed and those who were unemployed, foreigners, and vagabonds – were first in line to be suspected of adulterating the demarcation between public and private. The politics of living arrangements, exasperated by overcrowding and inadequate housing options, are an apt illustration of the city administration’s uneasiness toward single women. A Belgrade landlord could, for example, rent a room to single men without a special permit,\textsuperscript{138} but they were required to obtain permission in order to rent to single women. The semiotics of the administration are revealing: renters were required to file a permit for “keeping women” (\textit{držati ženskinje}), a phrase that suggested a landlord was responsible for policing the behavior of his tenants as much as

\textsuperscript{135} IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2779 (1936), f. XXIV, j. 1.
\textsuperscript{136} IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2779 (1936), f. XXIV, j. 171.
\textsuperscript{138} IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2786, fascikla XII-89/37.
collecting the rent. Moreover, the right to rent a room to single women was earned only after an application to the Belgrade City Authority confirmed the landlord’s own moral standing. Ana Crnović, a Belgrade homemaker requested one such permit, and received permission to “keep women under the age of 30 as permanent residents, so long as she strictly held to police ordinances.”

This imagined link between single women and immorality was so strongly internalized that citizens sometimes reported suspicions about women in the own neighborhood. For instance, an officer fined Djurdjuja Jelisijević after a neighbor denounced her for lodging prostitutes. Though the investigating officer did find two women and a man “under by sheets” at her apartment, the report showed no evidence indicating that the women were prostitutes or that Jelisijević was renting the room for the purpose of clandestine prostitution. On the other hand, a police agent reported the seamstress Mare Marčić for “keeping women” – performers, no less – without a permit. Marčić came to her own defense by reiterating her own lack of a criminal record, but the officer fined her nonetheless. Entertainers, especially female ones, were reputed to be of “loose morals,” and they were perceived to be threats to patriarchal society – and bad neighbors to have. An industry agent testified that many entertainers retired after turning thirty because, by that time, they had “fallen too low.” The agent also claimed that these women “have too many enemies,” and among them alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and venereal disease, making them a dangerous addition to any community. In response to this public discourse, individual residents were expected – and often did – discipline patriarchal norms, normative sexual practices, and the proper practice of private spaces in their neighborhoods.

139 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2780 (1936), f. XVIII, j. 232/936.
140 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2800 (1939), f. 18, j. 160.
141 IAB, UBG, ČNV, k. 2786 (1937), f. XII, j. 189/1937.
The paradox, of course, is that the bulk of interwar prostitution was located neither on the fringes of society or on the margins of the city, just like most prostitutes were not conspicuously immoral women – they were Yugoslav women who would rarely be singled out on the street as prostitutes. In Belgrade, evidence reveals that the rates of venereal disease among prostitutes increased by 200% after the First World War – and that a remarkable majority of cases were among married women. Elizabeth Clement describes a similar historical moment in early twentieth century New York City, when a massive urban cleanup of brothels diffused prostitution into residential working class neighborhoods. As was the case in Belgrade, Clement suggests that the repression of vice in the commercial center increased the presence of prostitution in residential areas – in the private realm. At the same time, Clement argues that the transition of prostitution out of the brothel gave women agency to define the terms of their labor: where, how often, and to what extent they participated in prostitution. For some women, this meant an occasional sexual favor in exchange for a night out in the city. For others, it was a wage earned through a small-scale commercial network linking their home to a local kafana.

The domestication of entertainment – in this case, the romance novel and prostitution – altered the spatial practice of the home as well as the gender and class hierarchies regulating private places. Because Belgrade did not host commercial districts where women were sanctioned to participate in entertainment, magazines and fiction brought urban culture into the home. They were cheap commodities accessible to almost all literate urbanites while, at the same time, they were enticing enough to attract upper class readers who mobilized the private interiors

143 “Po čemu ćemo poznati otmenu damu na ulici?,” Žena i svet, juni 1932, 16. According to Jovana Knežević, 45% of prostitutes in Belgrade’s brothels between 1898 and 1907 were foreign. She also cites that the most active procurers were Hungarian Serbs. However, prostitution at cafés and hotels – most likely unregistered, clandestine prostitutes who worked irregularly – were said to be local women (Knežević uses the term “native”): only 20% of those prostitutes were foreign (Knežević, “Prostitutes as a Threat,” 322-323.).
144 Marković, Beograd i Evropa, 62.
to shield their popular pursuits. On the other hand, Belgraders who used private places to buy and sell sex, posed another challenge to patriarchal order of the home. Not only did they undermine the family, they did so in the face of bourgeois social values outlining women’s sexual restraint. When Belgrade police investigated the coffeehouse Djurdjevski uranak, not far from the city center, on an accusation that the establishment hosted a side entrance patronized by male customers five or six times per day, allegedly for “love meetings,” it was found that the pub owner Stana Milesavljević facilitated fornication between male customers and several unregistered women for a mere 10 dinar per visit. Like magazines and novels, sex was cheap and it could be bought almost anywhere in the city. While entertainment played an important role in destabilizing traditional norms of class and gender in almost all cities, the spatial practice of the home was doubly important in cities lacking a demarcated leisure district.

Conclusion

Because the Yugoslav capital lacked an entertainment district, fun permeated the city’s commercial, public, and private places. Commercial places like variety stages and cinemas brought audiences in contact with foreign entertainment and shaped movement around these venues as new urban epicenters. Parks and streets, on the other hand, were pertinent examples of social democratization of Belgrade’s public places, as the interwar period saw a series of reforms that transformed Kalemegdan from a socially divided park to one that uniformly accessible to residents. It is precisely in Kalemegdan that Belgraders of diverse backgrounds appeared as actors in the 1930s; the cover of the women’s magazine Žena i svet, for example, commonly pictured petit bourgeois women purchasing flowers from peasant children along Kalemegdan’s iconic fortress walls and photographs from the period have captured similar scenes on city

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146 IAB, UGB, ČNV, k. 2779 (1936), f XXIV, j. 106/1936, 1.
streets. Finally, entertainment also reached into the home and brought residents in closer contact with all genres of fun, and the city itself, through transportable popular culture such as magazines, records, and radio. Although an entertainment district hardly confines entertainment, the absence of sanctioned entertainment places in Belgrade pushed residents to redefine the spatial practice of other urban sites. This made fun more broadly accessible to a larger populations of residents because entertainment spilled over the threshold of commercial venues, saturated public streets and parks, and penetrated the private realm of the home, just as it shifted the reigning hierarchies and class and gender in interwar Belgrade.
Chapter Five

Interwar Physical Cultures:
The Strongman Dragoljub Aleksić between National and Metropolitan Ideals

Introduction

Uroš Stojanović’s high-budget 2008 film *Tears for Sale* (*Čarlston za Ognjenku*) was set in a fictionalized Yugoslav village Pokrp in the 1920s. The plot was premised on an absence of men in the years after the First World War, a circumstance that has driven local women to edge of reason.¹ After the last man in Pokrp passed away, the women conscripted two representatives – the sisters Ognjenka and Boginja – to travel “over there to that Belgrade” and to procure a man to replenish the local resources. As the two women got further from the village, they encountered urban signifiers like fashion, automobiles, and entertainment that eventually led them to the city. The women easily adapted to their new environment: they shed their peasant costumes in favor of western-style dresses, they learned to drive, and they were seduced by jazz as much as their new-found sexual freedom. Two men captured the attention of Ognjenka and Boginja – the “King of the Charleston” Arsenije and the “Man of Steel” Dragoljub Aleksić. Like the film’s setting, the two characters were loosely based on historic figures; Arsenije was a nod to Kosta Novaković’s (1886-1938) lost 1927 comedy *King of the Charleston* (*Kralj Čarlstaona*) about an older gentleman basking in a sea of beautiful Belgrade sunbathers, while Dragoljub Aleksić (1910-1985) was a Yugoslav strongman who often performed on the streets of the interwar capital. In the film, both characters are markedly urban in their dress, demeanor, and profession,

¹ In an opening scene, a still suggests that two thirds of Serbia’s male population perished in the war. While this figure it inflated, it is not far from the truth. Scholars agree that approximately one million residents (military and civilian) of the Kingdom of Serbia died during the First World War. While this constituted about 22% of the total population of 4.5 million, it also totaled 57% of Serbia’s prewar male population (Vladimir Dedijer, Ivan Božić, Sima Cirković, and Milorad Ekmečić, *History of Yugoslavia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 501). It is also worth noting that the film makes no mention of the existence of Yugoslavia, but rather draws a direct historical continuity between the Kingdom of Serbia at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Republic of Serbia at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
and the two sisters, like city and village women alike, unanimously proclaimed them to be specimens of “real men.” But *Tears for Sale* was far from historically accurate, and it took great liberty with political, social, and cultural representation of the 1920s: it eradicated the tension between the city and the countryside, it oversimplified the accessibility of urban life to peasant women, and it recast the strongman as the epitome of Serbian masculinity. In interwar Belgrade, Dragoljub Aleksić was hardly celebrated like the character played by the actor Nenad Jezdić in *Tears for Sale*; as we will see, the strongman was never praised as the perfect specimen of the nation, he was hardly embraced as a quintessential urban entertainer, and it was only a lucky coincidence that he has not altogether fallen into historical obscurity.

On the interwar cultural spectrum, where Sokol gymnastics exhibited the essence of the nation and the variety stage showcased the spectacle of the metropolis, the performances of Dragoljub Aleksić did not fit neatly into either hierarchy of physical culture. Instead, it was precisely his historical complexity that highlighted how competing ideas about physicality were negotiated in Belgrade. Short in stature, Aleksić overcompensated with a chiseled chest and biceps that he eagerly displayed in shirtless performances, snug costumes, and posed photographs resembling the postures of Greek gods. He made appeals to the state on the grounds that his shows promoted the same pinnacles of health and strength as national physical culture. Archival records, however, show that his arguments were not persuasive enough to earn support or endorsement from the state – because he was deemed to be much of an entertainer. Aleksić’s resume listed elaborate stunts such as balancing on several stacked unicycles, walking a tightrope suspended above city streets with a scantily clad woman in tow, bending iron rods into coils, holding back speeding cars with his bare hands, and – his most famed stunt – flying above Kalemegdan Park while clenching (only by his teeth) to a chain attached to an airplane. The
strongman reveled in that his performances amounted to the practice of public urban places like streets and squares as spaces of entertainment and that they were available to all residents. Yet as a street performer steeped in patriarchal imagery, Aleksić failed to rival the popularity of metropolitan physical culture like cabaret and cinema that tantalized audiences with subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle performances. In Belgrade, where the conflict over what precisely constituted respectable bodies was underlined by the city’s role as both the national capital and a European metropolis; Aleksić was a poignant example of this ambivalence. In this chapter, I harness the case of the strongman into a study of physical culture between the two wars that as well as the negotiations of national and metropolitan bodily ideals underway in Belgrade.

Historians show how bodies have been mobilized for social, symbolic, and a variety of other purposes, such as objects of medical-hygienic and racial ideology and as sites of control and colonialism. As Kathleen Canning argues that “bodies sometimes do different work at the same historical moment… [they are] difficult objects of historical analysis and such intriguing sites of memory, agency, and subjectivity.”² The body is an important category for the period at hand. Ramsay Burt suggests that “in the inter-war years, difference was often expressed through bodily metaphors, ‘pure race’ being understood in terms of ‘pure blood,’ while anxiety over national boundaries … was equated with concern over bodily boundaries, pollution, and degeneration.”³ In East European historiography, Maria Bucur’s excellent book about eugenics in interwar Romania shows how state ideology racialized the body.⁴ While the body can be approached as a historical category from many perspectives, this chapter focuses on the manifestations of interwar physical culture in entertainment. I consider both state-sponsored

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leisure tasked to nationalize the body as well as the European currents of big city entertainment that mobilized the body as a pleasurable commercial commodity poised to entertain audiences. I locate the strongman Dragoljub Aleksić and a cast of other domestic performers in Belgrade within this interwar dialogue about physical culture; their bodies, not unlike the city’s space of entertainment, were sites where the politics of culture, gender, and class were played out.

In this chapter, I first examine state-sponsored activities such as Sokol groups that disciplined the body into a symbol of Yugoslav unity just as they exemplified patriarchal hierarchies of gender. Dragoljub Aleksić attempted to embody many of these national ideals, and I explore his designs to promote performances as educational and patriotic. Then, I analyze the manifestations of metropolitan physical culture in foreign entertainment, focusing specifically on Josephine Baker during her visit to Yugoslavia in 1929 and broadly on spectator sports, both examples as incarnations of the bodily pleasures of big city entertainment. In Belgrade, the popularity of entertainers like Baker stood as a challenge to the propriety of the arts as well as the paradigms of gender and class. Yet, despite this, metropolitan physical cultures were sanctioned under categories such as foreign, urban, and European; as we have seen in the preceding chapters, foreign entertainment recalibrated the politics of culture and it shifted class and gender hierarchies. In the last section, I compare the case of the strongman to three other Yugoslav entertainers and explore how they mediated the presentation of their bodies in interwar Belgrade. Although each case differs from that of Aleksić, I show that the physical cultures of the nation and the big city were irreconcilable for domestic performers. Aleksić’s legitimization by the state, elites, and the audience came too late, and in the conclusion, I return to Tears for Sale and other contemporary cultural representations that have rehabilitated the entertainer as an embodiment of Yugoslav and Serbian history between the two wars.
The Sokols and the Strongman

In August of 1931, Dragoljub Aleksić wrote to King Alexander I in hopes of gaining royal patronage and receiving state recognition of his performances as educational (prosvetne) rather than entertaining (zabavne). By this time, Aleksić had developed most of the performing repertoire and he sent a packet of promotional material, including photographs, pamphlets, and published booklets that extolled his physical strength, personal duress, and a catalogue of death defying stunts. Records from the Ministry of Education show that Aleksić had received work permits in 1929 and 1930 as an “amateur performer of acrobatics,” but that he was denied permission to present his shows to Yugoslav school children in the following year. Around the same time, the Ministry of the Army and Navy rejected Aleksić’s request to use a state-owned airplane in his newly developed performance of dangling from a flying plane, and declined to financially support him in renting one from a private organization. Marginalized by the state, the performer appealed to the King and embarked on a project to recast his reputation as an advocate of physical health akin to the gymnastics of Sokol clubs. But, the road to respectability was rocky for Aleksić, especially in light of the state’s erratic cultural policy and the entertainer’s string of arrests for public disobedience in the 1930s. Even without these obstacles, the strongman fit uncomfortably alongside state-sponsored interwar physical culture such as Sokol organizations. In this section, I examine the ideals of the Yugoslav national body and show the strongman’s appeals to its pillars of health, strength, and discipline. However, Aleksić’s claims fell on deaf ears: he was never celebrated as a representation of national physical culture in neither state nor society because, as I argue, he concurrently accommodated the competing symbols of metropolitan physical culture in his performances. While the second section

7 Aleksić, Aleksićev doživljaj, 25.
considers why the strongman did not succeed in capturing the attention of the city’s entertainment audiences, here I show why he was never legitimizied by the state, national conservatives, and reform-minded residents.

The origin of the Sokol organization (a word that means falcon in some Slavic languages) stretches to late-nineteenth century Prague as a gymnastic association that attracted men across age, class, and ethnicity. It initially evoked leftist working-class symbolism and empowered the individual to participate in the mass. As the organization expanded, it took on the flavor of the local political milieu; in prewar Serbia, Sokol members had the reputation of promoting Yugoslavism and pan-Slavism, just like their interwar successors nurtured Yugoslav state unity.8 While the Sokols were not explicitly a state organization, they embodied the national dictates of physical health, moral strength, and social order.9 In fact, these gymnastic organizations stood as an alternative to modern spectator sport for Yugoslav youth: they were “collectivist rather than competitive, mass-based rather than elitist, [and] underpinned by different philosophical conceptions of the modern body.”10 Spectator sports popular in interwar Yugoslavia – from boxing and tennis to soccer and racing – were defiantly classified as entertainment by cultural elites, national conservatives, and the reform-minded upper classes rather than a patriotic exercise. As Robert Edelman suggests, and as I discuss in more detail below, spectator sport was a “an opportunity for pleasure and fun.”11 Sokol gymnastics, on the other hand, exhibited the

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8 Alcock, Explaining Yugoslavia, 284.
9 Many interwar states supported similar groups devoted to cultivating health “in body and in spirit” as part of nation-building projects. As Robert Edelman suggests in the case of the Soviet Union, the state supported athletics insomuch as they inspired citizens to be better workers and solders; see: Robert Edelman, Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), ix. For the case of Israel, see: Nina S. Spiegel, “Constructing the City of Tel Aviv: Urban Space, Physical Culture, and the Natural Environment,” Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice 16, 4 (2012): 497-516. For a discussion how gymnastics displays in Leni Riefenstahl’s Olympia, see: Burt, Alien Bodies, 101-120.
11 Edelman, Serious Fun, 6-7.
controlled order of a military march, the dignified separation of men’s and women’s bodies, and the respectable diversions of health consciousness. Although I do not classify the Sokols as entertainment, I consider these organizations a prominent agent in the development of national physical culture in Belgrade due to their high membership rates, consistent coverage in illustrated presses, and prominence of parades and performances in the city.

The popularity of the Sokols peaked in the capital in anticipation of the massive Jamboree (*Svesokolski slet sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije*) in 1930, around the same time that Dragoljub Aleksić appealed to the Minister of Education by pledging his commitment to the “spirit of the Sokols.” The Jamboree merited the construction of the largest stadium (*Trkalište*) at the time in the southeastern neighborhood Palilula and brought some 13,000 Yugoslav youths into the city as participants. Newspapers and magazines devoted considerable attention to the event, presenting it as a manifestation in the interest of patriotism – but also as a respectable spectacle to attend. Photographs and film from the Jamboree showed masses of young men parading and performing choreographed gymnastic displays in matching athletic uniforms. The spectacle was accompanied by the music of military marches and processions of women dressed in peasant costumes. The publicity and documentation of the Jamboree aptly illustrate the politicized image of the nation that Siegfried Kracauer terms mass ornament. The bodies of the participants were intended to be seen from afar, where they appeared mechanical, synchronized, and anonymous. The performances gave the impression of a militant unity and the collective national strength of its younger generations. An interwar resident testified to the Sokols’ prominence on the urban psyche; he remembered that the Jamboree evoked “a delirium

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12 AJ, MP, f. 2343.
14 *Ilustrovano vreme*, 28 juni 1930.
of excitement among the spectators” and bursts of national pride akin to those inspired by the Olympics.\footnote{Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 179.}

The centrality of the body was further highlighted in Jamboree promotional posters that appeared on city streets and in the presses. In one, three nude muscular male bodies (with their backs turned to the viewer) assumed identical lunging poses with one hand releasing a falcon and another groundling a spear. Overhead, the three falcons grasped the Yugoslav tricolor from the three men, implicitly representing the recognized “tribes” or “bothers” of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Like the men, the falcons are identical and poised to take flight in unison. In another image, a nearly nude muscular man – in this case, a single representation of unified Yugoslavia – posed rigidly with a sword and a falcon perched atop its handle (another falcon soared in the background). In his other hand, the man held the Yugoslav flag. In yet a third poster for the Jamboree, a similar presentation of the male body was intact: agile, muscular, and decent. The variables in this poster served to reiterate patriotism inherent in Sokol athletics, namely the erect sword symbolic of a victory and the shield platform supported by the many hands of citizens. The near-nudity of these male bodies was excused by allusions to the postures of classical Greek statues; in fact, this association with the “natural” man lent the right degree of respectability to the exposed bodies that could be gazed upon without tempting sexual arousal just as their historical illusions implied the nation’s eternal bearings. In each of the tree images, moreover, the Yugoslav tricolor reinforced that message of these Sokol Jamboree posters: the disciplined, strong, and healthy male body – whether the three identical brothers or the single Yugoslav – was the epitome of nation physical culture.
It is also significant that the Jamboree was held in Belgrade. As the city had struggled to serve as the capital of an enlarged and multicultural state in the 1920s, the stakes only increased after the King’s 1929 motion toward state centralization. Even as advertisements for the Jamboree oscillated between the recognition of the three “tribes” and the image of the single Yugoslav, the event was intended to root the capital as the epicenter of the nation. The 1932 propaganda film *Belgrade, the Capital of Yugoslavia* (*Beograd prestonica Jugoslavije*), for example, incorporated images recorded at the Jamboree alongside scenes filmed on city streets and parks. As one critic wrote, “this is the first serious film that captures the full magnificence of the ideas of Yugoslav unity and brotherhood.” Similarly, articles in the 1930s continued to extoll the positive effects of Sokol athletics on spectators, increasingly stressing the education inherent in the pursuit of physical health, moral strength, and social discipline.

Around the time of the Jamboree, Dragoljub Aleksić was preparing his own promotional materials in which a generous appropriation of the Sokol discourse was difficult to overlook. In his youthful autobiography published in 1932 (*Aleksić’s Experiences with an Introduction to His Exercise Regime*), Aleksić narrated a dramatic personal ascent: he claimed that he had been weak and sickly as a child, that he was severely injured in a car accident, and that he nearly succumbed to depression and addiction before he discovered the virtues of physical discipline. In other words, Aleksić imposed the dialectic of moral strength and physical health onto his life story, creating a narrative of parallel uplift. Moreover, the biography offered an exercise guide, the same one the strongman had allegedly used to attain “a healthy spirit in a healthy body.” Indeed, even this motto was taken directly from the Sokols. In another publication, the short pamphlet titled “The Master of Death’s Guide for the Strengthening of the Body,” Aleksić elaborated on

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18 “‘Sokolstvo je pokret koji će nas izvesti iz moralne krize,’” *Nedeljne ilustracije*, 3 januar 1936, 4-6.
his exercise regiment, promoting abstinence from tobacco and alcohol, all the while advocating a vegetable-based diet. In his endeavors to mimic the national physical culture of the Sokols, Aleksić was also influenced by the successful campaigns of another entertainer: the German-born, London-based strongman Eugene Sandow. While Sandow was notorious for provocative displays of the body, sometime only wearing a leopard skin loincloth in onstage performances, he won over European middle class audiences by veiling his repertoire of muscular flexing as an instructional exercise. His Sandow System, as historian Caroline Daley suggests, “ennobled” performances as educational programs and “explained and justified” the presence of respectable audiences at the shows.20 But while the cover of health consciousness sanctioned Sandow, the Yugoslav Minister of Education remained unconvinced about Aleksić’s value to the promotion of national ideals of physical culture.

In his quest for state endorsement, Aleksić attempted to underline other links between his own performances and national physical culture. After a serious injury during a performance in Split, the strongman chose to stage his comeback in the Yugoslav capital in the stadium that had been built for the Jamboree. Rather than setting up his high wires in the city center, Aleksić erected two huge poles “that looked like some sort of American skyscraper”21 in the stadium. This was a symbolic act that claimed the ground zero of the Sokol Jamboree as his own space, but also one that disassociated the strongman from street culture. Moreover, promotional images of the strongman echoed the posters depicting the national body. Aleksić appeared shirtless in pamphlets, displaying all his muscular glory in stoic poses akin to those of Greek gods. Not only that, but these photographs were juxtaposed with ones of Aleksić suited up as a respectable

21 Aleksić, Aleksićev doživljaj, 49-50.
The strongman presented a similar image of himself in *Innocence Unprotected* (*Nevinost bez zaštitite*, 1942), a film he wrote, directed, and starred in as the crowning feat of his career. Aleksić cast himself in the heroic leading role – as himself – as the savior of a woman’s virginity and, metaphorically, of the Serbian nation at the hands of Axis Europe. In other words, he argued that his muscles did not only serve to entertain, but that they were veritable weapons at the service of patriarchal – and national – values.

Aleksić’s appeals produced mixed reactions. Interwar newspapers praised the strongman’s professed abstinence and ascribed the success of his strict physical regiment to his moral integrity. One Sarajevo paper even accepted the stunts as instructive displays of discipline rather than entertainment. But the state was not as easily convinced. Aleksić’s contemporary, the athlete Milorad Višković, for example, was banned from staging anything akin to Sokol gymnastics without the explicit approval from the regional Sokol organization. The Minister inserted his personal opinion in the internal memo regarding Višković’s case, one that could have easily applied to Aleksić, suggesting that any trace of “entertaining character” should disqualify the performance from being considered educational. Yugoslav entertainers were thus at a double disadvantage: they were expected to meet the standards of national physical culture in order to receive state sponsorship all the while attempting to match the allure of foreignness that propelled their foreign contemporaries to popularity in Belgrade. The strongman Aleksić was one among few Yugoslav performers who took an active role in attempting to bridge the national and metropolitan ideals of physical culture. Yet, even with entrepreneurial self-

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24 AJ, MP, f. 2343.
promotion, Yugoslav entertainers were met with the insurmountable task of pleasing both the ideals of the state and the city during the interwar years.

Yugoslav women had a harder time in reconciling national and metropolitan physical cultures. As I show in the next section, foreign women were upheld to different social hierarchies; this discrepancy helps account for the overwhelmingly male cast of domestic performers on the Belgrade stage. A family member or partner often accompanied Yugoslav women who did work as entertainers. For example, Katica Aleksić, Dragoljub Aleksić’s sister, began to appear as the strongman’s assistant in 1931. Jelena Obradović, known as Fatima, performed alongside her husband, the magician Sreten Obradović, in shows of illusions and mysteries. The couple was notorious for their exotic acts in which Jelena Obradović was cast in roles such as an Egyptian fortuneteller, an Ottoman princess, or an enchanted French heiress; because she played the foreign female on stage, Obradović was able to evade the strict scruples of gender expected of domestic women. But, more often, it was the kafana singers who constituted the bulk of domestic women’s sparse participation on the city’s entertainment circuit.

Belgrade’s famed Cica Stojanović, for instance, was said to evoke a bacchanalian atmosphere among the spectators, “intoxicating thousands of people with her song, until she finally succumbed to its rousing power. Glasses smashed, champagne popped, and the instruments trembled under the shaky hands of the Roma while Cica’s voice rose above it all.” Although some newspapers glorified the kafana singer as a staple of urban nightlife, Cica Stojanović hardly hailed as an embodiment of the national ideal. Instead, like other women employed in entertainment venues, she was presumed to seduce and solicit customers for illicit activities in private places. One observer speculated that “when the cafés close, then every singer

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26 “Kroz noćni Beograd…,” Ilustrovani list nedelja, 12 januar 1930, ii, 25.
with her newly acquired lover retreats for the night to her hotel or private apartment.”

Like the contestations of the gendered practices of urban space, female *kafana* singers like Stojanović stood in direct contrast to the patriarchal mores dictating women’s bodies: they exhibited their bodies on stage, they demanded to be gazed upon, and they fully engaged with male urban signifiers like alcohol and the nighttime. Moreover, the *kafana* singer, as a legacy of the prewar city, was incongruent with the new ideals of the Yugoslav state. This discrepancy is evident in texts of the affecting songs the sang (*sevdalinke*): instead of national oneness the songs glorified the everyday life of “old Belgrade” where women loved passionately, men behaved irrationally, and song and wine were among the favorite physical pleasures.

In 1942, Dragoljub Aleksić put forth the most ambitious attempt to rehabilitate his image in interwar society: *Innocence Unprotected*. While the film came to have a defining role in Aleksić’s legacy and, indeed, his contemporary reincarnation in Serbian culture, the strongman would not have made this extravagant film had he not been marginalized from the interwar mainstream in the first place. In addition to failing to secure state patronage, Aleksić’s popularity was plummeting among urban audiences who were growing tired of his routines in the early 1930s. In his autobiography, he confided his worst fears after an injury forced him to remain bedridden for several months: “I am going to be forgotten, as if I never exited!” Unfortunately, his instincts were a correct evaluation of the fickleness of Belgrade spectators, whose short memory threatened to plunge Aleksić into oblivion on more than one occasion. To make matters worse, he was arrested twice for vagrancy and public disobedience, and consequently sentenced

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27 Quoted in Knežević, “Prostitutes as a Threat,” 319. Knežević reiterates that “widespread clandestine prostitution also created a great deal of ambiguity on the image and categories of women in Serbian society. Because many clandestine prostitutes occasionally also worked as barmaids, waitresses, cashiers, or chambermaids, especially in times of economic crisis, a broad range of working women were suspected of being ‘prostitutes’ in Serbian society. Another group of suspect women were entertainers, especially cabaret performers and female members of the Serbian Orpheum” (319).

to two years of hard labor in 1933 and 20 months of imprisonment, followed by exiled to his native village in central Serbia in 1935.\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Innocence Unprotected} was the strongman’s last attempt to embody national physical culture – but also an ambitious move to captivate audiences through a decidedly modern genre.

In the film, he played himself as himself. Like in his real life promotional materials, the fictionalized Aleksić professed abstinence from physical stimulants, decried material gluttony, and fought to protect the weak against violence. After a sequence showing the strongman’s flexing muscles and classical poses – set to a soundtrack of folk music, no less – Nada, the character playing Aleksić’s girlfriend, declared: “isn’t this a real man, in all the right ways?” Aleksić was later given an opportunity to show his manliness in action, when he saved the innocent Nada from a sexual attack by the belligerent bourgeois predator Petrović. But, in the context of the German occupation, it would have been difficult to miss the film’s not so subtle metaphor: like Nada, Serbia was innocent and unprotected, while the strongman was a veritable Yugoslav \textit{übermensch} – the savior of the nation. The black and white film opened in occupied Belgrade with immediate success as the first domestic talkie; its premiere was said to have provoked such loud approval from the audience that troops at a nearby screening (of course, of a German propaganda film – in color) were immediately dispatched to arrest the crew.\textsuperscript{30} Although the film was banned almost immediately, Aleksić managed to salvage a portion of the reels. They lay buried, along with the strongman’s reputation, for almost three decades. Even in face of Aleksić’s cinematic accomplishments – \textit{Innocence Unprotected} was, after all, a forerunner of sound film in Yugoslavia – and the audience acclaim in the final act of the interwar period, the

\textsuperscript{29} AJ, MP, f. 2343.
strongman did not qualify as an embodiment of the nation. On the contrary, he was imprisoned immediately after the war, this time on suspicion of wartime collaboration.  

Despite his best efforts to align his work with the pillars of Yugoslav physical culture, signifiers of metropolitan ideals compromised the strongman’s appeals to national physical culture. First, apart from assistants in the roles of “damsels in distress,” Aleksić did not perform in a group or a team: he was an independent entertainer. Although this was not terribly unusual, it sent the message of exceptionalism that conflicted with the collective agendas of unified Yugoslav national culture – like that exhibited by Sokol gymnastics. Moreover, the strongman exerted mastery over nature and the machine: he defied gravity, subverted physics, and challenged the capacity of human strength. Unlike the Sokol’s uniformed movement of bodies that mimicked the work of a mechanized being synchronous with nature, Aleksić posed a threat of defeating the national body and overturning natural order. Second, for all his assertions of patriotism, the strongman never as so much as incorporated a Yugoslav flag into his performances during the interwar years. The veil of Sokol language and imagery was a transparent entrepreneurial front backed neither by the intent to educate the public nor to popularize the virtues of physical health and moral strength. In other words, Aleksić was an entertainer who sought to captivate audience attention, rather than to rouse it into patriotic action. Finally, Aleksić’s performances were too urban in order to qualify as national culture: his stunts catered to short attention spans, he mobilized the city streets as a space of entertainment, and he employed his own body as a spectacular tool that broke records and challenged physical limits. That is to say that the strongman did not so much as transgress patriarchal hierarchies of class and gender like female Yugoslav performers, but he failed to embody them. Yet, at the same

time, Aleksić fulfilled neither the competing notions of metropolitan physical culture – a topic to which the following section is devoted.

Josephine Baker in Belgrade

While the strongman Dragoljub Aleksić stood on the margins of national physical culture, he also stood on the margins of metropolitan currents. For one, Aleksić promoted the rationality of diet and exercise in a milieu where erratic jazz, frenzied dancing, and the pursuit of pleasurable abandon set the bar for entertainment. His daredevil performances reinforced much of the same social hierarchies promoted by Sokol contemporaries at the same time that they defied man’s relationship to nature and machines. Finally, Aleksić chiseled body was – and remains – quite a sight to behold, but Aleksić’s sexuality was veiled by a self-conscious veneer of respectability; the strongman was no competition to the seductive female performers who shed more of their clothes on stage, toyed with sexual innuendos, and introduced big city transgressions to blushing Belgraders. Like the urban audiences of other smaller European and North American cities, Belgrade spectators eagerly looked upon performers who embodied, or at least performed the embodiment of, metropolitan entertainment. This section is narrated through the lens of one performer who was frequently revered as the epitome of big city fun: Josephine Baker. I rely on Baker as a case study to examine metropolitan physical culture in the context of interwar Belgrade, its interpretations by audiences and critics, and its accommodations relative to the notions of the national body. Alongside Baker, I also briefly consider spectator sport. I argue that metropolitan physical culture was defined by its commodification of the body as an object of consumption. Big city entertainment was provocative to conservatives and elites for the same
reasons it was appealing to spectators – because it stirred cultural, class, and gender hierarchies in Belgrade under the semi-sanctioned veil of foreignness.

Josephine Baker’s earliest performances epitomized the interwar metropolis, a milieu in which she came of age as an entertainer. The American-born French performer arrived in Paris in 1925 after a brief vaudeville career in New York, when she was recruited to join the all-black cast of the *Revue Nègres*. Producer Caroline Dudley hired Baker as the star of the *danse sauvage* skit where the performer played an exaggerated, mechanical caricature boasting bent knees, rolling eyes, and puckered lips in the first part of the show. However, this was coupled with another scene that transformed Baker into an animal-like character that literally came to be hunted by another actor. The shifting of the set from urban skyscrapers into a jungle along with music that was initially soothing but then became erratic and chaotic reinforced the metamorphosis of Baker’s body. Dance scholar Felicia McCarren suggests that these skits “imitate[ed] the frenzy of the assembly line; mimicking the chorus-line engine; dancing the human motor that made these industry and entertainment teams run,” and interprets that as parodies of modern times. But the *danse sauvage* was also deeply modern, at once a concession to the untamed city as it was a nod to the avant-garde obsession with primitivism. In both cases Baker’s body served as the object of commodification – as a machine and an animal – to be consumed by the gaze of the audience.

The sexualization of the female body reduced the performer to an animal, a set of isolated body parts, and an object of consumption. In the preface of Baker’s autobiography, Maurice Sauvage likened her to a snake and a giraffe, a “pre-modern animal,” and then described her body piece by piece: “long legs, … unbelievable elastic body, bright eyes, her whole body has

something – spiritual.”33 A newspaper article published following Baker’s debut in Yugoslavia enacted the same physical objectification: “Josephine showed her dark body, long and slender legs, thin and shapely hands, and hips and thighs, and many other things. And her unbelievable head, pretty, a head like a man can only dream – in a pleasant dream, of course.”34 As one interwar observer declared, the attraction to Baker was explicable to men on account of “her sex and animal instinct.”35 In her memoir, Baker also spoke of the animalistic urges of the audience who “swallow you with their eyes,” especially “after midnight, [when] everyone becomes wild.”36 Other foreign female entertainers were similarly objectified as commodities to be consumed by the rabid gaze of the spectators. One article described a local variety stage where the men in the audience felt entitled to “eat up and swallow up the little bodies” of the performers during the shows.37 The visibility of foreign women on stage transformed them into objects of consumption for the spectator gaze.

Race exerted a heavy influence on the commodification of Baker’s body. As an African-American performer, she symbolized the colonial subject to French audiences. In turn, contemporary imperial power relations warranted the projection of sexual fantasies on her body because her “primitivism” was thought to free her of restrictive European sexual mores. As scholar of dance Ramsay Burt suggests, the presentation of Baker amounted to an image of the safe “other” in Paris. “For those Parisians (and Berliners, and audiences in other major capital cities) who went to Baker’s performances and witnessed her night club acts,” Burt writes, “part of the enjoyment of dancing to jazz music at the time was a temporary ritualized blurring of the

33 Đozefine Beker, Memoari Đozefine Beker, ed., Marsel Sovaž (Beograd: Narodna štamparija, 1929), 47, 7-9, 11.
36 Beker, Memoari, 63.
difference between the self and ‘other’ through losing themselves in the strong, ‘primitive’ rhythms of jazz music.”

But while this was the case in avant-garde circles predisposed to Afrophilia, another set of French audiences was becoming increasingly bothered by Baker’s ambiguous cultural presence. Historian Jennifer Boittini argues that the French public opinion gradually “whitened” Baker’s image, so that she could be accepted into the fold as “French.”

And, indeed, by the Baker’s body eventually came to be imagined as one of the ideals of the slender, modern Parisian in the 1930s rather than the racialized other. Art historian Simona Čupić argues that Baker arrived in the Yugoslav capital as a “finished product” and that the local spectators inherited both the colonial gaze and the Afrophilia of their French contemporaries.

However, Belgraders were also complicit in reproducing European racial narratives when it came to Baker as well as other entertainers. Alongside the sexualization of women’s bodies, racialization, too, played an important part in producing the metropolitan physical culture in interwar Belgrade.

Like the entrepreneurial self-presentation of Dragoljub Aleksić, Baker’s image was deliberately shaped by promotional material such as publications, ads, and posters in the 1920s. The journalist Maurice Sauvage ghostwrote her 1927 autobiography that was widely translated (including into Serbo-Croatian), Paul Colin sketched images presenting the performer’s disposition as comic and erotic, and Baker’s manager Pépito Abratino ensured that the print media had an ample selection of the entertainer’s extravagant semi-nude photographs. Baker also became the spokesperson for a line of hair products called Bakerfix that promised to reproduce the slickness of the performer’s own bubikopf. Moreover, promotional posters reiterated the

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38 Burt, Alien Bodies, 63.
39 Jennifer Anne Boittini, Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 16.
40 Čupić, Gradska modernizam, 36-42.
discourse of metropolitan physical culture by centering her semi-nude body in abstract poses that evoked the contemporary representations of urban chaos: she is elongated and almost asexual, her arms and legs form jagged forms, and her image hovers disassociated from the surroundings.

By the time Josephine Baker arrived in Belgrade in April of 1929, her famous “banana dance” was the talk of the town; the city’s public had already read her memoirs as serialized feuilletons in the daily Novosti in 1928, and the entire city appeared to be dancing the Charleston, a style she is said to have popularized in Europe. Although Baker’s performance in the Yugoslav capital prompted some criticism, her reception was overwhelmingly positive. In Politika, an author conceded that Baker’s dancing “has conquered the world,” her bubikopf cut was cited as an iconic inspiration to local women, and Žena i svet offered up the “Josephine Baker” among its ideas for carnival costumes. Baker stirred the urban imagination of Belgraders because her performances promised to transport the fun and pleasure of the metropolis to the local variety stage. For wealthier Belgraders, the variety theater was a sanctioned urban venue for the practice of entertainment. But Baker was just as attractive to everyday residents, described as crowds of “young women, young men, and older residents,” who chased Baker through the streets of Belgrade in hopes of glimpsing, touching, or perhaps even meeting the star as she visited local parks, shops, and clubs. In a frenzy, Belgraders mirrored her spontaneity and laughter at each step; with Josephine Baker, who “showed no signs of exhaustion,” they had fun.

Baker was a compelling incarnation of metropolitan physical culture in Belgrade. Most importantly, like the legions of variety stage singers and dancers that passed through Yugoslavia,
she was foreign. More than just lending a degree of allure, foreign female performers were not upheld to the strict patriarchal hierarchies dictating gender roles nor were they subjected to Yugoslav laws regulating women’s labor. At the same time, Baker’s foreignness sanctioned the practice of big city decadence, sexuality, and fun – without subverting the social mores of the attending audiences. Another factor that made Baker’s shows so intriguing was their affront to bourgeois notions of culture: the sound of jazz and the performance of the Charleston flew in the face of the ordered façade of the waltz.\textsuperscript{46} What is more, the popular embrace of her performances challenged the propriety of the arts in the city. One newspaper reported that Baker continued to perform long after her show ended; she descended among the audience, humored them with autographs, and continued the party in the basement club Ruski Jar.\textsuperscript{47} “By creating a positive image of personal enjoyment,” Burt writes, “Baker in effect supported the modernist myth of social, scientific, and technological progress.”\textsuperscript{48} However, by the same stroke, her incarnation of metropolitan physical culture bristled Belgrade’s conservatives, elites, and reformers who saw their task as safeguarding social and cultural hierarchies in the city.

While foreign female performers like Baker presented one metropolitan ideal in interwar Belgrade, athletes embodied another. Sport was a popular leisure activity among bourgeois and petit bourgeois residents who took part in sports such as swimming, bicycling, skiing as amateur athletes. Indeed, interwar Belgrade was abuzz with clubs and associations, ranging from student organizations like the Belgrade University Sports Club (\textit{Beogradski univerzitetski sportski klub}...
or BUSK) to elite ones like the Auto-Club. Not uncommonly, membership constituted as much a platform for amateur athletics as it did for a different type of leisure: BUSK members, for instance, assembled into a jazz band called (Džoli-bojz) and the Auto-Club frequently hosted parties with live music.

But, it was spectator sport that truly enthralled Belgraders. Scholars agree that spectator sports like football games, horse races, or boxing matches constituted entertainment in interwar Europe as well as a type of physical culture that differed little from Baker’s performing body. Richard Mandell defines sport as a “competitive activity of the whole human body according to sets of rules for purposes ostensibly or symbolically set apart from the serious, essential aspects of life.” Sports historian Allen Guttmann suggests it constitutes “‘playful’ physical contests, that is, as non-utilitarian contests which include an important measure of physical as well as intellectual skill.” That is to say that spectator sport was distinctly set apart from national physical culture: it was not sponsored by the state, it did not constitute a rational exertion of physical energy, and it was not promised on health or discipline. As Robert Edelman shows, spectator sports were considered by the state, in this case the early twentieth century Soviet Union, as “a set of irrational concerns divorced from the world of politics” alongside jazz, cinema, and music halls. Although sport has certainly been mobilized as a tool of the state, in interwar Belgrade it served to entertainment much more frequently than it furthered national agendas.

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49 Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti, 181-182.
52 Guttmann, From Ritual to Record, 7.
53 Edelman, Serious Fun, 4.
54 For example, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that sport is “one of the most significant of the new social practices” directed toward nation-building in an age of mass politics” (Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in The Invention of Tradition, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 306.)
Like other interwar entertainment, spectator sports were a form of metropolitan physical culture that commodified the bodies of performing athletes. Athletes were gazed upon as objects to be consumed. Richard Maltby argues that spectator sport evolved into an industry after the First World War, one that produced its own rules and actors. \(^5\) Eric Weitz describes one instance of this production, namely how the boxer became a celebrity in Weimar Germany. \(^5\) In Belgrade, foreign athletes frequently appeared as youthful foreign men, such as the French tennis player Henri Cochet whose visit to Belgrade in the late 1920s was described as an urban sensation akin to that of Josephine Baker. \(^5\) The city itself was an indispensible site for the consumption of sport. The industrializing urban fabric facilitated the venues where games were played; according to Steven Riess “the evolution of the city, more than any other single factor, influences the development of organized sport and recreation athletic.”\(^5\) Interwar Belgrade became such a stage for spectator sports. Stadiums and tracks popped up around the city’s outskirts, just as its urban beaches became observation docks for water competitions in the Danube and Sava Rivers. City streets were also transformed into makeshift tracks, while the coverage in print and radio brought dramatic narratives of athletic feats to readers across the state. Edelman qualifies the other component that made the city a unique place for the development of spectator sport: fans. “To qualify as a spectator sport in the modern world,” Edelman suggests, “a game must regularly attract significant numbers of ticket-buying fans to enclosed arenas, and large numbers of viewers to their television sets.”\(^5\) Indeed, it was the urban spectators themselves – both devoted fans and curious onlookers – that propelled metropolitan physical culture to popularity in interwar Belgrade. The wealth of coverage in the presses – from the genre-specific weekly Sport

\(^5\) Maltby, Passing Parade, 52-54.
\(^5\) Čupić, Gradijanski modernizam, 82.
\(^5\) Riess, City Games, 1.
\(^5\) Edelman, Serious Fun, viii.
to reporting in almost all other publications that appeared side-by-side with current events –
testifies its high consumption rate in the city.

At the same time spectator sports bristled the social hierarchies of interwar Belgrade. First, cultural elites described games as the “psychosis of sport” and the “manifestation of sport
cheer and emotions by the observed game.” Like most entertainment, it was deemed a
distraction from the higher pursuits of enlightened arts. For national conservatives, spectator
sports were considered too “recessive, spontaneous, and playful,” to the point that they
sidetracked the sober practice of state citizenship. Interwar Belgraders, on the other hand,
would have been most conscious of the implicit democratization of sports. As numerous scholars
have shown, the practice of spectatorship blurred class lines. Games were affordable, they
required little or no knowledge (or shared language) in order to partake in the field drama, and
their chief aim was to engage viewers in magnificent physical feats. Perhaps most importantly,
spectator sports served as another bridge connecting Belgrade to big European cities, whether a
global drive to top a record, the standardization of game regulations, or international encounters
on the field. Indeed, by the mid-1930s, manifestations like the Olympics and the World Cup
had transformed into what Barbara Keys describes as “mass entertainment on a global scale,”
one in which Yugoslav teams also participated. Dimitrije M. Knežev remembered that residents
shared a sense of pride when local athletes played abroad, while newspapers doted on foreign
tones when they visited the capital. The recent blockbuster *Montevideo: Taste of a Dream*
(*Montevideo, Bog te video!*, 2010) directed by Dragan Bjelogrlić, reproduced the excitement of a

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64 Keys, *Globalizing Sport*, 3.
Yugoslav soccer team’s journey to the World Cup in Uruguay in the 1930s. Although the film was prone to the same nostalgia as *Tears for Sale*, it singles out sport as a critical component of everyday entertainment that captured the imagination of interwar Belgraders.

Not unlike foreign entertainers and spectator sports, performances of Dragoljub Aleksić were fundamentally urban: his high wires often hung between Belgrade’s highest buildings in the central neighborhood Zeleni venac, he mobilized the street near the National Theater as the place to display feats of strength over automobile engines, and his flying performances were inherently accessible to any urban resident curious enough to crane their neck toward the sky. As a street performer, and even when he performed in stadiums or theaters, Aleksić was notorious for never charging an entry fee. But he also took more than a few cues from metropolitan physical culture. First of all, Aleksić was attuned to the over-stimulation of city spectators: he designed his stunts to be consumed in a matter of minutes, he catered to the fascination with record-breaking feats, and his exposed body lobbied to attract the gaze of the public. In a moment of self-promotion in *Innocence Unprotected*, the strongman performed his heroic stunt “The Pole of Death,” wherein he released himself and another performer from a cage suspended above the city streets only seconds before an explosion. The young actress playing the strongman’s fictional girlfriend swooned in reply: “what he accomplishes on The Pole is a veritable world record. He is a man with a gentle soul, a gigantic strength, and nerves of steel.” Although I have not been able to find evidence tabulating Aleksić’s feats relative to contemporary world records, these types of performances – from displays of strength and endurance, to dance marathons and races – were prevalent trends in interwar popular culture across the world.66 Similarly, Aleksić frequently

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66 Discussing dance marathons in 1920s America, and the obsession with world records in general, Carol Martin suggests that popular culture collapsed the clear distinction between real life and performance, and led to the interwar obsession with celebrity, notoriety, and endurance. Martin argues that “it was the coupling of ‘authentic’
employed technologies that defied natural order and brought his body into contest with machines. When *Innocence Unprotected* premiered, he also achieved the crowning glory of any entertainment entrepreneur: his own body became a cheaply, quickly, and widely accessible commodity.

While it may have been pleasurable to watch the strongman defy gravity, challenge death, and flex his muscles, Aleksić, however, could not match the displays of metropolitan physical culture – certainly not to the standard measured by Josephine Baker and spectator sports. Indeed, his efforts to appease national ideas positioned him too far outside this realm. The strongman’s performances were too educational, too rational, and too patriotic to qualify as big city entertainment. But a central appeal of metropolitan physical culture was its implicit association with trends popular in large European and American cities. Many performers who toured in Belgrade, appeared on its silver screen, or posed in photographs published in local presses were marketed as personifications of Berlin, London, Paris, or New York, regardless of the accuracy of these assertions. Josephine Baker was a Parisian in the eyes of Belgraders, long before Parisians saw her through the same lens. In turn, as a Parisian performing in the Yugoslav capital, she asserted Belgrade’s place on the European urban network. Spectator sports played a similar role in bringing European and American games to interwar Yugoslavia, whether foreign athletes visited the capital or domestic ones took the field. Aleksić could not call upon such urban association, not necessarily because he was not foreign himself, but rather because his performances in no way evoked any other big city other than Belgrade. It was not uncommon for domestic interwar performers to capitalize on training or experience gained abroad as testament with the ‘staged’ that made marathons so popular.” See: Carol Martin, *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), xxi.
to their metropolitan dispositions. However, as I show in the next section, they were no more successful in their appeals to the state and the Belgrade public than the strongman.

*The Irreconcilable Being of Yugoslav Performers*

Domestic performers like Dragoljub Aleksić struggled to attract the attention of the Belgrade public just as they labored to secure the patronage of the state. Despite the fact that domestic entertainers were only required to renew their state-issued work permits annually in the interest of economic protectionism, their permit requests were denied more often, their performances were frequently dismissed as “unsuitable,” and their bodies prominently stood as contradictions to the ideals of national culture. As Yugoslavs, they were also more often criticized for transgressing hierarchies of class, gender, and culture in their performances – the very same hierarchies their foreign contemporaries blatantly undermined. More importantly, domestic entertainers faced an increasingly blasé urban public preoccupied with the fantasy of big city spectacle. Although they appealed to the contemporary imagination with magic, novelty, and the promise of physical titillation, they never achieved the degree of fame among Belgraders as the likes of Josephine Baker and spectator sports. In this section, I first compare the experience of the strongman Aleksić to several other domestic entertainers who appeared in the archives and the presses: the illusionist Sreten Obradović, the carnival magician Miloš Radojković, and the dance instructor Petar R. Stojić. I consider how the state, society, and the Belgrade audience “read” the bodies of these domestic performers as conflicting narratives of the national and metropolitan physical culture. I ultimately show that the strongman Aleksić and his contemporaries could not reconcile these competing physical ideas in Belgrade’s interwar society – well until the period at hand had become history.
Little is certain in the biography of illusionist Sreten Obradović, known by his performing name Reta or Retta, but he left an animated first-person record of self-promotion, complaints, and extravagant demands that help us contextualize the challenges domestic performers faced during the interwar years. In a letter to the Minister of Education, for example, he addressed the falling interest of the local spectators: he confessed that he had been pushed to innovate his comedy performances after finding the audiences indifferent to the tired routines of his colleagues.\textsuperscript{67} Many of his other complaints were directed at foreign performers in Yugoslavia. As we will see, Obradović’s interwar career was devoted to carving out a niche for himself as a domestic entertainer, and casting his body as a “blank slate” that teetered between the expectations of national and metropolitan physical cultures.

Indeed, Obradović’s body was his prized tool: he transformed from one role into another with each skit, comparing himself to the Italian protean performer Leopold Fregoli.\textsuperscript{68} All the while, Obradović’s own physicality remained conspicuously obscured. In two consecutive 1919 performances on the variety stage Kasina, Reta performed as a magician, an illusionist, psychic, and a ventriloquist. Moreover, he was especially fond of “mysteries,” “enchantments,” and “secrets” that were frequently tinted with orientalism.\textsuperscript{69} In a self-promotional poster from 1928, Obradović boasted a collection of 500 costumes – “a rich wardrobe, lavish props and decorations” that travelled with him despite the heavy costs of transport – and a repertoire of

\textsuperscript{67} AJ, MP, f. 411. 
\textsuperscript{68} Leopold Fregoli (1867-1936) began performing as an amateur entertainer across Europe in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He was known for his ability to perform impersonations and to quickly change between male and female roles. During the peak of his career at the turn of the century, he was celebrated for impersonations of Verdi, Wagner, Paderewski, and Rossini. By some accounts, audiences were flabbergasted by his shows and uncommonly demanded proof that there was not more than one performers. Royalty and aristocrats patronized Fregoli, all the while his music hall performances were consistently packed. Followers of the Fregoli style, like Sreten Obradović, attempted to embody the performer and often developed their own style by mixing magic, acting, costumes, and shadow play. Interestingly, a rare medical condition, a form of delusion misidentification syndrome, associated with brain lesions and manifested through delusional beliefs that the individual is persecuted by “disguised” personas, was named “Fregoli delusions” or “delusion of doubles” by a team of physicians in 1927. 
\textsuperscript{69} AJ, MP, f. 650.
seven performing voices. Reta’s metamorphosing role was promised to be so fascinating that he offered a disclaimer on advertising posters: “It’s not a film! It’s not a novel!” Other ads offered a “sensational, original and perfectly new program – no single skit of the show will be repeated under any circumstances.” Writing to the Minister, Obradović described his creative contributions in the early 1920s as “breakthroughs in occult and modern illusion” that he claimed had impressed even the most critical audiences in the Yugoslav capital, including the royal court. His real feat, however, was mastering a state of constant reinvention that appealed to the audience’s shortening attention span. Reta could embody anyone and no one at the same time.

But Sreten Obradović did not have any illusions about his ambivalent place between metropolitan and national physical culture; a bountiful record of his correspondence with the state allows us to understand how the performer exploited both of these categories in an effort to barter for legitimacy as an entertainer. While the strongman appeared unaware of international competitors, Obradović struggled to distinguish himself as an urban performer worthy of metropolitan acclaim and frequently compared himself with cultural workers from abroad who were, in fact, attracting larger urban audiences. The illusionist recognized the ensuing globalization of entertainment – himself, he professed to having met success on numerous tours across the world – but vowed to present his most spectacular shows for the domestic audiences.

While Aleksić was riding a bicycle on a high wire down the street from Hotel Moskva, Obradović claimed that “as a result of my 25 years of dedicated and honest creative work, I am

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70 AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 10-57.
71 AJ, MP, f. 650, j. 9-16.
72 A notable exception appeared in Unprotected Innocence. In an early scene, as Nada is rebuffing Petrović, her stepmother denounces her for hiding a stash of photographs of the strongman Aleksić. Nada subsequently reveals that she is in love with Aleksić and scuffs at Petrović’s patronizing comments about the strongman. She declares: “Aleksić leads his life honestly despite the most difficult of circumstances. We can be proud of all his work. It is only unfortunate that our people insult everything that is our own.” This statement, directed at Petrović as the representation of the Belgrade bourgeoisie, can be read as a criticism of the urban residents’ preference for foreign popular culture rather than domestic performers.
the creator of an original, particular, and the most attractive travelling performance that doesn’t exist today in either France or Italy.” But urban audiences were not necessarily interested in originality when it came to entertainment; they looked to big city bodies to be legible as personifications of Paris, London, or Berlin. While Reta was confidant enough in the transformative power of his “blank slate” body to promise urban pleasures, fleeting audience attendance and sporadic coverage in the popular presses attests that he was not considered at the caliber of metropolitan physical culture.

In rallying for his repute as a national performer, Obradović claimed his skills were honed thanks to a strong will, dedication, and abstinence from “tobacco, alcohol, and all pleasures of society.” Not unlike the strongman Aleksić, the illusionist aligned himself with the physical discipline of the Sokols, claimed to practice idyllic matrimony, and promised to serve as a positive role model for young spectators. Like Aleksić, the illusionist occasionally staged charity performances in the name of national causes, such as, for example, the 1927 gala in the interest of the families of Serbian actors who had fallen in the war. In the advertisement for the performance, Obradović positioned himself as an altruistic colleague of “legitimate” cultural workers. He was eventually engaged as a mouthpiece for the Association of Performers, where he fought passionately against the heavy state taxation of entertainment and the competition from foreign performers. In a 1932 letter to the Minister, the illusionist complained that “the rudest charlatan and mystifier [the Czech performer Fred] Marion had succeeded in seducing the whole of the Belgrade public with his vulgar tricks, including some journalists and physicians.”

Obradović was unforgiving toward Marion, but he was also cunning in his self-presentation as a concerned citizen rallying for cultural protectionism: he took the liberty of speaking for all

74 AJ, MP, f. 411.
75 AJ, MP, f. 411.
domestic performers, their difficult economic circumstances, and their innumerable sacrifices “to create work of a higher caliber.” Unfortunately, the sheer quantity of the illusionists’ appeals to the state indicate that his efforts to receive recognition as a national performer were in vain; over the course of the interwar years, Obradović hardly received state approval to carry the title performer-artist (*artist-umjetnik*).

The carnival magician Miloš Radojković, on the other hand, showed few attempts to mobilize physical ideals to his advantage; unlike Aleksić and Obradović, he did not endeavor to appeal to the national or metropolitan physical culture. State records show that Radojković applied for work permits in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but his performing career stretched from the turn-of-the-century; he was primarily known to stage shows at fairs, carnivals, and streets to “the general merriment of Belgrade children.” But, unlike the strongman and the illusionist who produced their own promotional material, representations of the magician were largely left to journalists and observers. Milan Djoković, an interwar resident, remembered that Radojković’s tent, among others on the grounds of Lower Kalemegdan in the 1920s, was comprised of “a world of dreams” for younger visitors. Djoković described the performer as “robust, stocky, and strong; his biceps were tattooed and, as it was known that he was stronger than most Serbs… Miloš, however, hardly gloated about his strength.” Radojković’s performances were similarly tinted with a primal physicality in the press. A 1923 article in *Novi list* narrated that Radojković entertained the “plebeian masses” in Lower Kalemegdan with tired stunts such as swallowing swords, standing on his head, and reproducing the sounds of roosters, frogs, and donkeys. However, Aca Lazarević, a representative of the Associations of

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76 AJ, MP, f. 411.
Performers on Lower Kalemegdan (*Udruženje artista sa Malog Kalamegdana*) responded to this negative presentation of his colleague in a letter to *Novosti*, where he argued that Radojković’s show was far less primitive, and included magic, impersonation of men and women, imitations of grimaces, telepathy, and his trademark “stomach speech.”

The magician showed only intermitted evidence of his own accommodation of the national ideal, in part because his body was less flexible than that of Aleksić or Obradović. In a 1929 letter to the Minister of Education, the entertainer appealed to the sentiments of national protectionism and claimed that he was a proud war veteran. Radojković petitioned that his work with impersonation, “stomach speech,” and marionette shows should be classified as educational enough to be viewed by children, and thus unburdened of the performing tax, a request that the Minister curiously obliged. Some newspapers validated the magician as a patriotic gesture. A 1924 article in *Vreme*, for example, celebrated Radojković as “Serbia’s first famous impersonator.” In a discussion of Lower Kalemegdan, *Novosti* argued that domestic workers who staffed the fairground tents represented a more “authentic” local culture. Finally, Lazarević implied that the magician’s 25-year jubilee “One Hundred and Three Nights,” a name specifically chosen to echo the arts fundraiser “One Hundred and Two Nights” organized by Branislav Nušić for the Cvijeta Zuzorić Arts Pavilion, spoke to Radojković’s cultural contribution to the national heritage. Photographs of the magician tell a different story and reveal why he evaded the ranks of national physical culture. By the early 1930s, Radojković was well past middle age, balding, and wore ill-fitting tailcoats and trousers; he embodied the opposite of the national cult of youth, strength, and endurance. His body remained a stark

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81 AJ, MP, f. 2343.
reminder that the magician was aging – along with the mélange of tin cans, fading tablecloths, and a several dented furniture props that were used in his tricks.

These same photographs were also indication of why Radojković could not compete for the attention of the urban audiences mesmerized by the sights and sounds of metropolitan physical culture. Indeed, his performances were devoid of any trace of irrational pleasure, his body was unspectacular, and his costumes unimpressive. In fact, it would be difficult to describe Miloš Radojković as a desirable commodity in interwar entertainment. The magician’s shows were interesting only to the audience of boys and young adults like Milan Djoković, who hardly constituted a cross-section of urban residents. Where Obradović and Aleksić worked to appeal to the urban imagery of fantastic transformations and record-defying strength, Miloš Radojković did neither. Instead, and to no avail, the magician struggled to evoke Belgraders’ sense of national propriety and scarcely piqued their urban curiosity.

The dancer and dance instructor Petar R. Stojić (distinct from his competitor Petar Stajić) presents a third iteration of the domestic performer: a local arbiter of metropolitan physical culture. Petar Stojić was a household name in Belgrade between the two wars; he stirred the imagination of urban audiences more than Aleksić, Obradović, and Radojković because his dances directly evoked the big European city. Stojić kept the reading public current on recent
trends from Paris, New York, and London, petitioned in the interest of modern dance, and managed several dance schools in the city center. In 1925, *Ilustrovan list* proudly announced that “our own expert” Stojić was so well-versed to discuss the new “mash-up dances” that have evolved from the Foxtrot and that the paper had no need to syndicate articles from the foreign presses.\(^8^4\) The editors of *Comœdia* consulted Stojić on a similar topic and concluded that he inspired “Belgrade and our whole state [to] dance.”\(^8^5\) In the following year, Stojić’s dancing schools Akademija and Studio (both located in the same building as the variety stage Kasina) were described as “the epicenter of the dance craze;” the author speculated that “Stojić’s University” boasted an enrollment larger than the combined total of Belgrade’s six higher education institutions and praised the instructor as a veritable professor.\(^8^6\) The dancer’s own body was an incarnation of the big city, especially on occasions when he premiered new styles from abroad, such the “Tango of 1926.”\(^8^7\) As he danced the Tango, Shimmy, and Foxtrot in Belgrade, Stojić’s body moved to the irrational rhythm of modern music; this is, after all, why he was so popular among Belgrade’s urban audiences.

At the same time, the state was skeptical of modern dances and saw instructors like Stojić as a threat to the discipline of the national body. In fact, of the four domestic performers examined in this chapter, Stojić and fellow modern dance instructors had the largest files in the archives of the Ministry of Education that suggest their roles were most disputable in the eyes of the state. Of the four performers, Petar Stojić was also most similar to Josephine Baker. But unlike Baker and other foreign singers, dancers, and entertainers, Stojić was held to stricter standards of regulation as a domestic performer. At the same time, national conservatives – the

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85 “Koje moderne igre osvajaju u Beogradu?” *Comœdia*, 17 decembar 1923, 10.
86 Stojić’s role as an educator was further underlined by the fact that he was the author of textbook titled *The Basics of Folk and Modern Dance* (Brandim, “Naša žena u igri,” *Žena i svet*, 15 mart 1927, 10.).
same ones that claimed Josephine Baker’s productions tainted the holy memory of [the Battle of] Kosovo—argued that modern dancing was a glorification of foreign frivolities at the same time that it was an affront to the memory of those fallen in the war. Cultural elites decried that the Foxtrot distracted the public’s education in national dances like the kolo. And, reformers pointed to the loosening sexual mores of the dance floor. In each case, Stojić’s dancing body was seen as challenge to the patriarchal hierarchies of class, gender, and culture, all the more because he was a Yugoslav entertainer.

Dance teachers, like other Yugoslav performers, made attempts to express their commitment to patriotism and education. The dancer Rudolf Hinko Ungar, known as Rod Riffler, for example, was active in the campaign for a Yugoslav school of entertainment. In a letter to the Minister of Education in 1933, Ungar echoed Obradović in arguing that the absence of adequate domestic training was damaging to the state because Yugoslav performers were driven abroad for training while foreign dancers and singers monopolized the city’s variety stages. To that end, Stojić began to support the integration of folk dance, and particularly the kolo, into the repertoire of modern dance schools. In an interview in 1928, he attempted to convey to his urban audiences that the quick steps of the Foxtrot, Tango, and One-step should be paired with folk dance “in the interest of being contemporary.” In his support of the consolidation of modern and folk dance instruction, Stojić showed a keen sense of national accommodation that remained, however, inadequate to quality the dancer as an embodiment of national physical culture in the eyes of the state. On the eve of war, the Minister of Education was still concerned with the regulation of dance studios and subsequently issued an ordinance.

that endowed the City Authority with the power to impose regulation “over the work of dance teachers and owners of dance schools.”  

In spite of their tireless negotiation of the ideals of national and metropolitan physical culture, domestic performers – from dance teachers and magicians to strongmen and illusionists – failed to win legitimacy in the eyes of the state, just as audiences subordinated most Yugoslav entertainers to foreign ones. Relative to their participation in big city entertainment, Belgraders remained indifferent toward domestic performers; Yugoslav entertainers did not stir their imagination, at least not to the degree that Josephine Baker did. But Aleksić, Obradović, Radojković, and Stojić would not appear in archival records if they had played no part in the interwar city. Indeed, their performances were casually patronized in the interwar urban environment: audiences did attend their performances, newspapers did chronicle their feats, and the state and professional associations did engage with their demands. The entertainments of most domestic performers appealed to audiences not because they embodied the nation or the big city spectacle, but because they were inexpensive, held in public spaces such as parks, fairs, and church grounds, and easily accessible to residents regardless of age, gender, and class. In a sea of conflicting narratives about the body, domestic entertainers personified the same negotiation that Belgrade faced as the capital of the Yugoslav state and a growing European metropolis. The complexity of Yugoslav entertainers, much like the complexity Belgrade itself, points to unresolved demands of the nation and metropolitan Europe during the interwar years.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Dragoljub Aleksić

91 AJ, MP, f. 411.
In 2013, an English-language street newspaper *Belgrade Insight* proclaimed Dragoljub Aleksić as a “Belgrade legend” who “became famous between the two World Wars when he performed as an acrobat across Serbia and Europe.” Like *Tears for Sale*, the newspaper article is notable for the liberty it takes in re-evaluating the strongman’s legacy. As we have seen, Aleksić interwar fame was nothing close to a simple rise to celebrity. Moreover, little separated the strongman from the likes of Obradović, Radojković, Stojić, and a slew of other domestic interwar performers who have fallen through history’s cracks. How did Aleksić escape his worst fears of historic obscurity that has befallen most of his contemporaries? More importantly, why has his legacy been reclaimed as a part of Serbian cultural history after the Yugoslav wars?

The critical step toward the strongman’s rehabilitation was the rediscovery of *Innocence Unprotected* by the avant-garde filmmaker Dušan Makavejev (1932- ) who salvaged the remaining footage into a 1968 part-documentary, part-collage with the same title. The film was widely distributed and critically acclaimed, and it put into motion a process by which the strongman toured Europe as a celebrity for the first time, legitimized his long-unrealized aspiration to be a national hero, and – most importantly – was reimagined as an iconic specimen of interwar Belgrade. One of Makavejev’s central interventions was to recast the original film – which he believed to be a form of entertainment – as a contribution to Yugoslav national culture.

In a recent interview, the director stressed that Aleksić represented “a part of real boulevard culture” and that his legacy should be considered a veritable component of Yugoslav culture. This was a risky move in the socialist period when the years before the Second World War were

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93 German occupiers censored *Innocence Unprotected* immediately after its premiere, moving Aleksić to bury all the remaining footage in two provincial stashes. Soon after the war, Aleksić was accused (but later cleared) of wartime collaboration because the feat of producing a film – the first talkie, nonetheless – had seemed inconceivable under the circumstances.
94 Rakazić, “Svakidašnja umetnost akrobacije.”
politically, socially, and culturally discredited. Makavejev intercepted scenes from the 1942 version with interviews with the aging acrobat and the remaining cast members that shed light on the scripting, filming, and production of the film. He reinforced the original heroic narrative – one in which Aleksić saves his young girlfriend from the clutches of the bourgeois predator Petrović – to present the strongman as an personification of a “unique national hero” who persevered during the occupation. Moreover, the collage juxtaposed the aggression of Petrović with the similarly hostile political atmosphere of the occupation, war, and grassroots fascism of general Milan Nedić (1877-1946).

The 1968 film also allowed Aleksić to once again bask in his body; like the posing and flexing to the tune of a folk-inspired song decrying his strength in the original, Makavejev’s version featured ample celebration of strength and endurance. Aleksić spoke about his daily exercise regiment, demonstrated his physical feats (the same ones he performed in the interwar period), and stood semi-nude atop a platform to flex his muscles for the camera once more. A folk-inspired song again sang of his strength, bravery, and commitment to “the fatherland.” Although Makavejev’s film was also critical of the nationalization of folk culture, he allowed Aleksić to voice his overwhelming desire to be canonized as a part of Yugoslav history. On several occasions, the strongman finally displayed the Yugoslav flag during his stunts, discussed his contributions to charity, and spoke triumphantly about the original film’s significance.

Most importantly, Makavejev framed Innocence Unprotected as a representation of Yugoslav urban culture and, specifically, as the incarnation of the interwar capital. He described

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95 As Makavejev speculates, the new Yugoslav regime shuddered at the thought of acknowledging an interwar cultural success such as the production of the first sound film might have been. Considering the filmmaker’s other work, it is perhaps not surprising that Makavejev was also censored, banned, and exiled from socialist Yugoslavia in the aftermath of his 1971 film W. R.: Mysteries of the Organism (W.R. – Misterije organizma).

the original film as “the art of a metropolitan half-world . . . on the margins of an industrial culture and morality, somewhere between cafés and circus entertainment, cheap literature and melodramatic trash.” In a 1969 interview, the director suggested that the film was saturated with Belgrade characters, settings, and experiences so much that it “absolutely capture[d] urban life.” Four decades later, scholar Dijana Metlić agrees with this assertion and suggests that “Makavejev interpret[ed] Aleksić’s work as a form of boulevard culture, especially highlighting its importance as the historical inheritance of the capital.” Bodybuilding and health had come into vogue by the postwar period, and while the aging Aleksić performed the same stunts and met some of the same public ridicule, few now contested that he had been the “king of Belgrade” in the interwar years. And, indeed, as the Belgrade Insight article suggests, the strongman was a “Belgrade legend” – although, interestingly, this claim was not made for the case of the Sokol Jamboree or Josephine Baker’s 1929 visit to the capital (but could have been made for Obradović, Radojković, and Stojić).

Makavejev’s 1968 film thus initiated the retroactive merging of the national and metropolitan physical culture at a moment when a Yugoslav performer was elevated to personify the interwar legacy of both the state and its capital. But Innocence Unprotected was only the beginning of Aleksić’s re-imagination. Aleksić’s flexing upper body appeared in Pedja Milosavljević’s (1908-1989) collage The Tower of Eternity (Toranj večnosti) that same year, alongside the disembodied images of Tito, Pavle Kradjordjević, and an audience of masses; the artist deemed the strongman as enduring as political leaders and immortalized in local memory. Several decades later, the strongman’s claims of bravery, monogamy, and morality were uncontested in in Tears for Sale, where he personified the ideal interwar Serbian man. Aleksić

97 Greenspun, “Movie Review.”
98 Rakazić, “Svakidašnja umetnost akrobacije.”
was again reclaimed when the Toronto-based graphic artist Nina Bunjevac lead an illustration workshop with the cartoonist Aleksandar Zograf at the Grrr Festival at the Elektrika Gallery in Pančevo in 2009 based on the original Makavejev script. In the ensuing comic book, Aleksić was unsurprisingly presented as an interwar hero. And, at the time of writing, it is possible to purchase souvenir magnets with the strongman’s likeness at the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade. Although the strongman hardly garnered this sort of fanfare during the interwar years – as we have seen, he constantly negotiated his work permits with the state and tirelessly worked to promote himself – his story has been recast as that of an iconic interwar Belgrader.

Interwar audiences who had supported the national ideals of the disciplined, patriotic, and educational physical culture as well as those who had preferred its metropolitan counterpart for its irrationality, disorder, and pleasure might not have predicted the strongman’s historic perseverance. At the time, Dragoljub Aleksić and other domestic performers in interwar Belgrade struggled to negotiate these competing physical cultures but fulfilled neither entirely. Like Belgrade’s own attempts to fill the role of both a unified state’s capital and a major European center, the discrete negotiations of Yugoslav entertainers in interwar society have only garnered attention in history.
Conclusion

In interwar travelogues, many foreign visitors described their first impressions of Belgrade’s urban signifiers with a mixture of surprise and disdain. Rebecca West wrote that:

modern Belgrade has stripped that promontory [of a sacred Balkan village] with streets that have been built elsewhere much better… [The] hotel may have longed to slip off its robust character and emulate the Savoy and the Crillon and the Plaza; but its attempt was not well under way as yet… in none of those great cities have I seen hotel doors slowly swinging open to admit, unhurried and at ease, a peasant holding a black lamb in his arms. He took up his place beside the newsstand where they sold Pravda and Politika, the Continental Daily Mail, Paris Soir, the New York Herald Tribune… His suit was in the Western fashion, but he wore also a sheepskin jacket, a round black cap, and leather sandals with upturned toes…¹

This scene contradicted West’s idea that the capital of Yugoslavia would – or should – evoke its surrounding countryside. While the peasant and the lamb confirmed her expectations, she found everything else – the paved streets, hotels, international presses, and the peasant’s western attire – difficult to reconcile. In her admittedly romanticized gaze onto Southeastern Europe, West did not account for the possibility that Belgrade would resemble London, Paris, or New York more closely than the village life nestled in the nearby hills and valleys.² In turn, she looked upon the city with a sense of disdain; for West, Belgrade was insufficiently “Yugoslav” or “Serbian” as it was insufficiently “European.”

¹ West, Black Lamb and Gray Falcon, 482-483.
² West practically ignores the capital relative to the attention she bestows on the countryside, peasant culture, and folk customs. This is a particularity of her interests and underlined political agendas that rallied for the unified Yugoslavia. As Larry Wolff remarked, “the idea of Eastern Europe as the continent's backward half was invented in Western Europe, to illuminate by contrast the greater glory of “Western” civilization. Rebecca West was a journalist on the trail of that dishonest, self-serving appropriation of Eastern Europe, seeking to invert a tradition of condescension and to redefine the mapping of civilization in Europe.” In other words, West saw the region’s countryside as its greatest asset on the path toward European inclusion, unlike the urban areas she found to be unmemorable. See: Larry Wolff, “Rebecca West: This Time, Let’s Listen,” The New York Times, February 10, 1991.
But Rebecca West was not alone in the confusion about what exactly constituted Yugoslav and Serbian culture, particularly in an urban context. Another visitor from abroad, Lena Yovitchitch, also observed contradictions on Belgrade’s streets, but interpreted this as an indication that the city had revived from a postwar “carcass” and into a European capital. She measured Belgrade’s European membership by the fact that “the shops are full of up-to-date goods, and trade seems fairly flourishing” and only noted that the ethnic diversity of street vendors was “a little incongruous in this cosmopolitan town.”\(^3\) Much like Serbian and Yugoslav, the notions of Europe were just as ambiguous during the interwar years. Indeed, the continent had been entirely restructured after the Great War, leaving its denizens with a sense of unsettled identity. Literary scholar Zoran Milutanović suggests that “for all Europeans, Europe was somewhere or someone else” in the interwar period and that that “Europe” was imagined by Serbian cultural elites a place less often that a “signifier [of] a sum of ideas, images, and values.”\(^4\) On the other hand, Serbia had given way to the idea of Yugoslavia, a unified state the remained conceptually ill defined and hotly contested throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Elites incessantly debated the political grounds of unification, while cultural Yugoslavism never had a lack of critics.

What made the case of Belgrade inherently more complicated was that, as the capital, it should have been the epitome of both Yugoslav and European urban culture. Few interwar actors, however, saw these two categories as unproblematic or even mutually inclusive. For state representatives and national conservatives, the capital stood as a platform for the reaffirmation of

\(^3\) Yovitchitch, *Pages from Here and There*, 74-75.
\(^4\) Milutanović, *Getting Over Europe*, 17, 261.
state legitimacy such as monuments and parades.\(^5\) At the same time, Belgrade was also burdened by its legacy as the seat of the Serbian nation, an inheritance that undermined its primacy all the more in the eyes of elites from urban contenders like Zagreb with equally founded aspirations to be the state’s first city.\(^6\) Yet, both Serbian and Yugoslav conservatives unanimously decried Belgrade’s Europeanization as damaging to national culture, just as their prewar counterparts had done. For example, Miloš Ćosić, a member of congress in the Kingdom of Serbia, succinctly voiced an opinion that had been shared by many national conservatives when he declared that “I would not like it if Belgrade stood as the representation of Serbian culture. Anyone who has come to Serbia to encounter its culture will not find it in Belgrade. In Belgrade one can only find foreign culture because Belgrade readily accepts foreign culture.”\(^7\) Unlike national conservatives who imagined Europeanization and modernization as a conflated evil, Belgrade’s cultural elites looked more kindly on the city’s strengthening connections to Europe as an assertion of equal footing with the continent’s upper classes. At the same time, they supported the national project both as an extension of their own embourgeoisement as well as a practical approach to securing financial state-patronage for the arts. What bothered Belgrade’s elites about the strengthening links with Europe, however, was the diversity of popular culture that arrived alongside the arts – not because it was seen as a challenge to Yugoslav culture but because it subverted their salience in dictating a cultural hegemony in the city.

\(^5\) As Gabor Gyani writes, “in general, the capital is elevated above other cities in order for her to symbolize the political, economic and intellectual values of the state. It is in the capital or via the capital that the sublime ideal of the nation-state takes shape” (Gyani, *Identity and the Urban Experience*, 5.).

\(^6\) In the words of one scholar, Zagreb was Belgrade’s sound contender, “an aspiring national capital on the periphery of a hegemonic state” (Sarah A. Kent, “Zagreb,” in *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe*, eds. Emily Gunzburger Markaš and Tanja Damjanović Conley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 208.).

The negotiation of national and European signifiers was not unique to interwar Belgrade. As scholars in a recent edited volume show, each city that emerged as the capital of an independent state on the territory of the former Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires faced similar challenges.\(^8\) While specifics varied from city to city, almost every case encompassed what Eric Hobsbawm described as a “dual revolution:” the political struggle for national control alongside the development of industrial capitalism. Nathan Wood imagines these two processes as overlapping myths of modernity – the myth of the nation and the myth of Europe.\(^9\) While national and cultural elites in capitals across Central and Southeastern Europe attempted to blend the vision of the nation with the one of Europe, Belgrade was tasked with the added demand of blending the competing visions of Yugoslavia.

As interwar national and cultural leaders remained skeptical that an equilibrium of national and European signifiers could – or should – be reached in the state capital, residents in Warsaw, Bucharest, Sofia and Belgrade alike saw no contradictions in the fact that their gaze toward Europe’s metropolitan centers paralleled the one toward the nation. Indeed, as Wood argues, becoming national coexisted with aspiring to European urbanity as two-pronged path to modernity: “for citizens of middling but modernizing cities like Cracow,” he writes, “discovering and enacting metropolitan identities reinforced their break from a provincial past while affirming their belonging to modern urban civilization.”\(^10\) Moreover, because these experiences were shared across Central and Southeastern Europe’s capitals, they are indicative of a process we now call globalization.\(^11\) Noah Sobe presents evidence of the globalizing bend of travel writing in interwar Yugoslavia and the emergent “Slavic cosmopolitanism” that linked Yugoslavs to the

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\(^8\) Gunzburger Markaš and Damljanović Conley, *Capital Cities*.
world rather than to one another. In fact, it was precisely this globalizing shift toward an urban self-identification that unsettled Rebecca West’s expectation of a Yugoslav capital steeped in evocations of the rural region rather than Europe’s cities.

I agree with Wood and Sobe that the development of a metropolitan identity in Europe’s Central and Southeastern capitals happened alongside the equally modern development of national identity – with the latter an especially fraught process in interwar Yugoslavia. To that end, this dissertation shows that culture in Belgrade, specifically foreign entertainment, was heavily weighed with the signifiers of big European cities like Paris, London, and Berlin at the same time that the state and elites competed to mark the city as the capital of unified Yugoslavia. But in addition to bridging the distance between their contemporaries in European cities, I argue that, unlike national culture and the arts, foreign entertainment was instrumental in narrowing the distance that separated Belgraders among one another. As urban modernization heightened the distinction between the city and the country during the interwar years, I contend that foreign entertainment in Belgrade destabilized the notions of class and gender buttresses by the state and elites as the foundational pillars of the Yugoslav nation. Moreover, I argue that foreign entertainment reshuffled the city’s cultural hierarchies: it displaced the unquestionable salience of the arts in the city just as it undermined the preeminence awarded to the rural signifiers of national culture. Belgrade is an interesting case because it lacked an aristocratic class after the Great War and, in its place, hosted only a tiny bourgeoisie. As Belgrade’s population tripled, it also saw the emergence of a community of everyday urbanites, a quickly growing population of petite bourgeoisie and workers attracted by employment demands in the city after the war, who wielded a newfound power as consumers. These everyday urbanites turned not to national or

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12 Sobe, Provincializing the Worldly Citizen.
elite culture to reaffirm their new identity as Belgraders, but rather to foreign entertainment. Cultural encounters, like those between residents and big city entertainment, as well as those among the domestic cultural actors and their foreign contemporaries, stand at the center of my work. They show that matters of fun were of the upmost importance in Yugoslavia’s interwar history, just as they show that the practice of entertainment in the city amounted to a democratic form of social participation.

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Foreign entertainment engendered a shift in Belgrade’s social hierarchies, both as a cultural product as well as a cultural practice. Its challenge to class was perhaps the most important: not only did entertainment bristle the bourgeois equation of the arts with culture, but it also undermined its principles of exclusivity for the upper classes. Foreign entertainment was cheap and easily available to almost all urban residents; those who could not afford an entry ticket into the cabaret, cinema, or circus could nonetheless see posters lining the city’s posts, read reports reprinted in the city’s presses, and hear music seeping out of urban venues. More importantly, foreign entertainment was accessible to most Belgraders as a form of culture removed from the hierarchies dictating the consumption of the arts: its understanding was premised neither on a store of cultural knowledge nor language proficiency, and its enjoyment was barred neither by an individual’s social legacy nor salary. Foreign entertainment reshuffled the dynamic of cultural politics and, in turn, replaced its most important players. In the eyes of the general urban public, entertainment venue proprietors, publishers of illustrated presses, and performers came to occupy the places claimed by cultural elites. The destabilization of class hierarchies also occurred from within, when bourgeois men patronized cabarets with scantily clad dancers or when bourgeois women took up reading of the urban romance. And with this last
concession to the pleasures of entertainment, upper class Belgraders forfeited their power to dictate culture and the bounds of its consumption in the interwar city.

In addition to class, the flood of foreign entertainment shook up the notions of patriarchal gender in interwar Belgrade, all the more because its performers were young women. The foreignness of these entertainers was alluring for Yugoslav as an association of the European metropolis (even of the performers themselves were not Parisians, Londoners, or Berliners) that stood beyond the patriarchal pale of gender hierarchies atop the stage and sanctioned the displays of decadence, sexuality, and fun. While state and municipal authorities labored alongside social reformers to curtail the “immorality” associated with these performers and their audiences, attempts at regulating entertainment amounted to a series of negotiations that shaped top-down management more than bottom-up consumption. While entertainment was never reconciled as respectable labor for domestic women during the interwar years, evidenced by the harsher state codes for labor and stricter social norms of acceptable behavior of participation, this was not the case for female patrons. Bourgeois and petit bourgeois women, in particular, were gradually warranted to take part as consumers in diverse “safe” spaces of urban entertainment – from the cinema to the variety theater – where they could gaze upon foreign performers like Josephine Baker alongside the men in the audience.

Finally, foreign entertainment reshaped the cultural landscape of interwar Belgrade. First, new types of venues like cabarets, cinemas, and bars were integrated into the city center and, with them, a more socially diverse set of patrons laid claim to the downtown areas traditionally roped off for the upper classes. A similar social permeability affected public spaces where residents practiced entertainment – whether it was streets where vendors sold illustrated presses or train stations where fans awaited visiting stars from abroad – that located even the petty
consumer or the causal observer as participants in urban culture. But it was entertainment itself that swept up the prominence from underneath national and elite culture. What is more, it supplanted the promises of education and enlightenment with an inherently commercial form of culture that could be bought and sold by virtually anyone. No less, entertainment normalized the ever-present flickering, buzzing, and thumping of European culture in interwar Belgrade. As jazz had become French, so it became Yugoslav. As Josephine Baker reached fame across Europe, so she did in Belgrade. In other words, foreign entertainment was repositioned as a baseline of culture – one that captivated the imagination of Yugoslav urbanites much like their big city contemporaries.

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Foreign entertainment was not entirely new to interwar Belgrade and, more importantly, it did not play the same role in the city during the prewar, interwar, and socialist periods. As historian Dubravka Stojanović observes, proprietors of cafés, bars, and kafanas in the late nineteenth century named their establishments after far-away places, such as Paris, Solun (Salonika or Thessaloniki), Petrograd (St. Petersburg), and Orient. Stojanović argues that this showed a worldly orientation of urban residents that stood as a direct resistance to inward-looking state agendas of naming streets and squares after territories it hoped to incorporate, such as Bosnia and Macedonia. When Belgrade had been the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia, it wielded a significantly weaker connection to Europe and a limited access to foreign popular culture. However, when it became the capital of an enlarged unified state with a solid political footing in Europe, it also became an attractive new urban market for foreign products. Advancements in technology were integral in the ensuing flood of foreign popular culture that bridged the feeling of time and space across the restructured European map. This was certainly

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13 Stojanović, *Kaldrma i asfalt*, 301.
an early sign of cultural globalization, but one that maintained a core and a periphery. Big European cities like Paris, London, and Berlin served as the centers of these networks transporting hegemonic popular culture, while cities like Belgrade stood at its edges; it was connected to Europe’s new interwar cultural networks, but only at its receiving end.

Just at the First World War had reshuffled Europe’s prevailing networks, so the Second World War reshaped them once again. Interestingly, with the exception of the years preceding the Tito-Stalin split, scholars of the postwar period show that Belgrade remained connected to the European mainstream, if not also an active agent in its production. Patrick Patterson suggests that a postwar consumer culture emerged in 1960s Yugoslavia and served as a unifying force in a diverse Yugoslav society. For example, like its interwar counterpart, Patterson shows that domestic presses embraced fashion as a “generally European and, indeed, global phenomenon.”

Popular music, most prominently Anglo-American rock, similarly inundated socialist Yugoslavia’s domestic market. In a study of the rock’n’roll magazine Džuboks, historian Radina Vučetić shows that 1960s Belgrade was a dynamic site of foreign popular culture. Like interwar popular presses, Vučetić argues that Džuboks offered its readers topics like “ways of dressing, learning English, changing interiors of flats and houses, or disco clubs, new ways of having fun, popularizing a Western way of life,” rather than national ideology. However, the magazine is a notable representation of another trend in postwar Belgrade: domestic popular culture that appeared side by side with its foreign counterparts. This occurred not only on the pages of magazines but also on transnational networks. Indeed, scholars have shown that major

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14 Patterson, Bought & Sold, 267.
Yugoslav cities like Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Ljubljana developed thriving popular music scenes with commensurate audiences. Moreover, entertainment like *Džuboks* and rock’n’roll also became popular among neighboring countries in the Eastern Bloc – and sometimes also in Western Europe. In other words, cultural networks in the postwar period facilitated the movement of metropolitan Yugoslav culture abroad.

Belgrade’s cultural history has served as a point of departure for claiming the city’s inheritance for capital of the present-day Republic of Serbia. Different periods in the city’s history have been mobilized for different means, but the interwar years stand to position the capital of Serbia as the sole heir to its Yugoslav predecessor. Like the legacy of the strongman Dragoljub Aleksić, other interwar urban culture has recently become the subject of nostalgic films, novels, and exhibits. The reclaiming of the 1920s and 1930s into a continuity between the first and last decades of the twentieth century is a strategy of reconciling both the post-war period that shattered the idea of Yugoslavia and the post-socialist one that effaced bourgeois urban society. Moreover, the dramatic reduction in territorial size of the state presided by Belgrade at the end of the twentieth century is analogous to its dramatic growth at the century’s beginning. It has prompted some observers to speculate that Belgrade had been too provincial to crown the unified Yugoslav state after the First World War, but that the twentieth century had reshaped it into a capital far too worldly for the tiny Serbia after the Yugoslav Wars.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was not how residents in the 1920s and 1930s imagined the future of the city. Instead, they had been captivated by the speed of technological progress that surpassed state lines and politics. The skyscraper, a quintessential artifact of early twentieth

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century urbanization and modernization, appeared as one such symbol of their future city. In 1923, an article in *Novi list* described a city rising from the ashes of rickety houses in the working class neighborhood Dorćol and into the sky with new factories, mansions, and skyscrapers. A couple years later, *Ilustrovani list* predicted a fantastic city moving deeper into the earth (with underground electric rail and several layers of underground traffic) and higher into the sky (rooftop gardens and skyscraper airports). In the early 1930s, the strongman Aleksić even claimed that the poles being erected to string a high wire for his performance “looked like some sort of American skyscraper.” And Belgrade presses in the 1930s liberally reprinted the futuristic predictions from their big European contemporaries, many of which imagined the city as the site of mechanized sunlight and starlight, meals condensed into pill-like form, and soaring skyscrapers with roofs that functioned as racetracks. Belgrade’s first skyscraper, the thirteen-floor Palata Albanija, was built to great anticipation at the base of the prominent urban artery Knez Mihailova Street on the eve of the Second World War. Interwar residents regarded its construction as a feat of monumental proportions and closely associated with the urban fantasies of the time. In the last scenes of the 2008 film *Tears for Sale*, the fictionalized strongman Aleksić appeared on the cloudy platform of Palata Albanija and prepared to dive off the building’s highest floor in a daredevil stunt. As he was about to jump, a narrator

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18 The skyscraper figured prominently on the set of Josephine Baker’s 1920s “dance sauvage” performances: in the first scene, Baker danced to soothing music with a backdrop of geometric skyscrapers, while the second scene offered the juxtaposition of a chaotic jungle setting (Boittini, *Colonial Metropolis*, 4.). It was reported, however, that Baker’s stage set did not travel with the performer to Belgrade, to the great disappointment of some spectators (V. D., “Večer Džozefine Beker,” *Politika*, 3 april 1929, 5.).


23 Many other buildings scaling the heights were constructed in the postwar period, including the Ušće Tower (1964), Avala Tower (1965), Beogradanka (1974), Rudo A, B, C (1974), Inex Tower (1978), and the Genex Tower (1980).
informed that “the twentieth century was well on its way… a century not of war, death, and
graves but a world of car culture, gramophones, and buildings that scale the clouds.” Despite the
fact that the real performer likely never scaled Belgrade’s first skyscraper and that *Tears for Sale*
can be taken to task for its historical dramatization, the film does grasp one aspect of Belgrade’s
interwar history: while overshadowed by both war and death, it was a period steeped in urban
entertainment.
Abbreviations and Primary Sources

Archives
AJ – Arhiv Jugoslavije
DKJ – Dvor Kraljevine Jugoslavije
MIP – Ministarstvo inostranih poslova
MP – Ministarstvo prosvete
MUP – Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova
IAB – Istoriski arhiv Beograda
ČNV – Odeljenje krivične policije
PD – Pevačka aruštva
UG – Udruženje glumaca
UGB – Uprava grada Beograda
ZMG – Zbirka Memoarske Gradje
ZMSP – Zbirka Mihaila S. Petrovića
ZŠS – Zbirka štampanih stvari
ZŽMJ – Zbirka Živka M. Jovanovića
JIM – Jevrejski istorijski muzej
MPU – Muzej pozorišnih umetnosti

Periodicals
Beogradske novosti
Balkan
Comœdia
Film i moda
Ilustrovani list
Ilustrovani list nedelja
Ilustrovano vreme
Jugoslovenska pošta
Madjaršag
Nedeljne ilustracije
Novi list
Novosti
Opštinkse Novine
Panorama
Politika
Pravda
Scena
Šišani Jež
Time
Vreme
Večernje novine
Žena i svet
Published Primary Sources


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