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The return of the Serbian other: Interpretative repertoires of nationalism and identity politics in online news discourses on Serbia's integration in the European union

Jelena Petrovic

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THE RETURN OF THE SERBIAN OTHER:
INTERPRETATIVE REPERTOIRES OF NATIONALISM AND
IDENTITY POLITICS IN ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSES ON
SERBIA'S INTEGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

After more than a decade of political investment in integration, Serbia is still awaiting full membership into the European Union and thus is kept on the periphery of an imagined European community. In this difficult and uncertain process, Serbs have faced fractured national discourses that are inscribed with new forms of liminality encapsulated in an externally ascribed position of “flawed Europeans.” This dissertation explores the co-construction of national identities in the context of public debate about the country’s integration into the EU on Serbian online news websites. Informed by the theoretical and methodological framework of discursive psychology, this research identified interpretative repertoires activated and constructed in dialogic interaction through news reports and readers’ online commentaries on the visa liberalization process between 2009 and 2011. The analysis shows that although discontinuous and asynchronous in character, the employment of particular interpretative repertoires normalizes a limited number of positions of identification through which individuals avow their national belonging. Relying on taken-for-granted claims about current economic hardships, lack of alternatives, and memory of lived

collective suffering and unjust expulsion from imagined European community, participants in online dialogues construct a normative category of Serbs as damaged Europeans that challenges state-centered identities ascribed by the news discourse. By appropriating EU's cultural politics and symbolic geography, readers' comments mark territorial migrations of an internal and undesirable Other as moral transgression to advance a preference for fixed, clearly defined, and policed boundaries. Simultaneously, they reinterpret asylum seeking as a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances such as living in a failing Serbian state.

Articulated through this form of online communication, these constructs enter the public sphere to equip political elites and Serbian citizens with rational means for everyday nationalism, practical othering, and continued discrimination of already-marginalized groups couched in discourses on state citizenship.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The transformation and democratization of Serbia's socialist polity since 2000 have led Serbian nationals and citizens to manage emergent political, social, and economic uncertainties and, in the process, make sense of the ongoing reconfigurations of Serbia as an imagined community within the wider European context. In particular, the ambivalence and uncertainty of Serbia's position in the processes of European Union (EU) integration complicate both the formation and maintenance of positions of national identification. These issues become evident especially before and after events that create national crises, signify turning points in national politics, or promise an end to the experienced ambiguities.

The EU's liberalization of travel visas for Serbian citizens is one of the events that have had profound implications for discourses on both national identity and Europeanness. In 2009, Serbia was included on the list of all European countries whose citizens do not need visas to travel to other EU countries. This list is known as the Schengen white list or White Schengen. Serbian news media, the public, and the political elites have interpreted this event as EU's acknowledgment and validation of the nation's progress toward accession, and as the sign that Serbia is on the way to become a full and proper member state of the EU. On the other hand, the conditionality of the visa liberalization—a EU policy that makes Serbia's White Schengen conditional on fulfillment of pre-set criteria and ability to uphold EU laws and regulations—also reinforces Serbia's ambivalent position within the periphery of Europe. These inconsistent messages expose some of the contradictions that inscribe instability onto the Serbian national imagination, particularly in relation to external referents such as the EU and Europe, whose meanings are stakes of discursive struggles. Furthermore,

the ambivalence forces Serbian nationals and citizens to make sense of their collective identity and express it to others by managing their positions of inclusion in and exclusion from the EU. As individuals take part in discursive struggles to invest these positions with particular meanings, they become the agents and subjects of politics of identity that produce and justify preferred moral orders and social hierarchy (Hall, 1993b).

In the last five years, online public debates on Serbian integration in the EU have become a popular forum for national subjects to engage in the production of discourses on local, regional, and national identities (Surčulija, Pavlović, & Padejski, 2011). In effect, online news media have become a site where journalists and audiences engage in the symbolic co-construction of Serbian identities through the articulation of discursive repertoires that suggest in- and out-group positions of identification. The dialogic character of these interactions, manifested in the form of readers' exchange of commentaries on news reports, foster interplay between institutional and vernacular representations that produce hybrid, fragmented, and perpetually changing discourses (Howard, 2008a, 2008b). These types of online interactions invoke and appropriate forms of institutionally produced and sanctioned meanings of Serbian national belonging, although they retain a potentially subversive character due to their intertextuality, multi-narrative tendencies, and asynchronous turn-taking patterns (Kristeva, 1986; Howard, 2008a).

This dissertation research explored the process of co-construction of national identities by Serbian news media and their audiences in the context of online discussions about Serbia's EU integration. On the basis of a critical discourse analysis of interpretive repertoires constructed in dialogic interaction through news reports of the visa liberalization process and readers' online commentaries, this research illuminates the intersection between

the institutional discourses produced by media organizations and the vernacular discourses of their audiences as a site of construction of national identities. In this study, institutional discourses are news media discourses produced through journalistic conventions, norms, and routines that limit the content and forms of knowledge available to the public and establish relationships between subjects in socially organized settings (Richardson, 2007). In contrast, vernacular discourses are those produced in people's everyday interactions that do not directly depend on particular institutional frameworks for their functionality and validity, but rather on the lived experiences of daily life and the routines through which such life is produced. In the context of constructing of a national imaginary, vernacular discourses are sites where people develop a sense of belonging through unstructured interaction and cultural intimacy. Herzfeld's (2004) concept of cultural intimacy refers to a "bitter-sweet self-recognition"¹ of the characteristics of collective identities that both justify externally ascribed negative representations of Self, and also enable deep comradeship among those who share such characteristics (p. 21). Unlike institutionally sanctioned representations of national identities that suppress collective flaws through avoidance, denouncement, or identification and management, vernacular discourses embrace assigned stigma to negotiate and resist ascribed subordination in existing power hierarchies.

The findings of my analysis show that news media and their audiences use taken-for-granted, fragmented, and contradicting arguments as the resources for securing a particular narration of collective belonging, delegitimizing other alternatives, and rationalizing a range of flexible exclusionary practices that are productive of dominant social hierarchies. News media accomplish these goals by relying on three interpretative repertoires or resources of familiar systems of meanings—EU integration as progress toward becoming a European

¹ In the original: "gorko saljiva spoznaja jastva."

state, EUropeanness as final destination, and Serbia as a source of manageable otherness. By combining the arguments and premises of these repertoires, news stories systematically produce an argument for Serbia's peripheral position and state-centered concept of citizenship as the only available means by which Serbian people can join the EU, contain internal elements of otherness, and claim their European belongingness.

As they respond to these institutional representations of Serbianness, readers emphasize the centrality of everyday life as Serbian nationals and citizens. In their discourses, they appropriate and re-combine elements of available interpretative repertoires to connect flexible symbols of Europeanism with strategic memories of a lived past of collective suffering and physical confinement. In the process, they advance a set of interrelated re-interpretations of the core assumptions of the news discourse and subordinate their membership in the community of Serbian citizens to membership in the moral community of Serbian nationals. To accomplish this goal and make sense of themselves as flawed Europeans, which is a position ascribed by the news media, vernacular discourse constructs a narrative about damaged Europeanness as an uncontested marker of Serbian identity. Relying on the pairing of mutually constitutive understandings of social privilege and praise-worthy tactics of survival, readers advance subjective assessments of the damages a person has acquired through participation in past and present collective suffering, thus creating internal scales of inclusiveness. As a result, the vernacular narration of collective belonging regulates in- and out-group memberships based upon different moral and social orders than those constructed in news discourse. Simultaneously, it also rationalizes the same type of social exclusion and inequalities suggested in the news category of proper Serbian citizen.

This analysis of institutional and vernacular discourses on visa liberalization illustrates how the interaction between the two systems of knowledge claims, subject positions, and organizational rules in the context of online communication produced tensions resulting from the subjects' different motivations for social action. However, the link between vernacular and institutional discourse is also marked by interdependency and hybridity since vernacular communication appropriated some of the repertoires of institutional discourse. The analysis reinforces Howard's (2008a, 2008b) argument that vernacular discourses produced by the public through online communication most often depend on the institutional discursive practices of media, which provide and organize the space where such participation is possible.

My approach follows critical interrogations of national communities and identities that have built on Anderson's (1983) conceptualization of nation as an ideological construct produced through historically situated imagination rather than through the discovery of common origin or collective consciousness (see Billig, 1995; Hall, 1993a, 1993b; Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999). Within this framework, national imagination is viewed as a result of discursive processes that construct and naturalize the idea of sovereign community grounded in deep horizontal comradeship. The public perception of the community's continuity and stability is conveyed and validated through narration, interpretation, and enactment of a repository of fairly stable categories of national belonging. The incorporation and reproduction of these categories in everyday practices enable the constitution of national subjects in all spheres of social life (Billig, 1995; Hall, 1993b; Herzfeld, 2004). In this inquiry, I draw upon Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities to define nation as a linguistic construct whose meanings are temporarily fixed through discursive

struggles. More precisely, I explore nation as a system of discursive markers of collective sameness and difference upon which individuals can position themselves and others as members or outsiders of the Serbian national community.

Furthermore, I ground the concept of collective identification in the critical concepts of discourse and subjectivity developed by Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Margaret Wetherell, Michael Billig, and other scholars who have explored the discursive constitution of Self in everyday interactions. Central to these frameworks is the premise that the subject is decentered, overdetermined, and constructed in relation to the Other. This premise rejects the assumption that national identity reflects naturalized characteristics that a group of people claims to have in common. Instead, discursive approaches to national imagination assert that collective identification is constituted through historically specific discursive practices oriented to social action. To build on these arguments, this research examines the constitution of national subjects in the mediated spaces of Serbian online news media by analyzing discursive practices that news audiences employ to interpret events of national importance, respond to an externally ascribed position as Europe's Other, and make sense of themselves as Serbian citizens and nationals.

The emergence and intensification of global movements in the last 20 years have opened a new chapter in the critical study of national and political discourses (Appadurai, 1999; Shome & Hedge, 2002). As Appadurai (1999) noted, global flows of people, capital, technology, labor, and media destabilize the coupling of nation and state, and problematize the legitimacy of the reference points—such as territory, language, history, ethnicity, and race—upon which national identification is often claimed and secured. Despite these disjuncting and rupturing tendencies, the concept of nation remains a significant term to

explore collective identification, especially for groups whose members develop a sense of belonging from the fissures of modern nation-states and in ambivalent relations with desired centers such as the EU (Herzfeld, 2004). These groups often invoke beliefs of primordial collective origins and essence as a way to rationalize and validate discriminatory identity politics and the need to form racially, ethnically, or religiously pure communities (Hall, 1993b). To understand how people create these markers of collective homogeneity and difference and re-inscribe them in global movements, scholarly inquiry engages two questions: (a) whether national culture is still a site for reproduction of national imagination; and (b) whether social and national institutions such as news media can claim authority in the production, validation, and circulation of this imagination.

These questions are of particular relevance for the ongoing social, political, and economic integration in Europe and the resulting tensions between supranationality and national, regional, and local identities (Magistro, 2007; Mostov, 1994; Raik, 2004; Schlesinger, 1994; Smith, 1992). For countries that are not members of the EU, but are invested in the EU integration, these tensions complicate the establishment of stable regimes of collective identification such as citizenship status, rebuilding of the civil society, and legitimization of state sovereignty (Kostovicova, 2006; Vasiljević, 2011a). Furthermore, the unresolved status of these nations within the EU leads to an “ambivalence of identification” (Hall, 1993b, p. 354). It positions citizens of these nations at the intersection of multiple and contradicting collective subjectivities that often need to respond to the otherness ascribed to them through symbolic and material reconfigurations of Europe’s internal borders (Balibar, 2004; Graan, 2010).

The reconfiguration of the national discourse is even more pronounced in online environments where individuals can publish and articulate their own interpretations of national belonging and engage in co-construction of meanings with other authors and readers, independently from dominant institutional frameworks such as those advanced by the mainstream media. The existence of virtual national communities that form as alternatives to the dominant national imagination reinforces the idea that online technologies allow for radical transformation of temporal and spatial distances, and symbolic boundaries between people (Brinkerhoff, 2012; Saunders, 2011; Sundaram, 2000). However, even though an influential body of scholarly literature emphasizes the emancipatory potential of online communication, the online environment still remains “a site and means of political struggle and conflict: a contested terrain where exclusion and domination as well as solidarity and resistance are reproduced” (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 56). Rather than reinforcing a division between institutional and vernacular discourses, the online environment promotes the interplay of the two and constitutes hybrid vernaculars that establish themselves as alternative sites for narration of national imagination. They do so by necessarily validating and reproducing some elements of institutionally sanctioned and legitimized national discourses (Howard, 2008a, 2008b; Sundaram, 2000).

In this research project, I developed a theoretical and methodological framework for unpacking this intersection and its relevance for the construction of Serbian national identities in relation to the ongoing EU integration. I approached these tasks by supporting the premise that online communication, namely news commenting, is a form of everyday interaction in which individuals articulate their collective identities. Furthermore, I positioned the act of news commenting and the resulting conversational threads as discursive

practices that are both situated in larger context of news media production and responsive to the power matrix inscribed in this production. To explore these processes, I focused on the dialogic dimension of this positioning and how it relates to individuals negotiation of ambivalent subjectivities and relationships with the nation-state.

Significance

This dissertation research relies on a critical theory of discourse to explore the mediated construction of collective identities in contexts that call for reconfiguration of dominant national imagination and expose its fragmentation, dislocation, and fissures. With this aim, the research project also contributes to the body of work that investigates political and national discourses oriented to the ongoing European unification.

Europe and the ideal of Europeanness are two main reference points for the constitution of collective identities, especially for those national groups that historically have been positioned as European outcasts (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Todorova, 2006). Despite being viewed as an objective category, “Europe has no essence per se, but is a discursive construct and a product of many overlapping discourses” (Starth & Wodak, 2009, p. 15). The meanings of Europe and, therefore, their relevance for national identifications are produced, negotiated, and transformed in discursive struggles that respond to historically specific exigencies and events that have potential to challenge dominant national imaginations (Grabbe, 2003; Magistro, 2007; Raik, 2004; Starth & Wodak, 2009). Current geo-political reorganizations of the European map as well as geographical, political, cultural, and economic boundaries between different national groups cause profound disruption of the existing categories of national identification, and also create opportunities for the formation of new ones (Ejodus, 2008; Mostov, 1994; Smith, 1992). These changes, in turn, lead to various national crises

whose resolution necessitates a temporary fixing of the meaning of the EU, and its legitimization and mediation by national institutions and elites (Magistro, 2007; Polonska-Kimunguyi & Kimunguyi, 2011; Raik, 2004; Schlesinger, 1994; Strath & Wodak, 2009). At the same time, European integration is imbricated with other global tendencies that problematize universal and institutional authorities in knowledge production. This suggests that everyday public interactions are important sites where the meanings about Europe and about national identity are articulated, negotiated, and validated.

These issues are particularly relevant for scholarly understanding of discursive negotiations of national identity in post-communist and post-socialist countries that are caught in the tension between positions of inclusion in and exclusion from the EU (Graan, 2010; Grabbe, 2003; Raik, 2004). Since 2000, Serbia has invested time and money in the pursuit of EU membership and represented this orientation not only as a strategic goal, but also as a necessary road the country has to take in the complex transition from socialism to democracy. After more than a decade of domestic and international politics oriented toward integration into the EU, Serbia finally gained the status of an EU candidate in March 2012, but it is still facing a long process for obtaining full membership. In the meantime, local perceptions that the country has undergone minimal changes since 2000 due to financial insecurity, coupled with unfavorable views of the EU's politics of conditionality, have resulted in public Euro-skepticism and political and social apathy (Biserko, 2011).

Current Serbian-EU politics are also complicated by a set of factors that did not exist during the initial periods of European unification in the early 1990s (Grabbe, 2003; Raik, 2004). Most often, post-communist and post-socialist countries such as Serbia cannot negotiate the conditions for their EU accession and instead are pressured by the EU to

quickly implement a complex corpus of policies and meet numerous criteria for the membership (Grabbe, 2003; Raik, 2004). As a result, the relationship between potential candidates and the Union is asymmetrical and marked by dependence, paternalism, and surveillance. Arguably, the shift from communist or socialist to neoliberal democracy as well as the search for new modes of national identification make these potential EU members more susceptible to the EU's ideologies and preferred systems of values (Grabbe, 2003).

Despite these tensions, a vision of the EU and of Europe has become a constitutive element of Serbian national discourse, thus shaping, limiting, and transforming various media and vernacular understandings of what it means to be Serb in 21st century. More precisely, in the last decade, the views on European integration and Serbian advancement toward full membership have dominated citizens' and government's assessments of significant social issues (e.g., Kosovo independence, the celebration of a Gay Parade, increasing number of asylum-seekers from and to Serbia, and the 2010 worldwide economic crisis). Influenced by media reports about events of national importance that are often filtered through the EU lens, the public's experience of ambivalence and uncertainty about the integration entered the national discourse and complicated institutional and vernacular reproduction of a Serbian imaginary. Most important, this ambivalence in Serbian national identification activates particular identity politics that regulate group memberships and perpetuate existing social discrimination, both of which warrant nuanced critical analysis.

Personal ideological investments in the EU discourse are both premised upon and productive of a range of inclusionary and exclusionary practices through which people express and normalize preferred forms of social relations in everyday practices. Despite the importance of these practices for the understanding of how daily interactions produce new

and existing forms of social discrimination, scholarly examination of Serbian everyday nationalism is sparse (see compilation of these studies by Golubović, Spasić, & Pavićević, 2003). This theoretical gap exists despite the fact that the analysis of Serbian national identity and post-Milošević nationalism often serves as a major argument in scholarly explanations of events of national and regional interests, such as civil wars and Serbia's slow integration into the European community (Di Lellio, 2009; Mostov, 1994; Ristić, 2007).

A critical analysis of mediated, everyday articulations of national imagination is even more significant for understanding how online environments function as the sites of everyday, mundane talks through which interlocutors accomplish particular social action. The development of various forms of online communication, such as news commenting, underscores the potential of these spaces to provide a new lens for the study of discursive construction of national identity. The dialogic character of readers' news comments, for example, enables multi-path, asynchronous, and discontinuous conversations among multiple subjects who simultaneously respond both to particular media texts and to the utterances of other participants in the online dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). In addition, the highly intertextual context of the online environment fosters a persistent negotiation of meanings and mobilization of a variety of discursive repertoires.

Despite their popularity and significance, online discourses, especially readers' responses to online news stories, are rarely analyzed as sites of discursive construction of national identities (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003; Singer, 2009). The reason for this is that research on online communication often conceptualizes individuals as psychologically determined subjects who can produce and consume texts independently from institutional frameworks and other participants in online interaction (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003).

However, the theoretical approaches that assume that participation of newsreaders in media discourses is evidence of their unrestricted agency and resistance to dominant discourses often overlook power relations that underlie online practices. As Howard (2008a, 2008b) argued, public engagement in online communication as a form of vernacular discourse depends on media institutional practices that establish the boundaries of online participation. This after-the-fact quality of user-generated content indicates that institutional frameworks shape the structure and content of users' posts, and that these structures need to be included in the critical analysis of online vernaculars and the role they play in national imagination. Some of the most commonly noted structures include, but are not limited to, media ownership and control of online spaces as well as inequalities embedded in the institutional dialogue between journalists and their audiences (Bowers, Meyers, & Babbili, 2004; Papacharissi, 2009; Singer & Ashman, 2009). In regard to this problem, this dissertation project fills existing theoretical and methodological gaps by focusing on the power relations that are constituted in and constitutive of dialogic co-constructions of meanings between news media and audiences.

Historical (and Personal) Background

The 2009 visa liberalization was an important turning point in the country's EU politics. In many ways, the event symbolizes the fulfillment of promises that the national and international political elites made on the morning of October 6, 2000, as a massive public protest against Milošević' regime came to an end. To celebrate the new beginnings, that morning a majority of Serbian news media reported that being a Serb in the 21st century would symbolize progress, democratization, and reconnection with the nation's European

roots. However, as the following years have shown, October 6 also marked the beginning of Serbia's long and challenging process of accession to the EU.

Despite slow progress in the integration that is yet to result in full EU membership, a decade of EU rhetoric has had a profound impact on Serbian society: by linking the national goals to the Union, the country assumed the position that each political and economic decision could lead to either exclusion or inclusion into the European community. In an effort to identify these possibilities and predict their potential outcomes, one line of scholarly work has centered on the question of whether the traditional and historically constructed Serbian national identity is compatible with preferred European values and norms (De Lellio, 2009; Ristić, 2007). In addition to positioning EU as a benchmark for the branding of a preferred national identity, others also have noted that the EU discourse serves as a justification for the consolidation of domestic policies as well as for the constitution of national and regional consciousness (Kostovicova, 2004, 2006; Ejodus, 2008; Mitrović, 2004).

Although the Serbian public, political and social elites, and news media tend to view the 2000 October Revolution as a break with a turbulent past, the struggles to establish congruent and stable national identities in the post-Milošević Serbia indicate that the ideologies of the socialist regime are still core elements of the country's EU discourse (Biserko, 2011; Cohen, 2001; Di Lellio, 2009; Gordy, 2005; Kostovicova, 2006). The constant presence of past issues and their negative impact on the ongoing democratic transition have led to an overarching public sentiment that the legacies of this regime are the major obstacles to Serbian integration into the EU.² However, rather than confronting the past and working toward regional peace and political stability, people often use these

² From "European Orientation of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia: Trends," by Republic of Serbia Government, European Integration Office, (December 2009, 2011; July, 2011). Retrieved from www.seio.gov.rs

sentiments to deflect their responsibility for the national past and blame political elites, Serbian news media, or other ethnic groups, for turning Serbs into extreme nationalists (Gordy, 2003; Spasić, 2003; Volčić, 2006).

Considering that an understanding of those legacies is essential for the analysis of Serbian national imagination as well as the nation's symbolic, territorial, and political position in relation to European unification, I briefly outline some of the most important aspects of Milošević's regime as they pertain to the scope of this study.

Legacies of the Milošević Regime

National sentiments historically have been major factors in the territorial (re)configurations of the Balkan Peninsula and in the creation of borders between people who have inhabited this region. The importance of national identification is especially evident after 1991, when a collapse of communist political and economic systems across Eastern Europe prompted the transition of those systems to a market economy. In particular, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the citizens' disillusionment over the possibilities of forming post-national communities justified a search for new means of collective identification based on a revival of ethnic histories that would stabilize and protect the already fragile national identities (Williams, 1999). A high degree of ambiguity, in turn, provided fertile ground for the government, news media, and the Serbian public to legitimize nationalistic ideologies grounded in hatred, discrimination, and marginalization of minorities and other groups that were perceived as ethnically, racially, religiously, and culturally different from Serb people.

During the 1990s, Slobodan Milošević was just one of many politicians who exploited these national anxieties to secure his power and mobilize national and state

institutions in support of the myth of Greater Serbia. Greater Serbia is a metaphor for the idea that all ethnic Serbs should live in the same territory (Di Lellio, 2009; Erjavec & Volčič, 2007). In such atmosphere, a call for national self-determination seemed to be reasonable justification for Serbs to use in order to resolve several inter-ethnic conflicts (Jansen, 1999). By reinforcing the values of shared language, religion, historical roots, and territory, Milošević and the Serbian news media in the 1990s enabled the formation of cultural nationalism and used it as an argument for subsequent ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo (Hayden, 1992; 1996; Jansen, 1999; Mostov, 1994; Williams, 1999).

Government controlled news media, such as daily newspapers *Politika* and *Vecernje Novosti*, major networks *Radio Televizija Srbija* (RTS) and *Radio Televizija Beograd* (RTB), and the magazine *Duga*, contributed to the rationalization of nationalistic ideologies. For more than a decade, these and other news outlets consistently were producing coverage that simultaneously reinforced the legitimacy of the regime, advanced aggressive nationalism, and discredited political opposition and any form of social protest (Matić, 2004; Volčič, 2006).

Interestingly, despite this implementation of strong control and blatant censorship, the Serbian media scene also included a network of independent press outlets (daily newspaper *Danas*, and newsmagazines *NIN* and *Dnevni Telegraph*), broadcasters (*Studio B*, *Index Radio*, *B92*), and professional organizations such as *Nezavisno Udruženje Novinara Srbije* (NUNS), *Asocijacija nezavisnih elektronskih medija* (ANEM), and *Nezavisni novinarski sindikati* (UGS *Nezavisnost*). Although they played an important role in shaping public critique of the ruling party, these outlets struggled to survive as they were subjected to the government's

crackdown on political opposition. Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of the violent attacks on independent media is the still unresolved murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, the editor and publisher of the *Dnevni Telegraph* who was shot dead in front of his house on April 11, 1999. In other instances, the regime tried to establish control by seizing the equipment, shutting down the television and radio stations, and imposing high fines for violations of already politically biased media laws. For example, in 2000 the regime sued numerous journalists and publications arguing that under the Public Information Act of 1998 these news media should be regarded as national threats and punished (Cohen, 2001, p. 348).

This violent reconfiguration of national boundaries in post-communist Serbia had at least four consequences that are relevant for this dissertation research. One of them is Serbian territorial identity, one of the cornerstones of the Milošević regime that became the basis for the construction of an imaginary Serbian national space and for the establishment of national identification in terms of its spatiality (Kostovicova, 2004). In the 1990s, this national orientation involved the formulation of political and economic solutions for the territorial dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the limitation of the political and economic autonomy of two Serbian provinces—Vojvodina and Kosovo. Importantly, in the process of eliminating any potential threats to Serbian political and economic hegemony, Milošević created what is known as the “Kosovo question,” which concerns the civil and political rights of the Albanian majority that lives in Kosovo, an issue that remains unresolved.

Kosovo, in particular, has significant symbolic importance for Serbian national discourse because national history identifies this region as the founding place of both the Serbian state and the Orthodox Church. Specifically, references to 1389 and the Battle of Kosovo between Serbs and Turks serve as powerful metaphors that portray Serbia as a protector of Europe and

of Christianity (Čolović, 2000; Živković, 2011). This construction, in turn, provides symbolic resolution to the nation's liminal position between East and West, and a way of claiming European identity (Erajevac & Volčić, 2007). As Di Lellio (2009) said, "Kosovo is the Serb and European battlefield where Serbia can either win or lose her sacred ground, but cannot lose her soul, which is the same as the soul of a 'true Europe,' uncorrupted by secularism and individualism" (p. 376).



Figure 1: Kosovo myth and everyday life in Serbia. The graffiti that invoke the Kosovo myth are the images that can be found in many spots in Belgrade. The number "1389" stands for the year of the Kosovo Battle and the symbolic beginning of the fall of the Serbian Kingdom which was then ruled by the Turks for the next five centuries. Photo taken by the author in 2012.

In an attempt to secure Serbia's control over this imaginary national homeland, in 1989 Milošević made significant changes to the Constitution and reduced Kosovo's autonomy to ensure the province's economic and political dependency on Serbia. The growing dissatisfaction of Kosovo's Albanians with the Milošević regime and its neglect of their political and civil rights resulted in the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army

(KLA, known in Serbia as OVK for *Oslobodilacka vojska Kosova*). The first armed conflict between the KLA and the Serbian police in 1997 marked the beginning of a three-year long war that ended in massive population displacement and the deaths of close to 15,000 people. At the end of the war, the territory was placed under the UN administration, and Kosovo and Serbia began negotiations over the political status of the province. Although Kosovo declared independence in 2008 as the Republic of Kosovo, its status within Serbia is unresolved mainly because the Serbian government does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. However, the ambiguity of internal and international boundaries is both a source of persistent political and armed conflicts, and also one of the major reasons for Serbia's slow progress toward integration with the EU.

The wars in Kosovo and in the territories of the former Yugoslavia also are linked to the problematic relationship between Serbia and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague (henceforward ICTY)³ (Gordy, 2005, 2009). The nation's full cooperation with the ICTY and the extradition of indicted war criminals, including Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, Goran Hadžić, and former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, was one of the prerequisites for Serbia's accession to the EU. The EU's pressures for cooperation with the ICTY and the fact that those who were indicted were tried outside Serbia expose one of the main issues of the European unification—a tension between EU ideologies on one side, and political and territorial sovereignty that relate to the historical and the traditional roots of the country, on the other side. Furthermore, most of the people who are still on trial have been instrumental in the formation of Serbian extreme nationalism in 1990s, and, therefore, often continue to be viewed as national heroes. According to the

³ The ICTY is “a United Nations court of law dealing with war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s” (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 2012).

National Council for Cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, in 2011 the majority of Serbs did not support the extradition of Mladić (“Poll,” 2011). De Lillo (2009), among others, noted that this public opinion indicates a dominant view of Europe as an assimilative and threatening entity, which is an image that political parties, namely Democratic Serbian Party, used to advance certain EU visions as preferred and better for the national interest.

As a post-communist and post-socialist nation, Serbia also faced the complex question of establishing the legal criteria that qualify an individual for citizenship, especially because the concept of individual rights was “complicated with the notions of collective belonging and membership” (Mostov as cited in Williams, 1999, p. 59; Vasiljević, 2011a, 2011b). As Hayden (1992, 1996) argued, such suturing of legally and culturally defined national identifications in the 1990s led to the emergence of constitutive nationalism. This means that discursively constructed markers of national identification, such as language and ethnicity, encoded in official state documents help to control group boundaries and deny citizenship and other rights to national minorities. To a certain extent, formation of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in 1992 and the 1996 Law on Citizenship have changed ways in which national belonging could regulate citizenship rights: although everyone who already was citizen of Montenegro or Serbia automatically became a citizen of FRY, the restrictions for new applications were more severe. In that regard, the legal category of Serbian citizen became a mechanism for controlling refugees, shaping the ethnic makeup of the state territory (refuge families could get citizenship if they vouched to move to Kosovo), and denying the status to those who were marked as potential opposition to the ruling regime (Vasiljević, 2011b, p. 69-70).

Political changes in 2000 have further exposed the contradictions and instability of the existing citizenship regimes; difficulties in constituting universal categories of collective belonging in politically, socially, and ethnically divided Serbian society; and tendencies toward continued translation of national imagination and differentiation into the citizenship framework (Greenberg, 2006b; Vasiljević, 2011a, 2011b). Efforts have been made to relax criteria for granting citizenship status and separate civil rights from ethnic, cultural, and religious identification. However, their effectiveness has been undermined with continued political instability, ambivalent territorial sovereignty, and a weak civil society that is fighting both the nation-state and the rise of ultra-nationalistic groups within it (Kostovica, 2006).

The situation, further complicated by the country's troublesome EU integration, created a fertile ground not only for re-introduction of constitutive nationalism and ethnification of citizenship regimes, but also for revival of the mythic Serbian victimhood and the dichotomy "us" vs. "them." As these two national images, rooted in the perception of cultural homogeneity, became dominant representations of the national identity they also provided discursive means for the construction of the neighboring countries as the threatening Other. This construction served to justify numerous civil wars, physical and symbolic violence, and mass destruction in 1990s (Wilmer, 1997).

These processes and consequent reproduction of the ideologies of the ousted regime are particularly evident in news reporting on the EU integration and related events such as the trials at the ICTY (Džihana & Volčić, 2011; Erjavec & Volčić, 2007; Kisić & Stanojlović, 2008). Despite being both the instrumental players in the civil protests and the institutions needing the most radical reform after the fall of the regime, Serbian news media

are struggling to position themselves as the pillars of a democratic transition and an awakened civil society. Contrary to the expectation, the Serbian media landscape did not improve after the “October Revolution;” instead it has inherited a similar legal system, monopolization (through privatization of media), and type of censorship that characterized media operations under socialist regime (Matić, 2004; Veljanovski, 2006).

As these ongoing issues indicate, the change of regime in Serbia did not mean the demise of nationalistic politics, but rather its revitalization, reinterpretation, and re-articulation through the discourse on civil society, democracy, and civic conceptualizations of society (Cohen, 2001; Kostovicova, 2006). This is also the framework that shapes Serbia’s position in the EU integration and interpretation of the 2009 visa liberalization.

Serbia and the EU after 2000

As I mentioned, Serbia proclaimed its political and economic orientation toward the EU immediately after the change of the political regime in 2000. However, it was not until the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003 and the EU’s official decision to consider Western Balkan countries as potential candidates that these investments could be translated into specific domestic and foreign policies. Since then Serbia has made significant steps toward the full accession by signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA)⁴ and the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related issues in 2008, and by being granted visa liberalization and the status of official EU candidate. Nevertheless, Serbian progress toward accession has been difficult and slow in comparison to other former Yugoslavian states. Slovenia has been an EU member since 2004, while all other countries except Bosnia and Herzegovina have acquired EU candidate status before Serbia: Croatia in 2004 (set to

⁴ According to the European Commission, the Stabilization and Association Agreement is a contract that initiates EU negotiations with the Western Balkan Countries.

become a member in 2013), the Republic of Macedonia in 2005, and Montenegro in 2010. Serbia was also the last one to ratify the SAA in September 2008, two months after Bosnia and Herzegovina. The path to accession was also interrupted several times due to emergent national crises resulting in the postponement of both SAA negotiations in 2006 and the decision regarding the EU candidate status—which was moved from November 2010 to March of the following year. Even the latest confirmation of Serbia's candidacy is a reminder that this is a hard-won victory considering that the Greek initiative "Agenda 2014," published in 2003, predicted that Serbia, as one of the Western Balkans nations, would be fully integrated by 2014.

After the overthrow of Milošević, the government justified the nation's investment in the EU integration by reinforcing the correspondence between European and Serbian national values. These strategies were important not only to build public support for the government's policies but also to conceal the fragility of the government's power to manage its people considering that every move toward full EU membership exposed citizens to a new set of supranational and trans-national policies and regimes of governance. The case in point is the 2009 visa liberalization: by being based on a set of policies and requirements that the Serbian government had to fulfill, White Schengen inevitably questioned the right of the Serbian state to be the only entity that can certify Serbian citizens for cross-border movement.

In order to contain these destabilizing events, political elites often invoked principles of territoriality (Europe-as-EU) and peoplehood (Europe-as-identity) as well as confined the EU integration to issues related to international and domestic policies, bureaucracy, and diplomacy (Kostovicova, 2004). In fact, the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012 only affirmed that dominant political parties use EU symbolism to gain political points

without linking integration to practical benefits for the citizens or to issues that relate to their everyday lives. For example, between 2009 and 2012 Srpska Radikalna Stranka [Serbian Radical party]—one of the parties that initially advanced an anti-EU platform—began advocating for EU integration only to emphasize the inadequacy of citizens' living standards and their overall dissatisfaction with the existing political leadership (Biserko, 2011, p. 20-21).

On one hand, these strategies have helped political elites reinforce the state apparatus and win popular votes despite the economic crisis and the EU's enforcement of politics of conditionality. On the other hand, such delinking of EU integration from citizens' everyday concerns and interests have led to wide-spread public apathy and lack of investments in rebuilding civil society (Biserko, 2011). This was particularly evident during the crisis over Serbia's status of a EU candidate: in December 2011, the EU ministers decided to postpone a decision regarding the country's status in the integration until March of the following year, citing as the major reason Serbia's insufficient progress in negotiations with the Kosovo government. Although short, the delay resulted in a national and political crisis leading to the resignation of Serbian Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Božidar Djelić, who has been one of the main political figures since the nation began its democratic transition in 2000. More importantly, the event signified the nation's dependence on the EU and the political interests of EU members even in terms of its own sovereignty, while also prompting growing public Euroscepticism and a belief that Serbs will never be good enough for Europe.⁵

⁵ From "European Orientation of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia: Trends," by Republic of Serbia Government, European Integration Office, December 2011. Retrieved from www.seio.gov.rs

Serbia's position in the ongoing integration is complicated not only by the pressure to adopt new policies and show the nation's readiness to meet all of the requirements for becoming a EU member, but also by the growing disagreements between major political parties in terms of Serbia's EU future. This particularly applies to the "Kosovo question" and Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY, which emerged as the two issues that eventually caused a fallout between the major parties in the Serbian democratic block. The disagreements eventually prompted the formation of a pro-EU coalition led by late Zoran Djindjić (assassinated in 2003) and Boris Tadić, and a group of parties led by Vojislav Kostunica, who showed much less support for the EU integration because he tied his political platform to both Kosovo and limited cooperation with the ICTY (Di Lellio, 2009). The tension among major political parties resulted in the change of the official national orientation from Euro-Atlantic integration to specifically EU integration in 2007 (Ejdus, 2008).



Figure 2: Elections' aftermath. Torn billboards were a common sight on the Belgrade streets after the closing of the 2012 elections for the Serbian President and Parliament. Symbolically, I use this image as a visual representation of messiness and opacity of Serbia's political scene in post-Milošević Serbia. Photo taken by the author in 2012.

Aside from challenging state sovereignty and political unity, the transition from socialist to democratic polity also exposed the fragility and structural weakness of the existing social, economic, and political institutions. Rebuilding the civil society and working toward regional peace under the scrutinizing EU gaze has been a troublesome task for the Serbian government and citizens that has often resulted in social strife and destabilization of already fragile institutions and civil society (Gordy, 2005; Kostovicova, 2004, 2006; Pavićević, 2003). The surge of organized crime in the first years of political transition led to numerous attacks on journalists and political figures, one of which ended in the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić. Furthermore, the nation went through another phase of deterritorialization after Montenegro announced its independence in 2006. The instability and insecurity has also been evident in other spheres of social and everyday life. The public concern with state corruption has increased since 2003 and in 2011 became the third most pressing problems in the country (Pešić, 2007; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). In addition, the inflation and unemployment rates are in constant flux. Initially, the Serbian government was able to minimize the impact of the 2008 world crisis and secure another package of financial aid from IMF to manage a budget deficit of more than 9 billion⁶ Euros, or 34.8% of country's GDP (Biserko, 2011). Despite these efforts, the unemployment rates have progressively increased between 2008 and 2011 from 14.4% to 16.2%, 20.1%, and 23.6%, respectively.⁷

Visa liberalization. In contrast to these problems arising from the nation's troublesome cooperation with the ICTY and ongoing conflicts in Kosovo, issues that public

⁶ The term billion refers to 10^{12} (large-number naming system)

⁷ The data is reported by Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and refers to the working age population (15-64 years).

discourses often positioned as major complications for full EU integration, the 2009 visa liberalization represented a positive move toward the Union. In fact, for Serbian citizens, visa liberalization was the first result of the country's EU efforts since 2000 that had a direct relevance for their everyday lives. According to a non-government monitoring group, Centre for Free Elections and Democracy (CESID), the prospect of inclusion in the White Schengen list led to increased citizens' support for the EU: in November of 2009, when the EU officially announced its decision, 71% of those living in Serbia had positive views toward the integration process ("Support for Serbia's accession to EU increases," 2009). In December of 2011, after the EU ministers postponed the decision about the candidate status, public support dropped to 51% but it was still higher than in September of the same year.⁸

On a more practical level, these EU decisions symbolized validation of Serbia's efforts toward the integration. The EU candidate status, for example, opens doors for new investments, grants the nation more access to various EU financial programs and support, and improves the overall international image of Serbia. Granting of this status is also the last step before a nation can submit an application for EU candidate status and start negotiations for the full accession. In regard to visa liberalization, the Commission of the European Communities (2009) reported that the EU made its decision because the country "has made important progress in the areas of justice, freedom and security and has fulfilled the majority of the criteria from the roadmap."⁹

The event marked an end to Serbia's territorial isolation, which was first enforced by the UN embargo during the Bosnian war in the 1990s and then maintained in the post-

⁸ From "European Orientation of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia: Trends," by Republic of Serbia Government, European Integration Office, December 2009, 2011 and July 2011. Retrieved from www.seio.gov.rs

⁹Roadmap is a list of criteria set by the EU that the country applying for visa liberalization needs to meet in order to gradually progress toward White Schengen. The implementation is monitored by the EU Council.

Milošević period through a strict visa regime. Symbolically, this also indicated a potential break from a stigmatization of Serbs as barbaric people, which was mainly conveyed in international media representations of Milošević's nationalistic politics as violent and destabilizing for the region. To reinforce this significance of the White Schengen and affirm the nation's political orientation toward the EU, the government started several campaigns that promoted both travel and state policies to advance the EU integration.

One such campaign was tied to the EU's requirements that all Serbian citizens have biometric passports that would ensure safe border crossing after visa liberalization was put into effect. In spring 2008, the government announced the start of the campaign *Novi Srpski pasos – novo lice Srbije* [New Serbian passport – new face of Serbia] as a joint project between the state, the popular daily newspaper *Vecernje Novosti*, and the national TV station *RTS*. Under the motto of rewarding “people who represent true values of our community,” the project promised to give the first 204 biometric passports to “the most distinguished citizens of the Republic of Serbia and the members of the Diaspora.”¹⁰ Considering the change of the passport's color from navy blue to red, I conclude that the metaphor of change and return to “true values” was reinforced not only with the name of the campaign but also with the resemblance to Tito's Red Passport, a symbol of freedom of movement that citizens of Yugoslavia enjoyed before 1990s (Figure 3).

¹⁰ In original: “ljudе koji predstavljaju prave vrednosti našeg društva” and “najistaknutijim građanima iz Republike Srbije i dijasporе.” From “Crveni pasos novoj Srbiji,” by *Vecernje Novosti*, March 8, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:211848-Crveni-pasos-novoj-Srbiji>



Figure 3. Physical changes of traveling documents from 1963. The images from the left show Red (SFRJ) Passport valid between 1963-1992, FR Yugoslavia (later Serbian and Montenegro) passport valid between 1992-2010, and Serbian biometric passport valid from 2008. The first photo is adapted from “Serbian Passport,” by Wikipedia, 2013. The second and third photos taken by the author in 2013.

Another project with a similar purpose was realized through collaboration between the Serbian government and the European Movement in Serbia, an independent and voluntary organization of Serbian citizens. The project, named *Evropa za Sve!* [Europe for Everyone!], was a series of programs through which certain groups of citizens would be able to travel to EU countries at state expense. One of the programs started as a competition designed to select 50 deserving Serbian citizens, whose deeds, work, and initiatives benefited their communities and the nation (“Put u Evropu kao nagrada,” 2009).¹¹ The winners won a free, six-day trip to four EU countries that would start on the first day of the visa liberalization. The project was built upon the claims that a high number of Serbian citizens have never traveled outside the country and that the selected winners would be new ambassadors of EU ideas in their communities.¹² To symbolically mark the significance of

¹¹ From “Put u Evropu kao nagrada,” by B92, November 10, 2009. Retrieved from http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=11&dd=10&nav_id=391601

¹² From “Evropa za sve! Evropski Pokret u Srbiji,” by EPUS, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.emins.org/sr/aktivnosti/projekti/evropa-za-sve/index.html>

the event, the selected individuals started their trip at midnight on the first day of the visa liberalization.

The social climate, public excitement, and media reports on the 2009 visa liberalization conveyed a sense that Serbian citizens are to be included in the European community. White Schengen changed the ways in which traveling documents could produce “affective social life of regulation” by minimizing the need for long visa queues in front of the EU embassies and humiliating interactions with embassy staff during which Serbian citizens were ascribed positions as European Others (Jansen, 2009, p. 816). However, the political and economic situation in Serbia, especially in 2009, as well as the provisional nature of these EU decisions in many ways complicated the celebratory discourses.

On the one side, political elites and public discourse often positioned visa regime as the last trace of *situacija* [situation] – a label which people in Serbia use to describe the state of the nation and society after the collapse of Yugoslavia and civil wars in 1990s (Greenberg, 2011; Jansen, 2005; Simić, 2009). Within this interpretative framework, granting of the White Schengen was understood as an infallible sign of change. However, parallel to this popular narrative, the government also marked visa liberalization as one of the procedural steps in the long process of the EU integration, and as a policy that can be revoked or suspended if Serbia does not follow all the rules and continue with the progress.

Having a White Schengen status without being an official EU candidate inevitably identified Serbs as European outsiders whose actions and movement through the accession to the Union have to be monitored. The Serbia 2009 Progress Report affirmed that such standpoints are warranted by outlining Serbia’s moderate or insufficient advancements in most critical issues such as alignment to European standards in the area of visa policy, border

control, asylum, and migration policy (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). These and similar reports fueled public speculation that the White Schengen could be revoked if Serbia did not continue with its progress, democratization, and adoption of the EU values and norms.

The situation that crystallized national concern over the possibility of losing the White Schengen was the increased number of asylum-seekers from Serbia that many EU members defined as a pressing issue and abuse of the newly gained freedom to travel. Serbia was the 6th source country of asylum seekers in the world before visa liberalization.¹³ However, in the first year of relaxation of the visa regime, the number of applications increased by nearly 50% (from 16,791 in 2009 to 27,429 at the end of 2010)¹⁴ prompting EU members, namely Netherlands and France, to demand changes in border regulations. In the following year, the publication of numerous news articles about citizens who were seeking asylum to improve their economic situation as well as potential affairs regarding issuance of Serbian passports to Kosovo Albanians for profit fueled public fear that Serbia could be removed from the White list (Barlovac, 2010). Although in May 2011 the EU officially denied the potential suspension of the visa liberalization policy, the issue of asylum-seekers remains a relevant factor that shapes Serbia's position in the integration.

The vision of a conditioned or partial inclusion in the EU was also reinforced with several stipulations such as the fact that (a) visa-free travel did not apply to Great Britain and Ireland; (b) travelers could stay in EU only a limited number of days; and (c) the liberalization applied only to tourist visas. The last restriction is particularly interesting

¹³ From "Asylum Levels and Trends Industrialized Countries 2009," by UNHCR, March 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html>

¹⁴ From "Asylum Levels and Trends Industrialized Countries 2011," by UNHCR, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/4e9beaa19.pdf>

because it meant that visa queues, although minimized, were still a reality for a number of citizens who wanted to work or study in the EU. Symbolically, the existence of these queues served as a reminder that some forms of European belonging are still sanctioned, scrutinized, and inaccessible to Serbian citizens.

Furthermore, new opportunities for travel were tied to individual financial and material situations, which also created a paradoxical situation in which two contradicting visions on everyday life in Serbia framed the popular discourse on visa liberalization. The travel was linked with a particular consumerist lifestyle. Right after the EU officials confirmed that Serbia would be placed on the White Schengen list, many travel agencies started advertising 2- to 4-day trips to some of the most popular cities where travelers would be able to experience Europe for “reasonable price.” At the time *Kontiki*, one of the biggest travel agencies in Serbia, offered packages such as the Mediterranean Adventure, Europe is in your hands, Buon Giorno Italia, Laughter in four languages, just to name a few (E.B., 2010). Aside from packages that emphasized site seeing, particularly popular were also shopping trips, which usually included bus transportation, a one-day stay in hotel, and a visit to popular malls in Trieste, Szeged, Thessaloniki, and Timisoara (Stamenković, 2009).

However, many people living in Serbia could not afford these weekend gateways. The average salary between 2008 and 2011 remained the same (approximately €345¹⁵) and although inflation in 2009 was the lowest in a decade (6.6%), people’s purchasing power had been reduced with the continuous increase of consumers prices and steady widening of the gap between average household income and average price of a basket of consumer goods and

¹⁵ The estimate is based on the report “Key Macroeconomic Indicators” by the National Bank of Serbia, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.nbs.rs/internet/english/80/index.html>

services (on average, a family of 5 would need 1.4 salaries to purchase all items from the market basket).¹⁶

I would argue that the steps that led to visa liberalization and conditions for maintaining it have created new entrapments and subjected Serbian nationals and citizens to the networks of disciplining, self-regulation, and representational practices. More precisely, after the cancelation of territorial isolation, Serbs found themselves in need of performing both stigmatized and re-socialized identities for the EU, its citizens, and international community. Such negotiation of the position on the margin has not been without material effects that profoundly shape people's experiences of everyday life, collective identities, living spaces, and interpersonal relationships. In the last four years, they have also exposed difficulties in developing the institutions of civil society, strengthening the network of non-governmental organizations, and changing existing regimes of discrimination and marginalization of minorities in Serbian society (Biserko, 2011, 2012). Some of the recent events that expose these struggles include multiple cancelations of the Gay Parade in 2009, 2011, and 2012 in Belgrade—under the assumption that the event could promote city-wide violence—and several public protests over government's strategy for resettlement of Roma community from the center of the capital to the suburbs (Barlovac, 2012).

Speaking and Researching as a Serbian Native

Years after White Schengen has been put into effect, these entrapments are still essential aspects of people's lives in Serbia and means by which they communicate their national belonging. My goal in this study is to explore the materialization of those daily strategies of positioning in online dialogues about the 2009 visa liberalization, and to

¹⁶ Combined data from National Bank of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, and the Ministry of foreign and domestic trade and telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia.

illuminate how experiences of ambivalence and effort to negotiate unfavorable external representations of the Serbs color ongoing struggles to affirm and express particular forms of collective belonging.

I approach these tasks with more than a scholarly interest, as I consider the analysis of these online talks as an act that inevitably constitutes my own identities as (a) a Serbian national who moved to another country after experiencing disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of “October Revolution;” and (b) a Serbian citizen who experiences the country’s integration into the EU only through media representations and narratives of those whose lives are directly and continuously impacted by the process. Consequently, research for this dissertation was a process through which I was also re-learning and re-interpreting what it means both to be identified as Serbian and claim this identification for myself.

As a student at the Belgrade University, I participated in the demonstrations against Milošević and, like my friends and family, I thought that October 5, 2000, meant a radical change for our country. However, after a couple of years and the continuation of political instability, poverty, and lack of opportunities, I was disappointed and decided to leave for a college in Wichita, Kansas. The years living abroad certainly did not erase my Serbian Self; however, they have infused my knowledge of it with nostalgic memories of collective suffering and public resistance, which allow me to participate in the national imagination from a “safe” distance.

Despite all this, I received the news about visa liberalization with joy and sense of liberation. Three years later, when I crossed the EU border for the first time without needing a traveling visa, I was also able to intimately experience a mix of pride of being like all other EU citizens and discomfort that my Serbian passport makes me a potential threat in the eyes

of these desired Others. My life in the United States often requires that I respond to negative stereotypes about Balkans and Serbia; and also that I assure people that my country is a safe place and that the situation has changed since the inter-ethnic wars in 1990s. However, living abroad also means that I do not have to manage the tensions of being simultaneously included and excluded from the European proper on daily basis, a privilege that my family and friends in Serbia often do not have.

Considering the importance of the intimate knowledge of daily negotiations of this ambivalence of identification, I spent four months in Serbia in spring of 2012 prior to collecting the data for this study. Even though during my stay I did not gather any of the data that I analyze in subsequent chapters, the experience of being simultaneously a cultural insider and outsider, and learning about aspects of daily life in Belgrade, profoundly influenced my approach to this dissertation project. As always, in the first weeks after my arrival, I experienced the discomfort of constantly feeling both “depression and amusement,” a sentiment that Živković (2011) described as one of the common experiences of those living in Serbia (p. 10). Aside from the mix of confusion, dissatisfaction, and enjoyment in always-changing and opaque social and political situations in Serbia, the emotional tension I felt was also a result of the awareness that I have become somewhat of a stranger in my own country. This was evident especially in daily interactions with my family and friends, during which I often spoke with detached voice and acted as a native who also has the knowledge of the life outside Serbia, a situation also noted by Spasić (2010) in her ethnographic work.

As a result, I was giving advice and “objective” analysis of national issues and events even when the people I was talking to did not ask for them. In addition, I was advancing moral judgments about unequal treatment of minorities in Belgrade and existing

discrimination without paying attention whether such assessments were meaningful and relevant for the ongoing conversations. The same happened when I was proposing solutions for the problems my family and friends were sharing with me without realizing that resources that make those solutions possible are not always accessible or appropriate for these individuals. In other words, I was talking about determination, self-confidence, and motivation to overcome challenges, whereas my closest friends, mother, sister, and former track-and-field teammates and university colleagues were expressing deeply felt entrapment of an unpredictable daily life on the margins of the EU where living conditions can change without any prior notice.

Although all these instances were mundane aspects of my four-month stay, I realized they were, nevertheless, shaping how people view themselves as members of a national community and how they were talking about the country's future and integration into the EU. Most importantly, these daily "misunderstandings" with those around me illuminated my view that what it means to be Serb in post-Milošević society was predominately premised on cultural intimacy shaped with the stories about everyday life in Serbia.

I do claim that the time I spent in Serbia in 2012 has changed or minimized this degree of detachment; however, I consider this period to be an essential component of my analysis of everyday articulations of Serbian national identity in online news discourses. Namely, this re-entry has increased my awareness of the tensions that those living in Serbia have to manage on the daily basis. I describe some of those situations in the vignettes at the beginning of Chapters 5, 6, and 7 in order to illuminate a link between online narration of collective belonging and the intricacies of material everyday life I experienced in those four months. Furthermore, I believe that this participation in national imagination from the outside

has analytical value by enabling me to interrogate understandings and management of ambivalent positions that participants in the online dialogues I analyzed may treat as mundane aspects of their daily lives.

Structure of the Dissertation

The presentation of the scholarly sources that inform this research, research design, and analysis of findings is organized in the following seven chapters of this dissertation. The following chapter explicates a theoretical framework for this research and establishes a connection between the concept of discursive practice and the articulation of national belonging in local and highly occasioned interaction. Drawing upon critical discourse theory and discursive psychology, the chapter defines concepts of discourse and identity and discusses their relevance for the study of national imagination and formation of group identities in the context of global movements such as ongoing European unification. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the relevant literature on online news media and discusses how discursive approaches can contribute to this subject matter by examining online productions of knowledge, identities, and power relations as the processes of dialogic co-constructions of meanings between journalists and their audiences. In Chapter 4, I describe the methodology and research design for this study. More specifically, I outline major premises of critical discourse analysis, discuss their relevance for the research questions that guide this project, and describe analytical strategies I use to unpack discursive effects of online exchanges between Serbian news media and public that reveals itself through the practice of news commenting.

The second part of the dissertation, Chapters 5 to 7, presents empirical findings in regard to knowledge claims and models of identity politics produced in online dialogues

about Serbia's integration in the EU. Chapter 5 examines interpretative repertoires that Serbian news media use to represent visa liberalization and the relevance of the event for Serbia's position in relation to EU and Europe proper. I build on the descriptions of these repertoires to argue that news discourse produces state-centered identity as a rational expression of person's European belongingness. In the following two chapters, I shift the focus to news readers' discourses and examine the kind of identity politics that audiences activate in response to available news narratives. First, I discuss how these individuals combine EU symbolism and intimate experiences of everyday life to problematize identities ascribed through the news discourse and position themselves as mobile citizens of a "not-normal" state. I extend the discussion about state citizenship, collective solidarity, and national identities in Chapter 7 and examine their articulation through vernacular narration of the collective past. I particularly examine how this strategic narration produces the idea of tarnished Europeanness that enables these individuals to regulate their group memberships while simultaneously recognizing and reinterpreting conditions of their own exclusion from the imagined European community. Finally, I conclude the dissertation with a summary of the findings and discussion of future possibilities. In this final chapter my goal is to reinforce the argument that social institutions, groups, and individuals activate and legitimize national imagination through a range of historically situated, fragmented, and contested discursive practices that in turn regulate access to group memberships, and resources, rights, and freedoms inscribed in those memberships.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

To develop a theoretical and methodological framework for unpacking the complexities of the construction of national identities in the online media environment, I ground this study in the concept of discourse developed within poststructuralism and critical theory, as well as in theories of national identity and its formation in everyday interactions and in the online media environment. The critical study of discourse, particularly as developed in the work of Michel Foucault, allows for the critique of the concept of national identity as a reflection of collective spirit and conceptualizes it as a social, symbolic, and material phenomenon produced through language. By rejecting universalist and essentialist understandings of national identity, discursive approaches also explain how individuals' investments in national imaginaries produce particular articulations of national belonging in everyday practices and interactions. Positioning national imagination as a discourse also illuminates the power relations that constitute the objects and subjects of knowledge in society. This, in turn, helps explain why collective belonging is defined as belonging to a nation and how its articulations through media serve as powerful means for in- and out-group identifications, despite ongoing global processes that question the viability and sustainability of national communities.

The first section of this chapter focuses on discourse and discursive practice as two key theoretical concepts informing this investigation. In the second section, I address discursive theories of identity formation, using critical concepts of subjectification and articulation as well as the lens of discursive psychology to discuss the formation of Self in talk. The last section builds on these theories and shifts the focus on collective identity

through the discussions of the nation as an imagined community and group character, collective memory, and territory as the dominant characteristics of Serbian national imagination.

Discourse and Discursive Practices

Today's emphasis on the critical study of discourse is a result of a set of interrelated theoretical debates across several schools of thought (late Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism, semiotics, cultural studies) that ushered in what has become the linguistic turn in social sciences (During, 1993; Hall, 1982). One of the core premises of this paradigmatic turn is the proposition that language is a structuring and enabling agent, rather than a representation or "reflection" of reality. This view led scholars to develop culturally grounded accounts of social, political, and economic processes and to interpret them through critical concepts of representation, ideology, and hegemony. Although indebted to these theoretical concepts, the research established critical discourse analysis as a distinctive theoretical and methodological perspective for understanding the linguistic character of social and cultural processes.

This analytical task is often complicated by the existence of a plethora of diverging conceptualizations of discourse, which in many cases leads to scholarly debates and a variety of often irreconcilable approaches (see Fairclough, 1992; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1997). To address this problem, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) listed several basic characteristics that most of the critical approaches to discourse have in common, thus offering a way of navigating the field. Central to their mapping is the shared understanding in these approaches of the link between language, social practice, and power relations (Foucault, 1972; Hartley, 2002). Drawing on

the work of these authors, I advance the understanding of discourse as historically specific and regulated ways of talking and thinking about the world, Self, and other people. Discourse functions as a social practice achieved through language and invested with power to order, divide, and categorize knowledge as well as to (re)produce social patterns and norms that condition both our place in social hierarchies and understanding of those positions. Thus, discourses are “active, compelling, and a pervasive part of the fabric of social life” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 61).

This approach also implies that the analysis of discourse, therefore, is not about the meaning as much as it is about the conditions that ensure that those meanings are legitimized, justified, and rationalized (Hall, 1997). At the heart of these arguments is the understanding of discursive practice, defined as the process through which texts are created, received, and interpreted, as a political process that privileges and endows some meanings with the status of knowledge and truth, while excluding, restricting, and limiting others. In the critical study of discourses, this process is approached through an inquiry of the ideological effects that the politics of meaning has on social order, structures, and power relations between groups and individuals (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). As Fairclough and Wodak (1997) noted, in this case ideology is understood as a material process that not only constructs the world and identities, but also advances interests of particular social groups over others. By shifting the focus from impersonal systems of rules that produce determinate effects to the study of discursive practices that are productive of social inequalities, this theoretical perspective examines the action-function of the discourse and the ideological work that discourses perform on behalf of dominant social groups and their interests. The emphasis on ideological effects of discursive practices is of relevance for the

purpose of this dissertation, which aims to uncover mechanisms through which individuals regulate symbolic borders of imagined national community and restrict access to rights and resources that this community provides to its members.

This emphasis on the social implications of the discursive production of knowledge, relations, and identities is closely related to a fundamental question about the relationship between language and reality as mutually constitutive. For instance, some discursive approaches focus on discursive practices to refer to language use that is historically situated (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak et al., 1999; van Dijk, 1997), or occasioned (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Although these scholars do not deny existence of materiality outside people's symbolic relation to the reality, they note that the meaning of that materiality can only be produced within discourse, or instances of language use (Fairclough, 1992; Hall, 1985). However, Kress and van Leuven (2001) argued that language is one of the modes through which discourses are articulated and interpreted, but that discourses—although interrelated to material modes of existence—also have a non-linguistic and abstract existence of their own. Bridging the two levels of abstraction without creating a division between discursive and non-discursive practices, Kress and van Leuven (2001) stressed that discourses, and more precisely their networks, are fully constitutive of the social. This theoretical perspective is indebted to Foucault and his inquiry about how discourse functions as system of relations that constitutes objects of our knowledge and enables their continuous transformation based on rules of formation that are “conditions of existence in a given discursive division” (1972, p. 32, 38).

A major assumption underlying the arguments I present in this study is that discourses emerge through the interdependent relationship between historical and social

forces that both limit and organize possible systems of meanings, and also enable infinite play of language and slippages of meanings; and yet, they remain irreducible to any one of those processes (Hartley, 2002; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourses are always in tension, meaning that their materialization into particular forms of national communities and their common markers (e.g., ethnicity, collective memory, religion, and territory) are the site of struggle over production of dominant but contingent closures of meaning.

In this respect, the poststructuralist approach to language offers the most comprehensive elaboration of this argument by critiquing and expanding Saussure's contributions to the study of language. Scholars working within this tradition stressed the polysemic property of signs: they see meaning as a relation between signs established through signification, defined as a meaning-making practice that creates difference and chains of equivalence (Hall, 1997, 1985). Most importantly, poststructuralism also places the attention on those meanings that are excluded through signification and identifies them as a surplus or perpetual source of challenges to the achieved consensus or social fixing of meaning. Central to this position is the view of the inherent contingency of any order and attempt to limit the meaning; in other words, that correspondences are possible, yet not necessary or guaranteed (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Hall, 1985; Slack, 1996). Therefore, stable and singular meanings of any aspects of social reality are temporary since they face an always-present possibility of not being accomplished and, in the spirit of Gramsci's concept of hegemonic struggle, the consensus of meaning exists only as a "contradictory and unstable equilibrium" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 93). Furthermore, the effects of contingency and polysemy—or multiaccentuality of the sign, in Voloshinov's terms—indicate that signs have no necessary belongingness and are open for articulations, disarticulations, and re-

articulations (Hall, 1982; Slack, 1996). In that regard, interpreting the term national identity as an expression of ethnicity, religion, class, or any other dimension of person's identity, is a political process that ensures that the credibility and dominance of some interests and interpretations of collective belonging are produced on a regular basis and under different circumstances.

Scholars working within this perspective also emphasize that signification and discursive practices legitimize preferred meanings not through elimination of change and contradictions, but by endowing rupturing and destabilizing forces with an appearance of continuity and naturalness. Within discursive psychology, this process is theorized as an active management of ideological dilemmas in which counter-ideologies or perceived errors do not weaken the main ideal, but become explanations of how the ideal functions (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In all instances, discourse absorbs and re-articulates contradictions with the activation of common sense knowledge that is “communicated as ‘fact’ and empowered as ‘truth’” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 59). This truth or “universal knowledge,” whose origin is mystical and hidden, yet not disputed, functions as an argument that does not need further elaboration. Communicated as unmotivated and rational, and disinvested from historical, political, and cultural specificities, common-sense claims serve as objective referents upon which people can justify, reject, and evaluate new knowledge produced in social interaction (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005).

In the case of the news media, common sense takes the form of professional codes—standardized, institutionalized, and ritualized rules and structures that determine how something can be said (Bowers et al. 2004; Ekstrom, 2002; Hall, 1985, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; van Dijk, 1985, 1986, 2004). Van Dijk (1985, 1986, 2004) argued that consistent use

of specific styles of narration (e.g., summary, main events, background, consequences, and comments) standardizes knowledge production and limits ambiguity and potential for alternative interpretations. More precisely, this patterned narration favors the principle of assigning importance or relevance in a linear (top-to-bottom, inverted pyramid style) organization of the text, which in turn shapes audience's decoding of the news content (1985, p. 85). Aside from this, professional journalistic codes establish norms for knowledge production and presentation that legitimize a journalistic version of reality and establish the "equivalence between what can be assumed about the world and what could be said to be true" (Hall, 1982, p. 75).

This discussion about the formation and function of common sense knowledge underscores two crucial characteristics of discourses. First, it demonstrates that contingency exists only in principle because change, resistance, and re-articulations are always conditioned by the context and existing systems of social relations and restrictive rules of their organization (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Fairclough (1992, 1995) offered one complex illustration of this relationship. In his tri-dimensional model, he conceptualized discursive practice as mediation between the text and social practices, which include both the order of discourses and other non-discursive processes and institutions. The second implication of the discursive construction of common sense knowledge is that it facilitates self-sufficient reproduction of discourses. Hall (1985) called this the cycle of double articulation or active production of systems of meaning (p. 95). In other words, people rely on existing discourses to advance new knowledge or make sense of social reality; however, by following the rules of the discourse that make these practices meaningful and valid, individuals also produce similar patterns of meaning and power relations. Theorizing about

the unfolding of this process, specifically in regard to news media practices, Hall concluded that the struggle over meaning cannot be only about the control of the signification and access to it, but also about the range and limits of this meaning-making practice (1977, 1982).

According to Foucault, discourses are more than the sites of struggle because they are also the goals of those practices. Focusing on the triad of interrelated concepts power, knowledge, and truth, Foucault identified relations and strategies that make something appear as an object of knowledge. To unpack the limits and specificity of this occurrence he argued that:

we must question them [discourses] on two levels of their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategic integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur). (1980b, p. 102)

Finding unity and repetition in dispersion, heterogeneity, discontinuity and division, Foucault (1972) located discourses in the body of rules of their formation. To follow this argument, we can say that people's knowledge of the nation as a dominant expression of the symbolic and material organization of social relations, feelings of belonging, and resources does not form internally and exclusively within nationalistic discourse; instead, nation emerges as an object of knowledge in the alignments and intersection of multiple planes of knowledge that differentiate and separate this term from other objects of knowledge. Foucault (1980a) connected this dispersion with the shifting of conceptualizations of power from "juridico-discursive" or top-bottom influence and subordination, to power as

productive, circulating, and net-like strategies that set the conditions upon which other actions and relations could be possible (1982, p. 791).

These concepts of discourse and power create a framework for theorizing national belonging outside the discourses that are more typically recognized as national. They also point to the limitations of the strand of critical discourse theory that makes a distinction between ideology and discourse in general, which tends to limit the inquiry to those discursive events that are decisively ideological or marked as such by the researcher. Consequently, this division does not fully account for dispersed, fragmented, and decentralized production of knowledge about national belonging, in which every claim advanced as truth or common sense knowledge is potentially productive of social hierarchies.

To follow Balibar (2004), theorizing nation as a discourse or a “type of structural causality” points us to the systems of meanings and rules of formation whose interaction and circulation in society produce particular patterns of social relations recognized as “*community effects*” (p. 21, emphasis in original). The subtle workings of power that are enabling and motivating people to act as members of a collective or community can decenter concepts of nationalism and hide them from sight by circulating knowledge that produces nation as an object of knowledge in interactions when people are not directly talking about it (Foucault, 1980b). Furthermore, people can identify themselves as members of the national community and act on its behalf without ever being directly instructed or called to do so. Ong (1996), in that regard, suggested that institutions of the civil society inscribed with racial and gendered hierarchies, as well as everyday participation in those hierarchies, cannot be overlooked as the relevant sites for the discursive production of citizenship and national belonging.

In contrast to scholars who address the rules of discourse formation and locate them in dialectical discursive practices (see Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1997), Foucault neither confined discourses to their linguistic materialization nor made distinctions between discursive and non-discursive fields of social practice. Instead, he collapsed the social into the discursive—a theoretical move that many scholars identified as Foucault's rejection of any potential for change and transformation (Fairclough, 1992; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). This interpretation, however, is a reaction to the lack of theory of social change in Foucault's work, which, according to Fairclough, is one of the main purposes of discourse analysis and critique. For many poststructuralist approaches, the possibility for transformation of society, resistance to, and change of existing power dynamics is closely related to the inherent instability of all discourses because they are constantly challenged with the meanings that are excluded or yet to be signified. In that regard, discourse analysis aims to expose the limits of structures by focusing on re-articulations of orders of meanings or the interaction between existing structures and non-discursive forces (e.g. superstructures).

However, for Foucault, who also argued that discourses are contingent, the pressure points are within discourse, not outside of it, as power pushes against the counterforces necessary for its existence (Foucault, 1980b, 1982; Rabinow, 2010). This perpetual state of tension and potentiality is the reason why rules of discursive formation are not inflexible structures that at once and forever determine the conditions of knowledge production.

In the context of my study, the concept of resistance within creates a theoretical space for analysis of the strategies that online users employ to negotiate the meaning of their Serbian belonging in response to pre-existing knowledge about this form of collective identity and of Serbia as a nation. Foucault's approach to resistance and social change also

highlights the dialogic interdependence between institutional and vernacular discourses that form in the online environment: although individuals who are engaging in online commenting most likely already have an understanding of what it means to be Serb, they invoke that understanding within the interpretative field that is structurally pre-defined by the news media. In other words, they rely on the journalist's codified representations of Serbian identity to make their own meaningful, which is a discursive process I discuss in more depth in Chapters 6 and 7.

The concept of discourse and related discussion of power and social change form a theoretical space for exploring the maintenance and reconfigurations of what can be highly fractured and instable discourses. This specifically pertains to the production and legitimacy of national imagination that forms in relation to existing global complexities that at once negate importance of national communities and validate the need for their existence. The same can be said for the institutional mediation of the nation in the online environment, understood as a space of continuous reconfigurations, which in turn problematizes any forms of universalizing discourses and authority claims. My unpacking of this phenomenon depends on an explanation of nationhood and how its various imaginary forms emerge as taken-for-granted objects of knowledge in different and often unrelated contexts. By conceptualizing discourses as the set of pre-existing regulations and as products of the interplay of discursive practices, I can begin to explain why people, despite the range of new possibilities, still identify their participation in virtual communities as an expression of national and not other kind of collective belonging (Saunders, 2011). Understanding why and how national belonging serves as a framework for making sense of the world, Self, and others is tied to individual and institutional investments in their national identities as a form

of discursive positioning from which these commitments can make the most sense, which is the topic of the next section.

Identity: Discursive Production of Subjectivities, Self, and Positionings

In light of the concepts and assumptions discussed so far, discourse theory identifies three distinct and related constructive effects of discursive practices—ideational, relational, and identity (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In all three instances, the individual is decentered, fragmented, and spoken through language, which consequently means that identity is not a unity of fixed and stable expression of inner psychological states but a social construct (Grossberg, 1984; Hall, 1996a, 1997; Weedon, 2004). This is not to say that the discursive approach to identity rejects the existence of continuous and sedimented knowledge and recognition of Self (Hall, 1996a; Wetherell, 2007). Instead, it means that this approach grounds the memory of Self in the intersection and articulation of subjectivities or linguistically formed positions from which individuals can speak, form social relations, make sense of discourses, and validate their existence and reproduction. Taking this perspective, I discuss the concept of identity as a part of critical discursive psychology that focuses on how psychological states and identities are produced through and within discourse (Wetherell, 1998).

Before I review the major premises of this theoretical framework, I discuss how the construction of subject positions takes place through articulation, a concept that informs discursive psychology. With this theoretical focus, my purpose is to build a richer understanding of the discursive nature of the unstable, contradicting, and yet constitutive views individuals develop about themselves and others in everyday talk. At the same time, I

advance a critique of discursive psychology for its tendency to downplay the role of discourse as a set of disciplining and enabling regulations imposed on those identifications.

Articulation and identity formation. Central to Hall's theory of subjectivity and identity formation is the concept of interpellation or the understanding that individuals can have the knowledge of themselves only by responding to and internalizing subject positions constructed within language. Hall (1996a) advanced the concept of articulation to explicate the mechanism by which individuals recognize themselves as concrete "knowing subjects" and become both the products and bearers of dominant ideologies (Weedon, 2004). More precisely, articulation is the moment when individuals who are acting as free subjects invest themselves in the positions that are inscribed by the discourse.

Although Hall developed this conceptualization by building on Althusser's theory of interpellation, he also advanced a critique of this theoretical perspective, namely its emphasis on monolithic, static, and totalizing determination (Hall, 2004; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Manisfeld, 2000). Instead, in Hall's interpretation, articulation is a response to the over-determination and dispersion of all subjects across multiple and often conflicting positions, which prevents formation of any totalities or permanent closures. As Hall (1992) explained, over-determination means that "we are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation to others, but with a series of different positionalities" (p. 292). To explain why individuals choose some positions more than others, Hall also used articulation to theorize subjective self-constitution, a process that Foucault outlined in his theoretical re-conceptualization of interpellation.

Foucault also examined subject positioning as an effect of nonsubjective, productive, and intentional techniques of power. Aside from science and other dividing practices as

distinct modes of objectification, subjectification is also accomplished through self-knowledge or a process through which a person is both subjected to and constituted as a subject of discourse (Foucault, 1980b, 1982; Rabinow, 2010). According to Foucault, the reproduction of subject positions penetrates, disciplines, and inscribes mind and body, both of which immediately return into the circuit of discursive production. Building on the concept of power as a web of relations that circulate in a particular historical moment and society, he also developed a complex understanding of consensual subjectification. In that regard, active self-formation is the most profound effect of power's productive nature because it is a "way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (1982, p. 789). Subjectification, therefore, emerges as an intersection of versatile and often conflicting discursive effects that is always susceptible to modifications and irregularities.

The concept of articulation encompasses both signification (construction of difference) and identification, leading to two important characteristics of identity formation. First, the Self forms in relation to what it is not—or to the Other. The Other, therefore, is an external and internal force of destabilization either by negating the Self or by establishing the limits of its existence (Grossberg, 1990). In both cases, formed through inclusion and exclusion, identity is always a matter of politics of positioning (Hall, 1993a, 1996a). These positionings and repositionings are strategic because the "meaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible" (Hall, 1993a, p. 230). Consequently, articulation creates only temporary closures of meaning recognized as identities. These are inherently political (or ideological) because they give individuals "a singular sense of who they are and where they belong" (Weedon, 2004, p. 19).

Second, the formation of identity involves continuity or reiteration of discursive practices that produce articulations of subject positions and intersections of subjectivities. For Hall, this formative process creates a space for theorizing change, reflexivity, and recognition on the part of the subject; this is problem that, he argued, remains an unfinished project in Foucault's work. Discursive psychology, on the other hand, places emphasis on concepts of the sedimented knowledge of Self and the "history as subjective being" to advance a flexible approach to discourse and individuals' control over it (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48).

Identity as constitution of Self in talk: The lens of discursive psychology. By rejecting essentialism and the belief that humans pose an innate, psychological "essence" that can serve as an explanatory system for social acts, critical discursive psychology as developed by Wetherell and Potter describes psychological states as products of occasioned and mundane use of language in interaction with other people (Billig, 2006; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Potter & Edwards, 1999; Wetherell, 1997, 2007; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). These scholars use the concept of subject positioning to conceptualize a person's psychological makeup as a social construction and to locate identities as the sites of discursive organization and production of meaning (Wetherell, 1997, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Sneijder & te Molder, 2005). Discursive psychology expands upon Hall's work and poststructuralist conceptualizations of subjectivity and discourse, namely by emphasizing the premise that individuals are decentered, over-determined, and positioned by the context in which the interaction occurs. The context, in this sense, assumes a discursive nature because it sets the limit to all available systems of meaning in a particular moment, making them the only systems that people can use to express their experiences and give them a recognizable expression (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell, 2007).

What sets this approach apart from other interpretations of subject formation is the emphasis on identity construction accomplished in talk. Consequently, positioning is a dynamic process of turn-taking during which subjects sequentially activate discourses and ascribe positions for each other (Davies & Harre, 1990). The interaction has unpredictable twists and turns and an intensified interplay of invoked subjectivities that result in high instability of constructed subjectivities and enacted identities. The sense of Self or suturing of subjectivities occurs through the speaker's investment in some of the available positions and in the interlocutor's response to this articulation. This dialogic meaning-making, in a Bakhtinian sense, complicates how the speaker reiterates initially assumed positions in subsequent utterances (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). Everyday talk, interpreted as turn-by-turn interaction, exposes the dispersion, discontinuity, and realignments of the interactants' discourses and their associated subjectivities, and brings to light their contingency and fragility.

To respond to the ambiguity, ambivalence, and investment in potentially conflicting subject positions, participants in an interaction may avow and disavow the same identities or group memberships. This management of tensions, or what Billig (2006) has called ideological dilemmas, allows people to affirm their investments in contradicting positions without undermining the credibility of the ideal that is in question. This particularly pertains to the moments when conversation produces utterances that may trouble existing positions by shifting the context of the interaction; reinterpreting suggested meanings; exposing contradicting standpoints; failing to ratify interactants' investments in particular identities; or questioning interactants' credibility (Antaki et al., 1996; Wetherell, 1998). These practices result in dispreferred responses—"non-answer or unexpected" answers, which do not affirm

speaker's expectations and align with the social norms that organize ongoing interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 83; Wetherell, 1998). Most often, people offer these responses to assign troubled identities for the participants by making those speaking positions appear out of the ordinary, deviant, racist, prejudiced, discriminatory, amoral, or in any way different than what is perceived to be preferred in a particular context (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005; Tileagă, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005; Wetherell, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The person, who's both a product and producer of the discourses, may untrouble those identities through distancing and re-appropriation of meanings and ascribed positionalities by using common sense knowledge as well as rhetorical and linguistic strategies, such as switching between personal pronouns ("I," "we," and "they") and between modals and declarative formulations. Most importantly, the management of "trouble spots" in conversation perpetuates, rationalize, and naturalize unequal relations of power and discrimination from seemingly uninterested positions of tolerance and rationality (Dixon et al, 1994; Tileagă, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). For instance, discussing the reproduction of extreme prejudice toward Romanies in Romania, Tileagă (2005) noted that this process unfolds in a series of rhetorical steps through which individuals: a) distance themselves from those members of their national group that show prejudice; b) acknowledge and naturalize existence of prejudice outside their group; c) shift the blame for the prejudice to those who are its target; and d) rationalize the prejudiced practices of their group and, implicitly, their own.

In contrast to Hall, who theorized about people's personal investments in subject positions by utilizing Foucault's concept of subjectification and Butler's concept of performativity, discursive psychology focuses on the process of sedimentation, which is a

“history as subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse” (Davies & Harre, 1999, p. 48). Similarly, Wetherell (2007) discussed psycho-discursive practices and identified their function in the constitution of one’s psychological makeup and routines, which then leads to formation of patterned ways of talking in particular contexts. One of the reasons this strand of discursive psychology emphasizes the existence of these repositories of organized and repeated meaning-making practices—which individuals use to respond to familiar and new subject positioning—is to define talk as discursive practice oriented toward action or particular outcome (Davies & Harre, 1990; Potter & Edwards, 1999; Sneijder & te Molder, 2005; Wetherell, 1998). With this, participants in the interaction do not make haphazard choices, but rather make decisions grounded in their recognition of the situation and memory of dealing with the similar position in the past (Wetherell, 1998, 2007). Discursive psychology rejects the idea of individuals having agency to self-regulate their multiple identities. Instead, people make choices as a result of their subject positioning and articulation of these discursively formed subjectivities, meaning that the person makes strategic choices on the spot and in relation to constraints of the context (Wetherell, 1998, 2007; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The accumulation and availability of these resources of potential actions and meanings give subjects autonomy and endow them with more self-reflexivity than either Hall or Foucault indicated in their positions on subjectivity. More importantly, this theoretical framework emphasizes that identity is not fully constituted in discursive struggles, but is also a product of the type and range of individuals’ repertoires. The claim that people are both the products and producers of the discourse, therefore, is not Foucaultian self-constitution, but an “accountability or participants’ orientations to their setting and the emergent conversational

activities” (Wetherell, 1997, p. 401). The position advanced within discursive psychology provides looser links between discourse as a structured field of regulations and the subjectivities produced and enabled within the limitations of such field. Furthermore, the concept of personal orders and repertoires implies that pre-existence of some categories. In that regard, Fairclough (1992) correctly noted that within this strand of discursive psychology “there is tendency for strategic or rhetorical activity of the self in using categories, rules, etc. to be posed as an alternative to the subjection of the self, rather than for the two to be seen in a dialogic synthesis” (p. 25).

In line with the discussion of the concept of discourse, I argue that the discursive production of Self in talk is also a process of subjectification, which should be situated in a larger discursive matrix. The synthesis between discursive psychology and Foucault’s approach to subjectification is crucial for the study of national identities for two reasons. On the one hand, discursive psychology stresses the importance of vernacular or everyday discourses as sites where people avow their national belonging and ascribe those positions of identification for each other, thus regulating in- and out-group memberships. Considering the prominence of diverse forms of online communication that enable groups and individuals to articulate personal viewpoints and engage in non-institutional interactions, this theoretical perspective helps explain how subject positioning occurs in fragmented and multivocal communication (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003; Sneijder & te Molder, 2003). However, one of the limitations of discursive psychology is an emphasis on discursive practices and subjectivities accomplished in talk devoid of explanations of sociocultural practices that precede and pre-condition the talk and influences created by it (Fairclough, 1992; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The case of online communication, namely news commenting, is a

significant sociocultural practice in which the interdependence between social, discursive, and linguistic or textual practices point to the dialogic quality of an online vernacular as a re-articulation and response to institutional discourses. Finally, by incorporating concepts of discursive psychology with Foucault's theory of discourse, I can expand the exploration of national discourses outside the situations in which nation and national identities already exist as discursive categories.

National Identity: Imagined Communities and Group Identities

From the standpoint of discursive psychology, everyday talk is a process of sequential subject positioning in which individuals actively make sense of the world, position themselves in relation to others, and form social relations (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Djerić, 2003; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In this section, I use the concepts of discourse and subjectivity to discuss national identity as a particular form of social relations in which individuals actively construct and express their sense of belongingness and also differentiate themselves from others. I also use this framework to develop the argument that national identity is a site of struggle for defining and (re)inscribing boundaries between groups of people, and to link everyday identity avowals and ascriptions with identity politics in ways that rationalize social hierarchies and marginalization.

Central to this position is to explain the nation as a product of historically situated imagination and interpretation, rather than as an articulation of inner characteristics or origins people have in common with each other. Tracing the historical emergence of nations, Anderson (1983) argued that the expansion of print-capitalism and standardization of written languages created conditions for the formation of large-scale communities that could exist even though their members could not and did not know each other. Members' investment in

and association with a particular nation were forged in the symbolic imagination of the community's boundaries, sovereignty, and relations of deep horizontal comradeship. This, in turn, ensured that nation as an organizing principle of social life outlived the historically specific conditions that gave impetus for its emergence. Rejecting essentialism and universalism, Anderson concluded that nations were not established through discovery (which is not to say that discovery does not have discursive function in the maintenance of imagined communities), but through constant process of cultural imagination.

Imagination is a process of social construction that explains nations' spatial and temporal reach as communities that "loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into limitless future" (Anderson, 1983, p. 11-12). However, conceptualized in such way, imagination does not fully account for discontinuities embedded in the ideological work of national imagination. Addressing the issue, Billig (1995) argued that imagination is necessarily an act of interpretation. The identity of the nation, created through collective histories and imagined homelands, moves the idea of the nation from a mental construct to a discourse and constitutive mode of our thinking about Self and others and of our acting in accordance to those views. Hall, among others, also promoted this theoretical conceptualization when he stated that the "nation-state was never simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation—a 'system of representation'" (1993b, p. 355). From this perspective, Wodak et al. (1999) suggested that imagination is a process of narration—a form of discursive practice that constructs national subjects and is performed by them. National imagination is invoked through the decentralized narration as various social forces and institutions such as education, religion, news media, and the military reproduce knowledge about national community and foster socialization and internalization of

constructed positions of identification. As a result of such dispersion and multi-level narration, national discourses can code all aspects of social life ensuring that national identity connects and monopolizes all other available forms of belonging and thus becomes dominant and often silent framework for thinking about Self and relating to Others (Balibar, 2004).

This translation of imagination into interpretation, narration, and discursive practices highlights the contingency and fragility of national identities. Nation, to use Laclau's words, "has no necessary political belongingness" (cited by Hall, 1993b, p. 355). It has temporary meaning that results from a struggle that reduces ambiguity and invests the term with some meanings by excluding other possibilities, consequently limiting and regulating positions from which subjects can avow their national memberships. Everyday interactions between people are the important sites where this struggle takes place and where people actively use polysemic meanings of community and express their position within it to regulate in- and out-group boundaries (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In the process, individuals exploit the range of options for establishing community (e.g., territory, in-group/out-group relations, type of social relations, race, and ethnicity) and employ linguistic and rhetorical strategies to mark those who naturally belong to it, those who are worthy of inclusion, and those who present a threat to the community's well-being (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005).

The maintenance of these dominant but also arbitrary, persistently challenged, and destabilized meanings of national identities and boundaries brings up a question of politics or the "style in which they [nations] are imagined" in all aspects of social life (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). Whether it is activated through institutional or vernacular discourses, the politics of national imagination consists of two distinctive, but interrelated discursive practices. On the

one hand, nation emerges in contrast to other similar formations and through the construction of internal homogeneity (Billig, 1995; De Cella, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999; Hall, 1996b; Wodak et al., 1999). While occurring simultaneously, these practices of homogenization and differentiation do not always produce complementary and symbiotic effects. For example, the ongoing European regionalization with its resulting tensions between supra-national and national identifications shows that construction of uniqueness and sameness creates ambivalence and liminal spaces for those nations that are on the margins of normative Europe (e.g., South East Europe, The Balkans, postsocialist regimes) (Bjelić, 2002; Hall, 1993b; Herzfeld, 2004; Kiossev, 2002). Second, national imagination also depends on compression of time and its manifestation in the form of collective memory and history as a way to communicate and secure a perception of stability and continuity (Billig, 1995; de Cella et al., 1999; Djerić, 2009; Wodak et al., 1999).

In both instances, these discursive practices classify, select, standardize, and organize our knowledge about the nation into the systems of representations about collective national belonging (Hall, 1993b; de Cella et al., 1999; Wodak et al., 1999). Constituted and circulated as a collection of objectified markers of collective sameness, difference, and continuity, these systems inscribe and limit the range of positions from which individuals can identify with the imagined community. More precisely, drawing upon this repertoire that includes common history (namable origin and anticipation of the future), common culture, common territory or symbolic space (e.g., imaginary homeland) and national character, people invest themselves in national discourse and use it to establish and define relations with others based on a assessment of whether they lack these commonalities.

Importantly, these unquestionable anchors of collective sameness ensure that the nation always remains an object of a subject's knowledge. Nation, as a self-evident fact, becomes "a medium in which its own premises and presuppositions are being rendered invisible by its apparent transparency" (Hall, 1977, p. 326). Capturing this (in)visible presence, Billig (1995) coined the term banal nationalism to indicate both the repository of common assumptions about a particular nation as well as the everyday practices that employ this repository to mark the nation's existence. A nation is "flagged unflaggingly" in the acts of forgetting and remembering because of the institutionalization of national language, collective history, currency, flag, and linguistic diexis that are supported through various social institutions. The concept of banal nationalism points to two important characteristics of the national discourses.

First, it highlights that a national community cannot be produced only through institutional, formulaic, and top-down narration. This official national imagination also needs to be legitimized, reproduced, and transformed on a day-to-day basis through practical othering, mundane activities, and everyday routines in which people express their own, intimate knowledge of national repertoires for the purpose of social action (Herzfeld, 2004). Second, banal nationalism suggests that a way of marking nationalism that aims to create religiously, culturally, racially or ethically "pure" formations as violent and extreme is also a reproduction of a "normal" nation that functions as a silent norm, based upon which deviant forms can be constructed and evaluated. Furthermore, the discussion about "good" and "bad" nationalism diverts attention from institutional and spontaneous structural violence that produces symbolic and material borders, rationalizes essentializing and exclusionary practices, and regulates access to resources, rights, and freedoms (Balibar, 2004).

Naturalized and reproduced through banal nationalism and reinforced by the institutions and policies that regulate the organization and distribution of a territory and its resources, national identification functions as a profound symbolic and material signifier of one's position in society (Hall, 1993b, 1996b; Wodak et al., 1999). Furthermore, the projection of the local and individual onto dominant national subjectivities leads not only to rationalization of marginalization and prejudice toward those perceived as minorities or outsiders, but also to very concrete control of access to privilege and resources (Tileagă, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This is especially the case when markers of national belonging such as ethnicity, religion, knowledge of national history, and language become conditions for supporting, granting, limiting, and denying the political, social, and human rights of individuals. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, for instance, inscription of an imagined national culture in official state documents served as a justification for bureaucratic discrimination of minorities as well as for violent inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts in the 1990s (Hayden, 1996; Mostov, 1994; Wilmer, 1997). In these and similar situations, inter-group intolerance is often interpreted as an issue of citizenship, thus creating a legally warranted argument for exclusion, discrimination, and forceful assimilation of those perceived as different from "us" (Hall, 1993b; Verkuyten, 2005).

Discussing the question of citizenship and identification with a national community, Condor and Gibson (2007) argued that the scholarly coupling of the two forms of collective belonging—common particularly in the study of nationalism—is problematic. Their analysis of the vernacular discourses of citizenship in England shows that people tend to view their legal and cultural memberships in the national community as two separate and often unrelated forms of group belonging. By emphasizing this differentiation between the

identification with the state (legal) and identification with the nation (cultural), Condor and Gibson (2007) contributed to one of the main debates in contemporary discussions about the relevance of national identities in the age of globalization, a debate that focuses on the question of whether the discursive link between state and nation is still warranted.

The increased flow of international capital across and within national borders, transnational migrations, and the development of technology are just some of the forces of globalization that fracture discourses of nation-state and their power to constitute national subjects. Speaking of those disjunctures, Appadurai (1999) observed that “states throughout the world are under a siege” (p. 228), forced to open themselves to the global flows of capital that in turn endanger state control over the constitution of subjects within its borders. As Balibar (2004) argued, these rupturing forces enable disarticulations of the citizenship regimes from territorial sovereignty, and national memberships create new opportunities for democratization of society and existing borders. The opportunities are particularly relevant for the ongoing European unification and emergent category of European citizen, which can also lead to the establishment of the “citizenship of residence in Europe” as a democratic redefinition of the active citizenship based on the rights of residency and labor (p. 43). However, the politics of the EU integration, and related identification of non-member states, undermines the project of inclusion by recycling an orientalist imaginative geography and producing new forms of mass exclusion (Balibar, 2004; Graan, 2010). Often, this involves identification of citizens of non-member states as European’ Others, limitations of their access to the EU labor market and residency, and surveillance of their cross-border movements.

In addition, the EU project complicates the maintenance of state sovereignty among the countries invested in the integration process, since fulfillment of each procedural step toward full accession exposes the subjects of these states to the network of transnational policies. To respond to these challenges, these states often create new policies that regulate bodies and disciplinary mechanisms that affirm the state's discretionary right to define, manage, and certify its own populations. Immigration, emigration, and international travel are activities that are especially susceptible to this type of structural control. This is because cross-border movements are not only acts through which individuals perform dominant identity politics (Greenberg, 2011), but they are also movements that put border crossers at the mercy of disciplinary practices that are routinely performed at the border checkpoints (O'Byrne, 2001; Salter, 2006, 2008). Salter (2008) argued that a country's borders are permanent states of exception: on these borders, every traveler is at the threshold of law and thus subjected to the state's exclusive and discretionary right to define its population by granting or denying travelers access to the state territory.

The 2009 visa liberalization in Serbia illustrates how states of exception can be displaced from the administrative and inter-state borders. More precisely, the event produced several situations, or according to Salter (2008) "moments of examination," in which the Serbian government could identify and discipline its subjects despite the fact that the conditions for the relaxation of the visa regime have undermined these prerogatives. For instance, placing Serbia on the White Schengen list required that all citizens had to apply for new biometric passports that both establish a legal relationship between individuals and the state, and also materialize the government's discretionary right to decide who can travel and be protected by the state (O'Byrne, 2001; Salter, 2008). Furthermore, the EU decision not to

grant visa liberalization to Serbian citizens who, at the time, were residing in Kosovo resulted in passport fraud. This gave the government an opportunity to extend its power and limit a person's movement and access to citizenship rights based on an assessment of whether citizens have told the truth about their residence within the state territory. Finally, in 2011, state officials announced the start of more rigorous control of border crossing in order to manage an increasing number of asylum seekers in and from Serbia to the EU. Interestingly, the measures granted the government the power to deny individuals the right to leave the country if the state determines that a person's intent is to seek asylum, immigrate, or work illegally in the EU.

The same re-configurations are evident in the national discourses, whose diminished power to secure dominant means of identification are perhaps most visibly unfolding in the online environment, where virtual communities and digital diasporas enable alternative re-imaginings of the nation (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Saunders, 2011). Saunders (2011) argued that increased possibilities for forming virtual communities and connecting with people based on interests rather than geographical location make it possible for individuals to form collective identities based on their exclusion from and marginalization within a dominant national imagination. Furthermore, these virtual discursive practices are not only evidence of the possibility for rearticulating a preferred image of the nation and challenging institutional discourse, but also for redefining the grounds upon which the nation should be established (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Saunders, 2011; Singer, 2009).

The interaction between global complexities and national discourses demonstrates that the modern nation-state may no longer be as powerful as a model form for organizing social life. However, transnational flows of people, technology, and capital do not erase

power relations that were historically inscribed in national mapping. While these dislocations and fractures problematize the constitution of state subjects based on the principle of territorial sovereignty, they do not seem to undermine national identities as a particular form of social relations. Instead, weakening of the hyphen in nation-state and its reconfiguration leads to delocalization and deterritorialization of the national imagination and its overflow across existing borders (Appadurai, 1999). Consequently, global movements and the ambiguities they create allow for the nation to emerge as an imaginary point of return to forgotten or denied roots (Billig, 1995; Hall, 1996b); as a resolution of ambivalence or source of resistance (Kim, 2011; Kostovicova, 2004); as an expression of primordial belonging and deep comradeship (Appadurai, 1999; Hall, 1993b); and as a means for further intra-group differentiations and relocations of “the ‘essence’ of otherness” (Bakić-Hayden, 1995, p. 930). In a context where state borders and territory are not sufficiently inclusive elements of state citizenship due to prolonged and massive citizens’ immigrations, national belonging becomes the major means for constituting state subjects through ethnification and post-territorialization of citizenship regimes (Hayden, 1996; Vasiljević, 2011b).

At the heart of these arguments is the position that dislocations and fragmentations in universalizing discourses are not evidence of the disappearance of the differences upon which these discourses are established and normalized. Instead, dislocations and ruptures are constitutive of new differences, reconfigurations, and restaging of new and old differences within the complexities of globalization, leaving the state—and I argue the nation—still relevant “in our very imagination of what society is” (Hensen & Stepputat, 2001, p. 2; Shome & Hedge, 2002).

This reframing of the role of nation means that institutional interpretation of imagined communities still plays a constitutive role in formation of collective identities. However, treating elements of national discourse as preexisting categories limits the inquiry and neglects other ways by which individuals are made into national subjects through global processes (Shome & Hedge, 2002). Examination of identity politics encoded in the structures and institutions of the state and civil society reveals reproduction of the national discourses and identifications “at the intersection of different modes of belonging, entitlement, action, and politics” (Greenberg, 2006b, p. 336).

Building on these arguments, I conclude that construction of national identities is not only a struggle to defend and justify the existence of specific nationhood. Rather, it is a struggle to secure a specific style in which nation is imagined and also to legitimize political, cultural, and territorial boundaries between groups of people. For the rest of this chapter, I focus on several elements of the national repertoire that are both implicated in the institutionally supported national imagination and produced in individuals’ negotiation of their ambivalent and contradicting positions in the social hierarchy. I limit my discussion to national character, collective memory, and national territory, which are also three dominant categories in Serbian national discourse (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bjelić, 2002; Djerić, 2003, 2009; Ejđus, 2008; Kostovicova, 2004). I also acknowledge that my selection does not exhaust all discursive practices that mark the nation in everyday interactions (for a more extensive list see Billig, 1995; Wodak et al., 1999).

Serbian National Discourse: National Character, Collective Memory, and Territory

National identity is relational since it emerges in differentiation from the Other. However, as a means of collective identification, national subjectivities also enable people to

see themselves as members of particular groups. Therefore, discursive practices that buttress the national imagination stress “sameness, uniqueness, and inclusion” as well as “heteronomy, exclusion, fragmentation, discontinuity” (Colombo & Senatore, 2005, p. 59; de Cella et al., 1999). One of the effects of the deployment of these practices in talk is the constitution of a unitary expression of the “mentality, character, and behavioral dispositions” of the members of the national group (de Cella et al., 1999, p. 190).

As a means of accomplishing internal homogenization, group characterization suggests a set of criteria based on which individuals can establish their positions within a national group and evaluate and determine the positions of other members. In both instances, individuals invoke this discursive category to give meanings to their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion and to rationalize their investments in troubled identities by shifting blame, responsibility, and accountability to a group. Furthermore, the normative dimension of national character makes it a restrictive discursive category that regulates in- and out-group memberships. Specifically, national character marks some groups and individuals as strangers regardless of their legal status and determines the extent and mode of their symbolic identification with the national group.

Verkuyten (2005) noted that this type of positioning is important to discourses on immigration. Naturalized and taken-for-granted national character is a main referent for understanding what it means to be an immigrant. People’s understanding of preferred behaviors associated with that position in turn leads them to differentiate between desirable and threatening immigrants. National character also has implications for redistribution of responsibility for successful assimilation, acceptance, and incorporation of immigrants in national community to the immigrants themselves and their ability to become national

subjects in ways prescribed by the dominant national discourse. However, the performance of proper normative behaviors often results in immigrants' continuous marginalization and exclusion from national body (Wodak, 2008). Even after gaining legal and symbolic access to national community, these "strangers" continue to signify racial, cultural, or ethnic difference. Consequently, their inability to embody or enact discursively constructed national character marks them as internal outsiders whose actions and participation in the national imagination perpetuate their disadvantaged positions in the social hierarchy (Tileagă, 2005).

Aside from regulating the permeability of the boundaries, national character also serves as a means for establishing, negotiating, and rationalizing a group's position in relation to other similar imagined communities. For instance, Djerić (2003) has noted that personal internalization and validation of the stereotypical representations of a group's essence enables resolution or management of undesirable national identities. These problematic positions emerge when characterizations advanced by other groups in some way complicate characterizations communicated through national and state institutions such as the education system, government, and the media. In those instances, vernacular narration of the national character relies on cultural intimacy as intimate knowledge of those aspects of collective identities that are the source of externally assigned stigma or negative stereotypes (Herzfeld, 2004, p. 20). Most important, this knowledge and experience of discomfort caused by such self-recognition are the sites where individuals develop feelings of collective belonging and connection with those who presumably share the same experiences. Cultural intimacy emerges through vernacular discourses about the national belonging, highlights feelings of communal solidarity, and promotes self-debasement, irony, and essentialization as meaningful strategies for negotiating negative external significations of Self. This

articulation of collective identities by individuals also allows for the re-configuration of stereotypes for the purpose of social action. Consequently, when cultural intimacy interacts with the institutional national imagination, people often experience disemia or tension between the ambivalent, flexible, and fragmented self-recognition grounded in the intimate experiences of everyday life, and formalized official representations of national belonging (Herzfeld, 2004, p. 34).

This type of tension between external and internal self-images is particularly relevant for the study of Serbian national discourse, considering that Serbia is located both territorially and culturally between East and West (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bjelić, 2002; Herzfeld, 2004; Kiossev, 2002; Todorova, 2006). The ambiguities resulting from this liminal location as well as from numerous migrations and reterritorializations have historically posed difficulty for sustaining and legitimizing universal means for Serbia's national identification. As a result, national discourses often adopt and negotiate externally constructed images as reference points for securing the stability of the categories that construct national character and for managing stigmatized identities (Graan, 2010; Herzfeld, 2004). Bjelić (2002) and Kiossev (2002) argued that in the case of Serbia and most of the countries on the Balkan Peninsula, this character results from incorporating and appropriating a metaphor of the Balkan region built on stereotypes about innate barbarism and the "blood thirst" of the people who inhabit this part of Europe.

In an analysis of everyday Serbian discourse, Djerić's (2003) showed that this external stigmatization creates a need for a construction of ideal national character. This normative marker of national identification prescribes means of overcoming experienced ambivalence and difficulties in avowing national belonging. More precisely, individuals

recognize their group's failure to perform the ideal characteristics as an explanation and validation of the externally imposed stereotypes. At the same time, their knowledge of the ideal character means that current and undesirable positions are unnatural, flawed, and in need of reconstruction.

Collective history allows for an articulation of the national character that conveys the continuity, completeness, uniqueness, and integrity of a particular national group (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; de Cillia et al., 1999; Norval, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Through linguistic and visual references to important events, national success, heroism, exceptionality, and past individual experiences, collective history maps the development of a national spirit through time and space. The existence, pervasiveness, naturalization, and widespread circulation of these narratives and images suggest that collective history consists of repertoires of markers of collective homogeneity (Cioroianu, 2002; Djerić, 2003, 2009; Di Lellio, 2009; Ejodus, 2007; Norval, 2001; Wilmer, 1997). The employment of these markers in vernacular and institutional discourses conceals discursive struggles embedded in national positioning and replaces them with stories about the nation's destiny, essence, naturalness, progress, and inevitability. Djerić (2009, 2010) called this process the "politics of remembering" to indicate that collective history is representation and reconstruction of the past used as a discursive means for validating preferred and existing social orders.

Narration of collective history secures temporal continuity and legitimacy for the dominant national imagination and, therefore, it serves as a discursive mechanism that draws political, cultural, and territorial boundaries between different imagined communities. In other words, my arguments suggest that the politics of naming the national past are also identity politics. More precisely, forgetting and remembering through collective history

carves out positions from which national subjects can speak and negotiate their relations with the nation-state and other people (Billig, 1995; Djerić, 2009; Norval, 2001). Jansen (1999), for example, noted that one of the reasons for the collapse of Yugoslavia and the civil wars that ensued was the emergence of contradicting collective memories of the traumas experienced during the Second World War. Although initially suppressed within the discourse of reconciliation that legitimized the Titoist regime, these representations eventually became the basis for development of contradicting national imaginations that people and state governments could use to justify antagonistic relations between ethnic groups.

Collective history constitutes a discursive repertoire of taken-for-granted and selective representations of past experiences; yet, its materialization in vernacular and institutional discourses tries to fix the meaning of the present in relation to the direction of nation's future. In that regard, narration of the past becomes a site of contestation between groups and individuals over who have the authority to interpret and control the nation's future and their positions in the social hierarchy (Greenberg, 2006b; Hall, 1993b; Norval, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Norval (2001) argued that this struggle involves the strategic creation of archival records, renaming and rationalization of past events, and acknowledgment of the existence of diverse and conflicting accounts of those events. In her explanation of the interplay of these practices in post-apartheid South Africa, Norval noted that collective remembering is a double signification that includes remembering what "already reminds us of the incompleteness of our present; and a remembrance of something, of a discourse of closure" (p. 192).

Wetherell and Potter (1992) also acknowledged that the articulation of national imagination through institutional and public memory advances both the view of the present as a transitional phase and also a view of future as a radical break with the undesirable past. They conclude that this dual character of collective remembering that suggests both continuity and discontinuity of history have an important role in the formation of identities because they enable individuals to: (a) negotiate ideological dilemmas in relation to their collective identities; (b) avow preferred group memberships; and (c) ascribe positions of exclusion to those seen as different and undesirable Others (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This process, more importantly, enables reconstruction of national subjectivities in the fractures of national discourse, and it plays an essential role in the struggles for defining and defending “essentialist, identitarian, homogenous, and nonpluralistic conception of nationhood” (Norval, 2001, p. 189).

Aside from representing the past, collective history also defines national belonging through its spatial dimension by documenting the changes to the national territory over time (Halbwachs, 1950; Kostovicova, 2002). Produced and legitimized through discursive practices, this mapping of physical boundaries using collective histories and defining national subjectivities in terms of their spatiality allows individuals and groups to manage their national self-images (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Cioroianu, 2002). Therefore, this repository of visual and linguistic descriptions of the past and present geographical location of imagined communities is an important resource for social action (Cioroianu, 2002, Kostovicova, 2004; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000).

Dixon and Durrheim (2000) recognized the discursive character of geographical locations and used it to define place-identity as “a collective construction, produced and

modified through human dialogue, that allows people to make sense of their locatedness” (p. 40). The major premise of their argument is that place is never an apolitical dimension of national imagination. Instead, national place is the stake of discursive struggle that aims to link and dissociate a national group from the places of others and from the discourses through which those places are constructed (Cioroianu, 2002; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). As this approach to national territory suggests, place-identity is not an articulation of one’s phenomenological attachment to particular places and geographical locations, but more importantly it is the location of that person in the web of power relations (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). Bakić-Hayden (1995) linked power and space with the term “nested Orientalism” to describe the discursive practice of ascribing the essence of otherness to different groups, based on their geographical position and distance to Western Europe, which is viewed as the preferred center. Situating the construction of this hierarchy in the national imaginations located in the Balkan Peninsula, Bakić-Hayden noted that this spatial dimension of national identities ensures that even those positioned as Other by dominant European discourses have, in turn, their own, more eastern and southern Others.

Halbwachs (1950, 1980) also noted that collective memory is anchored and contained in spatial images, whose stability “gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and of retrieving the past in the present” (p. 157). This specifically occurs when historical narratives invoke and validate the myths of imaginary homelands and the nation’s founding event, and position them as uncontested points of reference for construction of national sameness and differences. Following Stuart Hall, the reproduction of these myths in collective histories suggests imaginary points of return to origins that “recast cultural identity as an unfolding essence, moving apparently without change, from past to future” (1993b, p.

356). These myths identify the origins of the group and the origin of one's identity, which ensure that the discursive reach of national imagination is not confined to the space within national boundaries. As a discursive category, the imaginary homeland, for example, serves as a marker of collective identification in situations where a nationalistic group lacks a stable and unified national space due to continuous reterritorializations, migrations, and displacements of the national subjects (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Ejdus, 2008; Kostovicova, 2004; Ristić, 2007; Willmer, 1997). Willmer (1997) explained this situation by noting that, during the civil wars in the 1990s, Serbian political elites, the education system, and the popular mass media successfully invoked and legitimized images of Greater Serbia as Serbia's imaginary homeland and consequently mobilized public support for military conflict.

The organization of the national territory and its external boundaries as well as the permeability, restrictiveness, and changeability of those boundaries are means for controlling in- and out-group memberships; yet, they are contested and unstable categories whose meanings are the desired outcomes of national imagination. As Cioroianu (2002) argued, the discursive practices that temporally fix these meanings are also major mechanisms through which the position of the nation is negotiated in relation to other imagined communities. The process involves identification of cultural, political, and economic centers and peripheries upon which individuals can make sense of their troubled and untroubled national identities. In the case of Romanian national history for example, Cioroianu (2002) noted that one of the major purposes of the contemporary narration of this history is to symbolically relocate Romania outside the Balkans and, therefore, to dissociate this imagined community from the stigmatizing discourse that positions inhabitants of this region as European Others.

These strategies for negotiating and re-appropriating unfavorable and externally imposed stereotypes have particular importance for the imagined communities that are located on the margins of what is seen as European “proper.” Kostovicova (2004) noted that national elites often exploit these liminal positions to legitimize preferred forms of national imagination, which in the case of Serbia meant reinforcement of a modernizing view of the nation-state in the context of EU integration. By reworking the representation of European integration in a way that could signify a return to European roots, danger for the nation’s sovereignty, and the reorganization of the institutions of the civil society, political elites successfully appropriated Milošević’s discourses grounded in fear of territorial disintegration as one of the premises for constructing Serbian identity in terms of its spatiality (Kostovicova, 2004).

Thus, national character, collective history, and national territory are three markers of collective identification that historically played important roles in the Serbian national imagination (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bjelić, 2002; De Lellio, 2009; Ejodus, 2008; Kiossev, 2002; Willmer, 1997). In this dissertation research, I discuss these constructs for the purpose of mapping national repertoires, identifying their employment in everyday expressions of national belonging, and add a more nuanced analysis of Serbia’s symbolic, territorial, and political positions in the context of ongoing European unification. In addition, reconceptualization of these three categories in terms of identity politics enables critical exploration of the character of national imagination in online media environments. Some scholars argued that online technologies radicalize concepts of place, distance, and time and therefore the means by which collective identities can be formed (McDorman, 2001; Palczewski, 2001; Saunders, 2011). However, the arguments I present in this section indicate

that these dimensions are political in nature: their meanings and intersections are determined through discursive practices and contestations, which in turn suggests that they will most likely be reproduced as significant reference points for the construction of collective sameness and difference, even in online forms of communication.

The existing body of literature on user-generated content, virtual communities and public spheres, and individual's interactivity and participation in online discourses does not always support this position. This is in part due to a dominant assumption that online technologies enable their users to exercise greater agency and consequently resist institutional knowledge production. In the next chapter, I review this scholarship, especially in relation to online news media, and discuss its underlying premises. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) and Palczewski (2001) suggested that the distinctiveness of the online environment calls for rethinking of the common ways in which we explain and define fundamental concepts and relations among the elements of this communication context. Taking up this task, I argue that the concepts of discourse and subject positions, as developed within cultural studies and critical theory, can advance current theorizing about news media by problematizing taken-for-granted concepts of users' agency and resistance. Furthermore, a discursive lens helps me explain interactions between journalists and their audience in online environment and define news commenting as an act of dialogic co-construction of national imagination among all participants in online news discourse.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The purpose of this dissertation is to explain the role online environment has in activation, construction, and individuals' enactments of national identities. It is in such contexts of everyday conversations that people form a sense of Self by positioning themselves in relation to others, negotiating the meanings of the community they are part of, and establishing in- and out-group memberships. In this process, these individuals often rely on the dominant systems of meanings about national belonging that are circulated, mediated, and configured through institutional discourses (Billig, 1995; de Cillia et al., 1999; Hall, 1996b; Willmer, 1997). In this study, I build upon these ideas to examine how online news producers and audiences contribute to the construction of national imagination. More precisely, I analyze online news media as symbolic and material spaces where institutional and everyday discourses interact and affect each other. In this literature review, I first discuss the relevance of news media for the formation and circulation of national discourses. Then, I review relevant literature on online news media and discuss how discursive approaches to this subject illuminate the dialogic relationship between journalists and their audiences.

Relationship between News Media and Nation-State

News media continue to be intimately involved in the formation and interpretation of nations, mainly because news media are socially recognized and legitimized institutions that exercise an authority in the production, validation, and distribution of representations of reality (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Saunders, 2011). In his historical analysis, Anderson (1983) has noted that the national community and news media have been each other's projects since the 18th century when the development of the print industry, in need for market

consolidations and mass audiences, prompted the formation of the first nation-like imagined communities. At the same time, the news media became instrumental in the activation of the collective imagination thanks to their ability to symbolically bridge territorial distances between people and create relations of deep horizontal comradeship. As Brookes (1999) explained, consumption of news media is a ritual involving “simultaneous consumption of the same newspaper by a group of individuals defined within finite boundaries” that constitute collective experience (p. 249). In addition, mobility and availability of other media technologies, such as television, meant that media consumption and, therefore, national imagination could shape public discourses and become inextricable elements of everyday life. Finally, news media invoke collective consciousness through stories that create symbolic space where the construction, contestation, and affirmation of collective identification can take place. In the crafting of stories, journalists employ diverse linguistic and rhetorical strategies that create and differentiate “us” from “them,” map and describe nations, frame a range of topics of national interest, mediate collective culture, and identify and legitimize those who can speak on behalf of the group (Billig, 1995; Brookes, 1999; Hall, 1996b).

This power to construct, validate, and distribute categories of group identification makes every aspect of news media discourse a potential catalyst for national imagination. Social and political elites, who recognize these possibilities, often seek control over media through legislation and funding as a way to ensure that mediated contents reinforce a sense of collective belongings (Polonska-Kimunguyi & Kimunguyi, 2011; Schlesinger, 1994; Spinelli, 2000). Boddy (2004) argued that this type of control also applies to technological innovations, which are powerful markers of national consciousness and often used to

demonstrate the superiority and uniqueness of nations that link innovations to ideals of progress, prosperity, and democracy.

As one of the institutional backbones of national imagination, news media are profoundly affected by global movements that complicate their continuous and centralized production of positions of collective identifications. Furthermore, the development of online technologies poses additional challenges to news media that are struggling to legitimize their authority in the production of the knowledge necessary for national imagination (Saunders, 2011; Singer, 2009). As scholars have suggested, specific characteristics of the online environment—horizontal and many-to-many communication—blur the lines between producers and consumers in ways that endow audiences with an authority to decide what counts as relevant knowledge (Deuze, 2006; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Singer, 2007; van Dijck, 2009).

As Saunders (2011) suggested, this shift creates possibilities for the public to construct fluid and alternative means of collective belonging and to transform dominant national discourses in virtual communities and online public spheres. In particular, the development of the online contexts of communication and its connection with the ideals of local and global communities, equality, and dissolution of master narratives and authorities fostered a renewed interest in the concept of the public sphere (Dahlberg, 1998, 2007; Deuze et al., 2007; Palczewski, 2001; Papacharissi, 2009; Singer, 2007; Witschge, 2008). The idea of an online public sphere gains importance especially when the public sphere is viewed as a major means of audience participation in media discourses and as a tool for challenging the journalists' agenda (Singer, 2009), or when the public sphere becomes a space for civic discussion in authoritarian regimes (Zhou, Chan, & Peng, 2008). The visibility and

prominence of online public discussions create a new responsibility for journalists, who are pressured to engage in a more egalitarian dialogue with their sources and audiences and, thus, to establish a much-needed link between the public sphere and social institutions. However, scholars also questioned whether online contexts of communication could produce a democratic society and emancipation from institutional power structures. This is especially the case when these scholars note that the digital divide, individualization, domination of personal interests, and structural limitations of open debate also undermine the establishment of a truly participatory online public sphere or similar forms of public forums (Dahlberg, 1998, 2004; Chae, 2005; Papacharissi, 2009; Singer, 2009; Zhou et al., 2008).

Despite new media exigencies that suggest the primacy of decoding or audience's interpretation of media texts, I argue that news media are still relevant producers and mediators of the national discourses even when their influence is no longer exclusively a top-down process. I use the critical concepts of discourse and subjectivity to define online news media as hybrid discourses that emerge through interdependent interactions between institutional and vernacular discourses as well as through co-construction of meanings between journalists and audiences. To develop this argument, I first briefly review scholarly literature that focuses on the character of the interactions between news media and their audiences, and then explain how online news media can be defined as a discourse that embeds and appropriates change for its own reproduction.

Audience Activity and the Relationship with Media

The research on online news media became prevalent in the last decade because the transition from print and broadcast to online modes of news production and consumption captured the minds of media professionals and scholars. This body of work exemplifies a

high degree of diversity in terms of theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, a close examination of research studies, their theoretical assumptions, and research questions also indicates the emergence of a particular research canon based upon the premise that the online media environment allows for a new relationship between consumption and production of information (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009).

Initially, Hall (2001) defined the relationship between news production and consumption as a relationship that aims to establish equivalence between encoding and decoding of messages. To achieve this symmetry, journalists relied on professional codes such as institutionalized patterns, standards, routines, and norms, and used them to organize information and regulate rules of interpretation. In relation to online news media and the emergence of user-generated contents, this approach addressed how the reproduction and validation of journalistic authority in the online environment accomplishes equivalence in encoding and decoding.

Drawing on Hall's encoding/decoding model, audience reception studies have focused on user-generated content (Singer 2009; Ye & Li 2006; Zhou et al., 2008); audience accessibility to the means of news production (Domingo et al., 2008); alternative news forms such as those produced through civic journalism and blogging (Thurman, 2008); and the emerging tensions between journalists and audiences (Paulssen & Ugille, 2008). What these studies have in common is the emphasis on the two-way, many-to-many, horizontal, and polyvocal character of online interactions, and the premise that audiences can act both as consumers and producers of information. However, many scholars have argued that the possibility of shifting between these two roles does not erase the division between

journalistic elites and the public; instead, the online environment makes this division more pronounced. For example, even when members of the public become civic journalists, they still perform those roles as outsiders who do not have the same seal of approval that professional journalists attain through training and performance of their institutional identities (Paulssen & Ugille, 2008; Singer & Ashman, 2009).

Despite the reproduction of this hierarchy, audiences actively challenge media dominance by using online technologies to access tools and privileges associated with the journalistic profession. As they mimic journalistic practices and utilize the same resources and authority claims that endow media discourse with truthfulness and credibility, the members of the audience produce parallel, alternative, and even opposing knowledge claims (Singer 2009; Thurman, 2008; Ye & Li 2006; Zhou et al., 2008). This redistribution of power located in the audience's control of the means of production calls into question the ability of the news media to justify their privileged status in the social production of knowledge (Domingo et al., 2008; Singer, 2009).

A central idea in this scholarship is the presumed existence of individual agency in audience members' ability to make conscious choices and articulate these choices independently from the influence of news media. Singer's (2009) content analysis of readers' online news comments showed that participants in online commenting developed conversations unrelated to the initial news story, which, as she argued, is evidence of their imperviousness to the news agenda. Aside from positioning the individual as the agent, these studies also view power as a negative hierarchical relationship of influence that changes when audiences have access to the means of news production. In their study of online news media in eight countries, Domingo et al. (2008) noted that journalists maintain their power by

both producing the news and by managing online discussion. With the application of content analysis, these authors discovered that audiences still have subordinate roles since they do not have full access to all five phases of news production (access and observation, selecting/filtering, processing/editing, distribution and interpretation).

As these studies show, scholarship about online news media has suggested that interactions between the journalists' encoding and the audience's decoding in the online environment are unpredictable and antagonistic in nature. This observation further implies that these two sites of knowledge production although interrelated, may also be independent from each other (Chae, 2005; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Singer, 2009; Ye & Li, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008). One of the main premises of these scholarly observations is that two-way, horizontal, asynchronous, and delayed communications—possible with development of online technologies—enable audience members to act both as consumers and producers of information. Furthermore, the ability to perform dual roles is interpreted as manifestations of agency that audiences exercise by engaging in commenting and sharing of information on news websites. In the process, they become major destabilizing forces that compete with and endanger journalists' claims of authority in representing reality (Domingo et al., 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2007; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Singer, 2009; van Dijck, 2009).

Discursive Approaches to Online News Media

Scholarly research on the gaps between encoding and decoding posits that the relationship between journalists and their audiences in the online environment crates a tension between two or more forms of communication. Furthermore, scholars have advanced the idea that antagonistic interactions between online users and news media point to a re-

distribution of power that undermines, controls, or replaces centers of power in the name of either more democratic or autocratic news media (Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008). However, because of the assumption that journalists and audiences enter online exchanges of information as objective and pre-constituted entities, this scholarship does not equate shifting of the roles with the shifting of identities: when non-professionals use journalistic tools they are still acting as the members of the audience, a group that is subordinated to journalistic elites. Therefore, seen as inherently non-institutional, these audience appropriations of institutional norms and resources become means for challenging dominant orders.

In contrast, Burgess (2006) argued that non-professionals possess the means to speak does not automatically mean a change or democratization of institutional frameworks, and that believing otherwise serves as a diversion from the critical question of “who is heard, and to what end” (p. 204). The common assumption that the online environment empowers audiences to resist and deconstruct existing discourses does not account for the productive and dispersed power relations that reproduce existing hierarchies and create new sources of authority (Bowers et al., 2004, p. 235; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Foucault, 1972). As Bowers, Mayers, and Babbili (2004) explained, this type of power dynamic remains undertheorized even though all subjects of news media discourse consensually subject themselves to these hierarchies.

Discursive approaches to news media address this issue by viewing the relationship between journalists and audiences as relentless power struggles over the authority to set and validate parameters of production, consumption, and distribution of knowledge (Hall, 1977, 1983). Building upon Hall’s theorizations, discursive approaches to news media use encoding and decoding to analyze “a series of discontinuities and ruptures which are

interwoven together, by signifying practices around the sites of social identity and subjective power” (Grossberg, 1984, p. 410). The premise of this conceptualization is that audience members do not speak, but are spoken to through signifying practices that construct their positions within media discourses and invest them with preferred meanings and power relations (Grossberg, 1984; Hall, 1983; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In contrast to the position presented earlier, discursive approaches reject the idea that audience involvement in online news media are acts of socially, culturally, and psychologically pre-constituted individuals. Instead, audiences are positioned and constituted in their relation to media texts and journalists’ points of view (Livingstone, 1998).

The existence of professional codes allows news media to validate their constructed accounts of reality and reduce the potential for negotiated and oppositional interpretations. Critical studies of news media have identified these codes as routinized strategies for collecting, selecting, organizing and editing material, and asked how reproduction of recognizable forms of narration such as the inverted pyramid affects decoding practices (Bowers et al., 2004; Ekstrom, 2002; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; van Dijk, 1985, 1986, 2004). The ideological effects of professional codes exist in the practices that journalists use to define their audiences. Williams (2010) discussed the ideological underpinnings of these institutional strategies for managing and positioning audiences, pointing out that there is no mass audience only a representation of people as masses. Smythe (2006) further argued that professional codes transform the audiences into commodities that news media can sell to the advertisers. For Sumpeter (2000), news media position audiences as imaginary interlocutors (Sumpeter, 2000) and socialize them into journalistic ideology. Along these lines, Lowrey

(2009) viewed the ideological effect in the ways journalists manage their online audiences and incorporate online technologies into their professional routines.

However, one of the limitations of research on the institutional positioning of the audiences is its limited attention to the qualities of online interactions that in many ways complicate top-bottom reproduction of news discourses. The productive activities of online news audiences and inclusion in news production result in new dynamics even though the type of audience participation is defined by institutional discourse. Publically available user-generated contents transform online news media into virtual spaces where individuals constantly traverse lines between private and public and institutional and non-institutional modes of communication (Matheson, 2004b; Papacharissi, 2002). Burgess (2006) called these crossings instances of “vernacular creativity” to indicate moments when non-professionals use available institutional resources to translate everyday communicative practices into public discourse (p. 206-207).

In the case of online news media, the use of online technologies often creates unstructured, delayed, and fragmented accounts of reality that disrupt the linearity and coherency of news narratives. The visibility of these horizontal (communication between audience members), vertical (communication between journalists-audience), and many-to-many interactions challenge the differentiation between institutionally assigned roles. In turn, this movement across different positions allows for the formation of multiple and potentially contradicting relations among audiences and journalists’ texts. As Matheson (2004a) argued, these shifting positions both challenge and reproduce news media discourse in ways that create ambivalence of the roles, which in turn forces non-professionals, such as bloggers, to negotiate their identities in relation to professional journalists. Furthermore, the multi-voiced,

delayed, and discontinuous communication that characterizes online interactions indicates that production and consumption of information are not only connected through signifying practices, but that they are mutually constitutive of each other. This applies particularly to online news commenting, where each post serves both as an interpretation of the posts and news story that precede it, and also as re-writing of those texts for every new participant.

I argue that online interactions, which occur in institutional contexts, can expose the mutually constitutive relationship between encoding and decoding in broader communicative chains. These two meaning-making practices indeed reveal the openness and multi-voiced character of texts produced through media discourse and point to the processes through which texts are constantly being remade in the online media environment (Howard, 2008a). This perspective follows other discursive approaches to online news media and calls for a framework that captures textual in-betweenness or moments where institutional and vernacular discourses intersect and shape each other.

Dialogic co-constructions of meaning and identities. Discursive psychology locates the process of identity formation in sequential organization of occasioned, naturally occurring, uninterrupted, and everyday interactions between two or more people. Because of its emphasis on dynamic and discontinuous subject positioning of interactants, discursive psychology illuminates both the tensions embedded in audience and journalists' co-constructions of meaning, and also the power relations interwoven in horizontal communication among members of an audience. Lamerichs and te Molder (2003) argued that this application is possible even though online interactions are often delayed and fragmented. In response to their recommendations, I suggest that in online news websites occasioned talk is situated in and conditioned by the institutional framework of news media. Central to this

position is a concept of identity formation that builds on Bakhtin's conceptualization of dialogue as communicative practice in which the "I" emerges in its relation to others (Morson & Emerson, 1990; Stewart & Zediker, 2000). To develop this conceptualization and indicate the role of online news media in imagining the nation, I close this chapter with a discussion of Bakhtin's concepts of utterance and dialogue and show the implications of these concepts for the study of online news media discourse.

Bakhtin developed the idea of the relational Self by positioning the utterance as the real unit of speech and by focusing on the meanings created in dialogue and with the change of the speaking subject. For Bakhtin, an utterance forms between the already-spoken and the anticipated (but not yet spoken) utterances; that is, the meaning of an utterance emerges only in relation to the utterance's position in a communicative chain (Bakhtin, 1986; Morson & Emerson, 1990). This definition conveys three major characteristics of the utterance: finalization or "the possibility of responding to it;" responsiveness to other utterances; and addressivity or "quality of being directed to someone" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 76, 95). These characteristics help to define relations between members of the audience and their connection with the news media in the online environment.

Responsiveness, or the idea that "all our utterances are filled with other's words," is of importance for online communication because it points to the link between institutional and vernacular discourses in the practice of news commenting (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89). Those who are engaged in online commentary are also engaged in conversation with multiple authors. More precisely, a comment can be simultaneously a reaction to an existing news story, to the posts of other participants, or to particular ideas invoked by these texts; it can also be a process of encoding an utterance with the voices of others. Because of the dialogic

nature of this practice, media audiences are invited to interpret the “socially located and constructed nature of meaning” instead of institutionally produced and closed systems of representations (Dialogism, 2005, p. 6). In other words, a news comment is a set of intertextual knowledge claims that interrupts the linearity of news stories, leaving them open to multiple interpretations (Bakhtin, 1986). Within Bakhtin’s framework, these re-writings of the utterances of others and their potential for creating disjointed and polyvocal narratives and argumentative threads are centrifugal forces that constantly threaten the order of the news media discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Heteroglossia, 2005; Morson & Emerson, 1990). Morson and Emerson (1990) summarized this transformation of discourse by noting that “what was once ‘unconditional’ – which is to say, direct, unmediated, referentially oriented discourse – is now ‘conditional’ (accepted because of specific conditions)” (p. 151).

However, this intertextuality is not an infinite interplay of meanings, but rather a signification situated within “social and historical intertextual networks,” each of which sets the range of possible meanings (Boje, 2001, p. 75). The responsiveness of the utterance depends on available resources and known utterances that speakers can use, combine, and reproduce in order to articulate their own. Howard’s (2008a, 2008b) critique of the uncontested assumption that user-generated contents are manifestations of individual agency was in line with Bakhtin’s (1981) argument that the restructuring of the discourse is possible only because of its dialectic pair—centripetal or structuring forces. The tension between the two exposes heteroglossia, or the essential messiness of communication, and the polyphonic (many-voiced) quality of the language.

To apply Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue to online news media, I conceptualize online news commentary as a destabilizing and interrupting discursive practice that is nevertheless

conditioned by the institutional framework of news media. From the perspective of discursive psychology, this means that news commenting is a situated social practice oriented not only toward the setting, but also toward the availability of interpretative repertoires or familiar systems of meanings and ways of organizing these systems in coherent accounts of reality (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Defined as a “culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places, and tropes (doxa),” an interpretative repertoire is a discursive resource that speakers use to accomplish specific goals and construct interpretations of Self and others (Wetherell, 1998, p. 400; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). News stories, as socially validated accounts of everyday life, are “helping us not simply to know more about the world, but to make sense out of it;” they suggest interpretive repertoires that audience members use in their own encoding and decoding practices (1977, p. 341).

Howard (2008a, 2009b) noted a similar interdependency and argued that most vernacular discourses emerge in spaces that are established and regulated by particular institutions such as news media, political parties, government, universities, and similar entities. Thus, user-generated content is structurally secondary since it forms only after news media create the means for expression of this content and offer news stories that invite audience’s response. Consequently, vernacular discourses are hybrids that implicitly invoke and reproduce institutional frameworks. In other words, to become vernacular or subversive these discourses need to both distance themselves from the institutional discourse and make institutional authority meaningful. Howard has argued that “as a result, vernacular expression is necessarily a hybrid containing at least these two layers of meaning” (2008a, p. 205). In the case of online news commentary, audiences not only respond to the news story but also

can acknowledge and reproduce the story's structure and knowledge claims advanced by the journalists.

With an emphasis on hybridity of discourses, Howard showed that aside from shaping the communicative chain through content, online news media can also set the norms that define and control the audience's conduct in these online spaces. As several other scholars argued, mapping this context in the online media environment involves an examination of the ways in which an institutional framework encodes the practices of non-professional subjects with professional codes. This includes the analysis of the tools the audience uses to produce, link, and share information as well as the set of policies that regulate individual behaviors in online interactions (Andrejevic, 2010; Matheson, 2004a; van Dijck, 2009; Witschge, 2008). For example, Witschge (2008) suggested that online news discourse sets numerous types of limitations for audience's knowledge production. These include, but are not limited to, netiquette (a set of guidelines and rules for online participation) and moderation of online discussions, both of which outline what types of knowledge claims and actions are acceptable and considered valid and meaningful. Matheson (2004a, 2004b) also argued that online news media affirm their power to determine what information should have status of truthful and factual news by encouraging audiences' participation in news production. In the case of weblogs, for example, journalists can replace the claim to know with the claim to have resources and the ability to help their readers find the knowledge they need. In that way, even though the audiences act as the authors of knowledge, their activity is still constituted and regulated by the author-function of the news media as the "legal an institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and circulate the realm of discourse" (Foucault, 1991, p. 456).

The speaker's cultural socialization and adoption of norms and utterances that are typical for particular contexts of communication are also means by which the speaker is positioned in the communicative chain (Bakhtin, 1986). The audience members not only accept and conform to the standards, rules, and policies instilled by particular news media outlets, but they also recognize themselves as the addressees of media discourse. News media employ various discursive practices to position individuals in hierarchically subordinated positions that promote unproblematic affirmation of the dominant and preferred meanings. Van Dijck (2009) suggested that the characteristics of the online media environment allow for more diverse and dispersed, but also more interconnected, positioning of audience members. Therefore, audience members are invited to identify themselves, often simultaneously, as members of the public, as participants in online community, as citizens engaged in rational debate, as journalists-in-training, as providers of personal data, and as knowledge workers.

This multiplicity of positions indicates fragmentation of the audience and a possibility for re-configuration of news media discourse. However, since most of these positions are invoked as markers of security, predictability, control, creativity, and individual empowerment, they may also obscure power relations that lead to uncontested and subtle subjectification to media discourse. Andrejevic (2007), for example, discussed this self-constitution as an effect of a network of disciplining strategies performed by online users who engage in peer-to-peer surveillance. He noted that these individuals rationalize their support for this practice and subject themselves to surveillance because of a desire to participate in spectatorship and do-it-yourself culture, which function as signifiers of personal autonomy and agency.

In this regard, Bakhtin's concept of addressivity relates to this relationship between news media and their audiences for it defines the nature of the interactions between those who are engaged in news commentary. As Kristeva (1987) stated when discussing addressivity, the existence of the utterance obliges the speaker to identify the addressees because "it is the addressee, the other, exteriority who transforms the subject into an author" (p. 45). The act involves an evaluative attitude or a tone that endows the others with voice, determines the relationship between the speakers and the objects of their speech, and performs discursive practice of naming those who are listening (Bakhtin, 1986; Kristeva, 1987). Applied to online media environments, the addressivity of an utterance means that those who participate in news commenting are both addressees of news media and speakers who, in anticipation of a response, ascribe subject positions to other members of the audience. For the purpose of my study, this argument suggests how discursive psychology can be used to conceptualize subject positioning in online communication even when online interaction does not depend on turn-taking and sequential organization.

The proponents of discursive psychology argued that only interlocutors' responses to each other's utterances could trouble and untrouble identities for the participants in an ongoing interaction. Identities thus form in a communicative exchange in which a speaker's offering (e.g., telling of a story) is immediately followed with audiences' acknowledgment of this offering and a response to it (Antaki et al., 1996; p. 481). Several scholars argued that online communication is talk-in-interaction because it is oriented toward sequential organization; however, the focus of these studies has been only on discussion forums (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2003; Sneijder & te Molder, 2005). Unlike these virtual spaces where users most often engage each other because they seek community-like relationships or

answers to their questions, online news commenting is conducted without expectation of a direct response. This is not to say that a series of comments cannot develop into argumentative or conversational threads between two or more people, as Singer (2009) has found in her analysis of news comments about the 2007 Scottish elections. However, the fact that the main purpose of a comment is to voice one's reaction or opinion on particular subject matter or talk back to often-unresponsive news media (Singer, 2009) means that absence of clear turn-taking patterns does not undermine the purpose of this online activity.

Considering this character of online news commenting, I suggest that Bakhtin's concept of utterance allows researchers to conceptualize news comments as polyvocal, fragmented, and disjointed chains of utterances with multiple addressees and speakers. Important for this dissertation project, this conceptualization points to the applicability of discursive psychology to online interactions that do not necessarily accomplish subject positioning in a manner previously studied under this theoretical and methodological framework. In my work, discursive psychology offers a fruitful theoretical framework, despite some of the peculiarities of mediated, online interaction between news producers and audiences.

First, my position incorporates the idea of addressivity of an utterance to illuminate ways in which existing conversation threads position individuals before they enter the communicative exchange with other members of the audience. Second, because online comments cannot rely on the geographical and temporal proximity of their authors to construct a sense of collective belonging, their functionality depends on the participants' recognition and enactment of shared expectations. In this context, these expectations may be set through an institutionally imposed netiquette or more subtle systems of peer-to-peer

surveillance (Howard, 2008a). Combined with the pressure of making oneself visible to others, this knowledge of being watched marks news commenting as a discursive practice through which individuals form sense of themselves and others (Bregaman & Haythornthwaite, 2003). Finally, the existence of multiple addressees and the extent to which a speaker objectifies or engages with the voices of others in a single utterance often results in the articulation of contradicting standpoints within a single utterance. This, in turn, shows that news commenting is a theoretically rich source of everyday communication that provides evidence of people's negotiation and management of emerging contradictions and ideological dilemmas and gives clues about positioning of those who participate in these sites.

In the light of these arguments, and of Markham's reformulation of the ontological maxim from "I think, therefore I am" to "I am responded to, therefore I am," I suggest that news commenting should be theorized as a process of subject positioning and constitution of Self and Others (2005, p. 795). This process of positioning has important implications not only for theoretical development, but also for the methodological approach I developed in this project. In the following chapter, I discuss the research design and the analytical strategies employed in the unpacking of the discursive practices that connect multiple networks of meaning.

Chapter 4

Methods

This research study explains the co-construction of Serbian national identity by online news media and their audiences in the context of public discussion of the EU integration. In order to explore discursive dimensions of this intersection between institutional and vernacular national imaginations, I conducted textual analysis of selected readers comments and their relationship with the preceding news stories to illuminate: (a) the repertoires of national markers constructed by news media and their audiences to articulate and legitimize preferred collective identities; and (b) how participants in this form of online communication activate and utilize those repertoires for the purpose of regulating in-and out-group memberships in the Serbian national community.

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) was selected as the most appropriate methodological framework for the exploration of discursive construction of national identities in online contexts mainly because it allows the identification of connections between collective, individual, and mediated interpretations of those identities and situates them in relevant social context (Witschge, 2008). CDA is a theoretically driven methodology that exposes and interrogates both transparent and obscured interdependent relations between sociocultural, discursive, and textual practices (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). In the following sections, I discuss the major premises of CDA, explain the position of discursive psychology within this program, and describe the application of the analytical strategies of discursive psychology in this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology: Methodological Intersections

CDA is a political and “socially committed scientific paradigm” that interrogates the metafunction of language use in the constitution of social identities, relationships, and worldviews (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 280). The purpose of CDA is to expose and critique the transparent and obscured interdependency between sociocultural practices, language, and texts. CDA does not advance any specific methodological framework; instead, as Wodak (2001) noted, its application is shaped by the nature of the problem under analysis. Despite the lack of methodological and analytical uniformity across different approaches to CDA, the strength of this program is in its grounding in a distinct set of philosophical and theoretical premises, which are also at the center of my dissertation research. More specifically, these critical approaches to meaning, identity, and reality draw on structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language to develop conceptual and methodological toolkits that address: a) discursive struggles to fix certain meanings and exclude others; b) the historical specificity of those struggles and their social consequences; and c) the decentered and overdetermined constitution of subjects in discourse (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002; Meyer, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2003).

Within CDA, emphasis is placed on the linguistic dimension of social reality and the understanding of discourse as language use in a social practice that is constitutive of that reality. More precisely, the interest of CDA is not in language, but on the linguistic articulation of social structures and power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The conceptualization of discourse within CDA allows for the approach to nation and national identities as constituted in discursive as well as in non-discursive processes--which is a position that diverges from Foucault’s concept of discourse that informs my work. For the

purpose of this dissertation research, I defined nation as a discourse, in order to (a) emphasize its linguistic expression in online dialogues, and (b) acknowledge its quality as a self-sustainable system of knowledge claims, objects of knowledge, subject positions, and rules of their organization (Foucault, 1972). Despite this difference in the theorization of non-discursive practices, I consider the general premises of CDA as they relate to discursive psychology as the part of the design of a methodological framework for the study of people's avowals and ascriptions of national identities in everyday instances of language use.

First, CDA's attentiveness to the alignment, intersection, and ordering of multiple systems of meaning calls for description and analysis of a social phenomenon such as national belonging from different theoretical perspectives and methodological standpoints (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1993; Witschge, 2008). Second, CDA takes a hermeneutical approach to the analysis of texts, which enables researchers to illuminate discontinuity, dispersion, and fragmentation of the social production of knowledge and relations of dominance and inequality (Meyer, 2001). Finally, the focus on language use, especially within discursive psychology, highlights the dual character of social actions that are both constitutive of fairly stable systems of social, economic, and political relations, but also constituted through contextually situated discursive practices (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This dynamic approach to discourses is of particular relevance for understanding of the dialogic interactions in online media environments in which people respond to the existing systems of meanings and conventions, but also appropriate these resources for the purpose of social action.

Discursive psychology is an approach “embedded in a web of theoretical and metatheoretical assumptions,” most of which are grounded in the post-structuralist philosophy of language and the interactionist perspective (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002; Potter, 2003, p. 785). Although Foucault’s theory of power and knowledge is one of the major theoretical influences in discursive psychology, Wetherell and Potter (1992) argued that researchers can assess the meaning of discourse and its ideological effects only by examining the moment of its instantiation. In that regard, discursive psychology stresses the importance of the interactionist perspective because it allows researchers to shift their focus from abstract notions of discourse as “potent causal agents in their own right” to the processes in which discourses are materialized, reproduced, and reconfigured in everyday interactions (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 90).

Consequently, instead of the term discourse, discursive psychology suggests the concept of an interpretative repertoire to underscore the flexible and poly-functional character of discourses. In that regard, interpretative repertoires are resources of limited range of common sense truths, values, and assumptions that individuals can use to produce particular knowledge about themselves and others, manage experienced ideological dilemmas, and justify their evaluations and worldviews (Dixon et al. 1994). Importantly, these resources consist of familiar themes, rhetorical tropes, narratives, moral maxims, phrases, argumentative premises and inferences, evaluative claims, descriptions, and images that can be reorganized in ways that would foster accomplishment of particular arguments and denial and elimination of other alternatives (Tileagă, 2005). By being repositories of commonplaces, the truthfulness of these repertoires is seen as given, thus enabling individuals to invoke them at different points in time and for the purpose of social action

without offering elaboration or additional justification (Dixon et al., 1994; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

One of the most significant implications of this theoretical reframing is that it provides concepts for the analysis of the readers' use of interpretative repertoires for everyday interactions. By engaging in inductive analysis of talk, the researcher is able to unpack individual interactions and identify both rhetorical patterns and their variations, which in turn indicate activation and reconfiguration of interpretative repertoires for the purpose of particular social actions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

In line with the political orientation of CDA, discursive psychology allows the critic to interrogate the ideological effects of the discursive practices that make these interpretative repertoires appear truthful and rational (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). However, despite this orientation toward exposing interconnectedness between language and social reproduction of unequal power structures, the methodological approach of discursive psychology is often not recognized as a form of CDA (see Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Meyer, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001).

The major line of critique of discursive psychology questions its emphasis on content and flexibility of discourses as well as the utility of rhetorical analysis to empirically demonstrate the existence of interpretative repertoires prior to their activation in everyday conversations (Fairclough, 1992; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Fairclough (1992) especially pointed out that discursive psychology fails to account for the linguistic and structural elements of discourses and their power to inscribe subject positions for all participants in the ongoing interaction. Snejder and te Molder (2005) responded to this critique by supplementing the theoretical framework of discursive psychology with linguistic analysis of

the “if-then” modal claims to analyze the management of ideological dilemmas in online discussions about veganism. To follow their lead, incorporate Fairclough’s critique, and strengthen the methodological framework of discursive psychology, I developed research questions that focus on the structural, interpretative, and contextual dimensions of the dialogic co-construction of national imagination between news media and their audiences.

Research Questions

This investigation was guided with a set of research questions that focus on the characteristics and implications of dialogic co-constructions of national imagination between news media and their audiences. I first explored the relationship between institutional and news audience’s interpretations of the 2009 visa liberalization by focusing on the types and the main features of interpretative repertoires that news media and their readers use to represent Serbia and its position in the EU integration:

- 1) What are the repertoires of national markers and Europeaness that news media construct to advance particular interpretations of the 2009 visa liberalization?
- 2) How do readers engage the content of news narratives and construct their own interpretive repertoires to express and legitimize their own understandings of the events related to the visa liberalization?

Interpretive repertoires are defined here as sources of familiar themes, rhetorical tropes, narratives, phrases, argumentative premises and inferences, evaluative claims, descriptions, and images that can be reorganized in ways that foster accomplishment of particular arguments and denial or elimination of other alternatives (Tileagă, 2005).

For the purpose of this research study, news media are understood as institutions or socially legitimized systems of knowledge claims, practices, and norms that regulate,

organize, and limit the range and availability of possible meanings of social reality (Hall, 1977, 1982). As they rely on the authority of standardized professional practices, journalists encode these norms into news stories which then help news audiences to make sense of their reality and position in society (Hall, 1977; Richardson, 2007).

Within this framework, I focused on news commenting by audiences as a process of reproduction and transformation of the narrative content of Serbian news stories about visa liberalization published between 2009 and 2011. Expanding upon Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, this study of online news commenting also defines dialogic co-construction of meanings between all participants in ongoing online interactions. In this sense, I analyzed news commentary as an intertextual utterance that responds to the selected news story and the comments of other participants, and, in the process, incorporates elements of existing texts to assert its own authority (Howard, 2008b). The approach is valuable not only because it points us to the hybrid characteristics of online vernaculars, but also because it exposes how readers respond to experienced disemia or the interpretative tension between their intimate experience of national belonging and journalists' prescriptive and codified narration of it (Herzfeld, 2004). Considering this theoretical orientation, I developed this inquiry by analyzing the news representation of visa liberalization and related events of national significance.

The second group of questions examined interpretative repertoires of national belonging that Serbian online news media and their audiences invoke when commenting on stories about visa liberalization and Serbia's EU candidacy. Two interrelated research questions focus on the discursive practices of news media and online news audiences to

identify the rhetorical and linguistic elements of a Serbian national discourse and the consequent co-construction of collective identities:

- 1) What do dominant interpretative repertoires about 2009 visa liberalization reveal about the media's construction of a sense of Serbian and European belonging?
- 2) How do participants in online news dialogues use markers of collective sameness and difference to express their understanding of Serbian national community and their position within it?

I ground these inquiries on the premise that national identity is a discursively produced form of collective identification based on which individuals give meaning to their experiences and construct social relations with other people. By employing rhetorical and linguistic strategies to construct "us" and simultaneously differentiate the group from "them," individuals form a sense of themselves as the members of particular community (Colombo & Senatore, 2005). Credibility, appeal, and legitimacy of these strategies depend on construction of objectified and naturalized external referents, which, in the case of Serbia, included national character (unitary expression of group's essence), common history (references to important events, national success, heroism, exceptionality, and destiny), and territory or symbolic space (imaginary homeland and nation's founding event).

The meaning of these referents, although malleable, can be temporally fixed in a way that can signify both a set of characteristics that all Serbs have in common, and also a set of characteristics that those perceived as outsiders are necessarily lacking. Once naturalized, these discursive categories acquire status of stable and uncontested markers of collective belonging that together form an interpretative repertoire of national belonging.

To map these “systems of significations” and “building blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures” I focused on textual activation of interpretative repertoires of Serbian belongings in selected news stories and audiences’ comments (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 90). More specifically, I examined how participants in online news dialogues use markers of collective sameness and difference to articulate their understanding of Serbian national community. In addition, I also analyzed these institutional and vernacular texts for their articulation of the repertoires of EU and Europe in order to illuminate how individuals use these categories as referent points for Serbian national discourse to determine their position within the Serbian national community.

The last group of research questions in this project asked about the relationship between identity politics activated through news commenting and sociocultural practices:

- 1) How do interpretative repertoires of national belonging provide individuals with a discursive platform for advancing desired interpretations of Self and other people?
- 2) In what ways these interpretations regulate in- and out-group memberships and reproduce dominant social and moral orders?

To unpack discursive constitution of Serbia as an imagined community and individuals as Serbian subjects, this dissertation project draws on theory of identity formation developed within a strand of discursive psychology as well as on the critical concept of articulation of subject positions. More precisely, I explore national identification in the online media environment as a process of simultaneous avowals and ascriptions of discursively constructed positions from which individuals can speak and see themselves as members of Serbian national community (Hall, 1993b; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

In this study, I looked for the evidence of the relationship between news commenting and sociocultural practices or production, legitimization, and reconfiguration of the status quo and relations of marginalization, subordination, and exclusion that are constitutive of people's identities and dominant worldviews (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In that regard, I examined how news audiences use interpretative repertoires of Serbian national belonging to avow preferred collective identities and rhetorically and linguistically draw lines between themselves and those whom they perceive as external or internal Others. In particular, I focused on the ways these practices regulate in- and out-group memberships and, therefore, position some individuals as natural national subjects, some as worthy of inclusion, and some as strangers, foreigners, and threats to the nation's well being (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005).

This form of internal homogenization is closely related to reproduction and legitimization of social hierarchy as a system of relations that regulate and limit access of certain groups to valuable social, political, and economic resources, rights, and privileges. Aside from access, social hierarchy also indicates who has authority to speak for others, advance interpretations of the events of national importance, and endow these interpretations with the status of truthful and credible knowledge claims. Finally, construction of national identity involves normalization of preferred moral orders that prescribe desired behaviors and values and mark those who inherently are lacking them. Moral orders serve as the means for creating and managing moral panic, which Hartley (2002) described as "perceived deviancy or threat from within a culture itself that is thought to challenge generally accepted societal norms, values and interests" (p. 147). Within the framework of discursive psychology, the focus is on the production of morality through social interaction and its function as discursive

practice that accomplishes social exclusion and prejudice from seemingly unmotivated positions. Or in other words, my interest is in the ways moral orders are “described, invoked, categorized, for action and interaction” (Tileagă, 2007, p. 721).

Data Collection

To examine the constitution of national identities through news commenting, I analyzed 45 Serbian news reports about the 2009 visa liberalization and issues related to this event, and more than 3,000 readers’ online comments published in response to the selected news reports. In order to capture variability of interpretative repertoires and situate discursive practices in historical context, I identified three significant time periods that shaped the discourse on visa liberalization: (a) government negotiations prior to the official announcement of the visa liberalization (May-November 30, 2009); (b) the official announcement and implementation of the visa liberalization polity (November 30 – December 20, 2009); and (c) the crisis over the numbers of asylum seekers from Serbia and consequent threats of suspension of the visa liberalization (February, 2010-May, 2011). Because each of the periods had concrete effects both on the country’s EU politics and the everyday lives of Serbian citizens, they were extensively covered by Serbian news media. For the purpose of this study, of particular interest was the coverage of these events in three mainstream online news outlets: B92.net, Blic.rs, and Politika.rs.

Serbian news outlets. The data selected for analysis was collected from three main sources of national news with online operations in Serbia: B92.net, Blic.rs, and Politika.rs. These organizations were selected on the basis of their journalistic trajectories in the context of the nation’s political development, their diverse ideological orientations, their reputation as trusted sources, and large national audiences. Since its establishment in 1989, national

radio and television broadcaster B92 has earned a reputation as a news outlet with a liberal political orientation and pronounced focus on issues of public interest. In the 1990s, B92 was one of the few news media outlets that was independent from government control, and as such it played a critical role in the mobilization of the civil protests that ended in the overthrow of Milošević. Because of its open support for the democratic block, B92 and its journalists were often the subjects of lawsuits and strict censorship, which the Serbian government used to control and eliminate any opposition to the ruling regime. In a widespread effort to suppress opposition in late 1999, the government initiated a campaign against “media aggression” and seized the station’s transmitters and equipment, forcing B92 to discontinue its broadcast via regular channels and move to satellite and Internet transmission until the democratic changes a year later gave it a new start (Cohen, 2001, p. 349). Thanks to this image of watchdog of the government and the development of a media model that successfully balanced entertainment and news-oriented programs, B92-TV and its online platform B92.net became the leading national news source. This assessment is particularly applicable to B92.net, which has been one of the most visited websites in Serbia since 2006 with over one million unique users every month.¹⁷ The dominance of this outlet was disrupted only two years ago, when the number of unique users of Blic.rs, an online version of another major daily newspaper, surpassed that of B92.net.

In contrast to B92, *Blic* was initially established in 1996 with shared Serb-German capital as a daily newspaper and an outlet for Milošević’s political propaganda. However, in the next five years, and in response to the looming civil unrests, the newspaper’s owners and editorial board shifted their allegiance and political orientation to a much more complex and

¹⁷ The data is compiled and presented by Alexa, the web information company, and accessible at <http://www.alexa.com/>

troublesome relationship with the regime. The popularity of this daily has been on the rise since 2004, making *Blic* one of the most widely circulated non-tabloid daily newspapers in 2007 with 200,000 copies sold. Although the circulation has declined by 50,000 in the last two years, the online version of this daily has seen a significant increase in the number of unique visitors per day from 30,000 in 2007 to 400,000 in 2010 (Surčulija et al., 2011). For this study, it is important to note that both Blic.rs and B92.net are by far the most popular online news sources in Serbia, with the majority of the audiences located in Serbia (58% and 64% respectively), and in the former Yugoslavian states, namely Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁸

Unlike *B92* and *Blic*, *Politika* does not have a strong online readership: The number of unique users is steadily increasing since 2010, but does not exceed more than 500,000 per month.¹⁹ Its print edition, however, has stronger presence on the Serbian media scene. In 2004, *Politika* had a circulation of 115,000 copies, which made it competitive with other mainstream newspapers such as *Blic* (Džoković, 2004). Despite a relatively smaller online readership compared to that of *B92* and *Blic*, this news source is included in this study for two reasons.

First, this newspaper is not only one of the dominant mainstream national dailies in terms of circulation, but it is also the newspaper with the longest tradition. After its establishment in 1904, *Politika* introduced “the standards of modern journalism in Serbia,” which is also one reason why this media outlet has become one of country’s most respected news brands read mainly by the upper-middle class, political and economic elites, and

¹⁸ The data is compiled and presented by Alexa, the web information company, and accessible at <http://www.alexa.com/>

¹⁹ The data is compiled and presented by Google’s DoubleClick Ad Planner, and accessible at <https://www.google.com/adplanner/#siteSearch>

intelligentsia (Džoković, 2004; Matić, 2004, p. 254). Due to this reputation, the newspaper historically has played a central role in the mediation and construction of national ideologies, especially during the Milošević regime when the government had direct control over *Politika*'s editorial politics (see Biserko et al., 2004; Božić-Roberson, 2005; Džoković, 2004; Džihana & Volčić, 2011). However, the years of direct censorship and support for the regime tarnished both *Politika*'s reputation and business, bringing this institution to the verge of bankruptcy and in need of foreign investments (Džoković, 2004). In 2002, the government and the German corporation WAZ signed a contract of shared ownership, which did not end the complex process of denationalization and reorganization of *Politika*'s ownership. This was finally confirmed on July 16, 2012, when it was announced that the Serbian government had sold WAZ shares to the East Media Group, a company based in Moscow. The fact that the decision was sudden and made without the knowledge of *Politika*'s employees, and that the public had little information about the East Media Group sparked debates about media monopolization, censorship, and threatened freedoms.²⁰

Internet use in Serbia. In addition to news media reports, this study analyzed online comments posted by readers in response to a selection of news stories. These comments were conceptualized as a vernacular discourse that constructs individual and collective identities. Despite the digital divide between rural and urban areas, the number of online users, mobile subscriptions, and households that have a broadband Internet connection in Serbia is on the rise since 2006 (Surčulija et al., 2011). This trend is closely followed by the increased production of user-generated contents. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, in 2009, 42% of online users in Serbia reported using Internet for sending

²⁰ From "Germany's WAZ in surprise sale of stake in Serbian daily," by B92, July 17, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2012&mm=07&dd=17&nav_id=81319

and posting messages on online forums and news websites, while in 2011 nearly 70% of those users said that they were using the Internet for social networking. These reports do not differentiate between activity on news and commercial websites; however, the 2011 report on digital media in Serbia indicated that the leading online news media in general have a larger following than popular social networks and video- and photo-sharing websites (Surčulija et al., 2011, p. 33). The same report stated that the number of online users who are seeking news increased from 29.7% in 2007 to 42.1% in 2009. Furthermore, the number of comments that are posted in response to news stories about events of political, economic, and social significance points to the conclusion that news commenting is a relevant and prominent practice for the production of user-generated contents in Serbia.

Sampling procedures. The selection of texts for this study was made in consideration of the specificities of the media landscape and Internet use in Serbia as well as in an effort to capture variability and diversity of the institutional and vernacular discourses on the 2009 visa liberalization. In that regard, the final corpus of texts for this study included news stories from each media outlet that both covered significant events and topics in three mentioned periods, and also prompted the highest number of readers' comments. To identify these moments, I conducted an online search for all news stories that focused on visa liberalization between May 2009 and May 2011. After reviewing the content and the number of readers' responses for each story, I was able to select 15 dates (each date within a two- or three-day periods) that either showed a shift in the overarching narratives or prompted a higher frequency of readers' responses than the stories published in the same time frame. Consequently, the final sample included 45 news stories (15 from each news site) and close to 3,400 news comments about a range of topics related to 2009 visa liberalization:

- May 2009-November 30, 2009: an assessment of the progress of Western Balkan states in fulfilling the Roadmap by non-profit organization European Initiative for Stability; speculations over the recommendation for visa liberalization by EU Commission; discussion about issuance of the passports to Serbian citizens living in Kosovo; official recommendation for visa liberalization by EU Commission; and announcement that the members of the European Parliament have voted for visa liberalization.
- November 30-December 20, 2009: official decision by The Council of Ministers of Interior and Justice of the European Union; suggestions on how to travel on a small budget; policies that regulate proper use of White Schengen; first day of visa liberalization; and the experiences of 50 Serbian citizens selected to travel to EU because of their contributions to the nation.
- February 2010-May 2011: reports about the increased numbers of asylum seekers from Serbia to EU countries that mapped escalation of the crisis from the first report to the official announcement by the EU representatives negating suspension of White Schengen and government's campaign to start stricter control of the Serbia's borders with the EU countries.

To ensure consistency and comparability of the news selection, I included one story from each of the three selected outlets for each date. In situations when the outlet published more than one story covering the same event or topic, I selected the article that had the highest number of readers' comments. It is important to note that the number of posts varied not only across time (some stories had significantly more comments than others), but also across news outlets (Politika.rs consistently had smaller number of posts compared to other two web sites). To understand the second pattern, I considered the average number of users that these sites have on daily basis; however, I also needed to take into account potential effects of the moderation policies that are enforced in these public forums (Witschge, 2008).

In terms of moderation policies, each site requires users to register every time they wish to comment on particular story. During the registration process, the commentators are informed that the site moderators will review the posts before making them available to other readers. During my stay in Belgrade in the summer of 2012, I was not able to interview

journalists from *Politika.rs*, *B92.net*, or *Blic.rs*, which, in addition to the lack of detailed information about the moderation process on these three sites, undermines any conclusive assessment of the effects these policies likely had on the content and number of readers' posts. However, by being one of the commentators on each website, I noticed that *Politika* has a more restrictive moderation policy than *B92* and *Blic* in terms of which one of my comments were published.

Translation. As a native speaker, I was able to analyze the final corpus of texts in its original version, and translate into English only the excerpts that are presented in the next three chapters. The original text is available in the endnotes. Aside from being an analytical process, this translation is also related to the editorial choices that I made concerning the presentation of the data in this dissertation. I use quotation marks to indicate words, phrases, and sentences from the longer examples, which are presented in the next three chapters. In most cases, the parts of the news paragraphs and readers' posts that were not relevant for the main topic or the goal of the interaction were not included, in which case I indicate the omissions with an ellipsis enclosed in square brackets ([...]). For presentation of the findings, I also use italics to distinguish recurring linguistic elements in different news stories and readers' comments, which I initially identified in the original text. In those instances, I selected an English reference by relying on both literal and phrasal translations to properly capture the synonymic quality of Serbian language. Finally, in some cases I use gender-specific pronouns to identify authors of different comments, although I recognize that the verbs, pronouns, and names that these individuals use do not necessarily represent their genders outside interaction examined in this dissertation. The purpose of these identifications, which I make by following grammatical system and norms of the Serbian

language, is only to promote clarity of the analysis and arguments presented.

Analytical Strategies

To examine individuals' engagement in news commenting as the process of subject positioning, I conducted separate analysis of the news and vernacular discourses by paying close attention to the points where the two intersect and shape each other. The purpose of this multi-level approach was to expand upon four contextual layers of discourse,²¹ and addresses the “intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses” in the context of online news commenting (Weiss & Wodak, 2003; p.22). Intertextuality is the inherent heterogeneity of all texts, which are constituted from the elements of other existing texts (Fairclough, 1992; Kristeva, 1987). However, Fairclough (1992) argued that intretextuality can be observed on two levels, and he used the term interdiscursivity to identify the intertextual relations that texts have with discourse conventions such as genre and activity type, and style.²²

Analysis of news discourse. In the first phase, I conducted textual analysis of the selected news articles to identify the matrix of themes and their recurring organization, which in turn suggest existence and activation of interpretative repertoires of national belonging. More specifically, the analysis focused on the narrative content and identification of (a) rhetorical tropes such as metaphors, metonyms, and synecdoches that mark national sameness; (b) descriptive references to national character, history, and space/territory; and (c)

²¹ Weiss and Wodak (2003) argue that context consists of four layers: (a) the immediate, language or text internal co-text; (b) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships; (c) the extralinguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific “context of situation;” and (d) the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which the discursive practices are embedded in and related to (p. 22).

²² In his theoretical framework, Fairclough utilized the term discourse for multiple purposes each of which indicates different level of abstraction. In relation to interdiscursivity, discourse means “particular way of constructing a subject-matter” (1992, p. 128).

transitivity of the relationship between Serbia and the EU (Fairclough, 1992; Richardson, 2007; Wodak et al., 1993).

Rather than using a specific coding scheme, I developed the categories and sets of themes about Serbia and the EU integration after repeated readings of the texts. After this initial identification of the thematic clusters, I also tested their validity by examining how they are accomplished through the sequence of narrative categories—Summary (headline and lead paragraph), Main Events, Background, Context, Consequences (Verbal Reactions), and Comment (Expectation and Evaluation)—whose top-down organization creates an impression of narrative coherence and indicates order of importance/relevance of events (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Richardson, 2007; van Dijk, 1988, 2004). Of particular importance in that regard were instances of reported speech that journalists employ to convey a sense of credibility, objectivity, detachment, and transparency of language (Richardson, 2007; van Dijk, 1988, 2004). In journalistic production of national imagination, the reported speech also indicates how authority of the knowledge claims is established and who has the right to define and interpret national interests, past, and future (Richardson, 2007, pp. 101-106).

This inductive approach coupled with narrative analysis reveals what is produced and also what discursive strategies news media use to justify and rationalize particular representations of main events as coherent, factual, and truthful knowledge claims (Richardson, 2007; van Dijk, 1985). Furthermore, emphasis on the formulaic patterns of narration indicates that news stories are not only a linguistic materialization of power relations and the preferred national imagination, but also a discursive strategy that news media employ to exercise power over discourse and control social occasion (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Witschge, 2008; Wodak, 2001).

Analysis of vernacular discourse. The subsequent analysis of news comments that audience members produced in response to the selected news stories focused on the intertextuality of vernacular discourse, namely its re-writing of the institutionally produced and sanctioned news narratives. In the case of news commenting, a focus on intertextuality calls for the analysis of each utterance (news comment) in relation to its position in a communicative chain. To accomplish this task, instead of combining all comments that respond to the same event (e.g. ratification on the visa liberalization on November 30, 2009) into one data set, I analyzed each comment in relation to the corresponding news story and the news comments that precede it.

Building on Fairclough's concept of interdiscursivity, my analysis of the news comments in regard to the first set of research questions about types of interpretative repertoires in news stories and corresponding comments focused on the extent to which (a) audience's comments acknowledge and exploit the authority of the knowledge claims journalists originally advance in the form of reported speech; and (b) audience members use their personal, everyday experiences of being a Serbian national and citizen to complement, modify, and challenge common sense claims advanced in the corresponding news stories. At this stage of analysis I also examined the second level of intertextuality, which Fairclough (1992) called manifest intertextuality, to define "the case where specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within the text" (p. 117). To illuminate this type of intertextual relations between news stories and corresponding comments, I showed how audience members appropriate the content of a particular news story, namely its references to national character, history, and territory as well as rhetorical tropes about EU and Europe, and how individuals advance these knowledge claims as presupposed propositions in their own comments.

Communicative chains and manifest intertextuality are also important concepts for mapping interpretative repertoires of Serbian national belonging and for understanding the use of these repertoires for the purpose of social action. To address these two issues in the second phase of critical discourse analysis, I examined rhetorical and linguistic strategies that individuals employ to advance particular representations of Serbia and construct national identities for themselves and others. In regard to the national imagination, these strategies are used to legitimize and naturalize a set of reference points around which individuals construct both collective homogeneity and heterogeneity.

In interaction, online users invoke these points as commonplaces, which they employ not only to describe particular situations and relationships, but also to advance an argument and articulate their view of national Self and Other. To identify these avowals and ascriptions of subject positions, I focused on the naming or referential strategies that individuals use to mark their association with and disassociation from particular group(s). Wodak et al. (1999) suggested that the use of pronoun “we” and its variations, namely addressee-inclusive, addressee-exclusive, speaker-inclusive, and speaker-exclusive forms of “we,” is an important linguistic strategy based on which people indicate the strength and nature of their group memberships. Richardson (2007) suggested that naming is a discursive practice for establishing not only group membership, but also “the coherence relations with the way that other social actors are referred to and represented” (p. 50). Polyfunctional use of referential strategies and switching between pronouns such as “I,” “us,” “they,” also exposes discontinuity of national identification and allows people to negotiate their troubled and untroubled identities by shifting between subject position that belong to different discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Tileagă, 2005).

Building on the existing literature on discursive narration of Serbian national identity, I also coded the news comments for their expression of the three major means for the realization of national sameness—temporal, personal, and spatial references—that also correspond to markers of collective history and memory, character, and territory (Wodak et al., 1999, p. 35). In addition to these categories, the data also showed patterned rhetorical clustering around the terms EU and Europe, which I also coded as significant elements of the repertoire of national belonging.

Furthermore, tracing the progression of the discursive steps through which individuals shift between associations and disassociations with the national group and, in the process, untrouble troubled identities, reveals the reproduction and justification of discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice from seemingly unmotivated and uninterested positions (Dixon et al, 1994; Tileagă, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Because these interpretative moves are crucial for constructing and regulating in-and out-group memberships, I also paid particular attention to “troubled spots” or crisis points that suggest existence of ideological dilemmas and a person’s investment in two or more conflicting positions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Tileagă, 2005). To identify the existence of these dilemmas, I looked for unfinished sentences, articulation of contradicting standpoints, and attempts to repair or manage these dilemmas through repetition, paraphrasing, and elaborate justifications (e.g., introduction of personal stories to validate particular standpoint). In that regard, I was able to capture variable degrees of permeability or restrictiveness of articulated in-and out-group memberships and discursively constructed boundaries between those who are positioned as “good,” Serbs, “bad” Serbs, and strangers to the national community.

Chapter 5

The Making of Proper Serbian Citizens: News Repertoires of the Visa Liberalization

As I was waiting to board a plane in Barcelona in summer of 2012, a member of security personnel asked to check my passport. After flipping through the first pages and without making eye contact, he asked me: “Don’t you need [Schengen] visa to travel?” Considering that I entered Spain a few days earlier without any problems, I found his question odd and unsettling: I was clearly picked out because of my Serbian passport. The situation became even more embarrassing when he did not seem to be satisfied with my “no” answer to his question. Already irritated by being publicly examined in such a manner, I noted that “we do not need visas since 2009.” Without saying a word, the man returned my passport and walked away leaving me with an impression that he still was not convinced I was telling the truth.
(author’s reflections, 2012)

This chapter focuses on Serbia’s online news outlets as a space where the political process of European integration is mediated to construct a discourse on Serbia’s Europeanness and sense of national belonging. The discursive power of media is articulated through the reporting on multiple events that highlight social and political tensions and force news outlets to activate particular interpretive repertoires to make sense of the unfolding process of the EU integration. The ebb and flow of such events pose critical questions for journalists who must mediate tensions to provide meaningful interpretations for readers. For instance, nearly a year after the much celebrated visa liberalization was put into effect, the European Integration Office (a Serbian government service) published a bi-yearly report about citizen’s European orientation noting that public approval of EU integration was at an all-time low in 2010, as 57% of people in Serbia stated they would support Serbia’s accession to the EU. The same opinion poll showed that a majority of the respondents considered the fight against corruption as the main reform that needed to happen in Serbia, and that ineffective state leadership—in addition to the EU’s politics of conditionality—was

the main obstacle for Serbia's EU membership.²³ In a situation where the public openly expressed distrust in its own government and practiced Euro-pessimism, how did news media validate EU integration as a state-led process in which institutional apparatuses work for the benefit of Serbian citizens?

A similar predicament was posed by the events that shook Serbia's public sphere in the second half of 2011. In the spring of 2011, public panic reached a boiling point when the people perceived that increasing numbers of asylum seekers from Serbia in EU countries were threatening recently abolished visa regime. Serbian news media have been following the issue since early 2010, mainly by informing the readers about the actions that the government had taken to control immigration patterns. After a series of warnings from government representatives from Belgium and statistical reports that Germany, Sweden, and Luxemburg were "flooded" with asylum seekers from the Western Balkan region, the EU Council initiated official discussions about a potential suspension of the White Schengen for Serbia. Although at the end the Council announced that visa liberalization would not be suspended, it also sent a serious warning to the Serbian government that suspension would likely occur in the future if asylum-seeking trends remained the same or worsen. Prompted by the pressure to secure visa-free travel, the Serbian government vowed to enforce stricter control of the borders and subject all citizens to a type of examination outlined in the following news excerpt:

The Minister of the Internal Affairs, Ivica Dacić, announced today implementation of stricter control of Serbian citizens who are going to the European Union countries, saying that what will be checked is whether passengers have sufficient funds, return tickets and travel insurance. [...] As one of the possible measures, the minister

²³ Republic of Serbia Government, European Integration Office (SEIO). (December 2010). *European Orientation of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia: Trends*. Retrieved from www.seio.gov.rs

mentioned confiscation of passports or ban to exit Serbia for those who are abusing their right to asylum. (*Politika*, May 23, 2011)¹

These developments posed the question: How are Serbian citizens seeking asylum in European countries, who were often identified by the news media as “a small group of individuals” who caused “a limited and specific problem” recast in news discourse as a reason for disciplining all Serbian citizens in the name of EU and state sovereignty?

This chapter maps the interpretative repertoires invoked by *Blic*, *B92*, and *Politika* between May 2009 and December 2011 to make sense of the emergent events surrounding visa liberalization. During the period examined, Serbian news media faced the task of advancing particular representations of the EU and Serbia that would help readers come to terms with troubling effects of visa liberalization, such as shared governance between the EU and Serbian government or the increasingly opaque symbolic boundaries between Serbia and the EU. Contrary to public expectations, White Schengen did not eradicate the borders but re-wrote them in a way that heightened the feeling of being neither here nor there. After November 30, 2009, Serbian citizens did not need visas to cross the borders and travel to the EU countries; however, they were still subjected to continuous observation, evaluation, and warnings convincing them that the road to full EU accession is long, mystified, and interwoven with a range of unpredictable challenges.

Interestingly, all three news outlets addressed these dilemmas and uncertainties in similar fashion despite their different political and editorial orientations. For instance, my analysis of news coverage of the events selected shows that in comparison to *Blic* and *B92*, *Politika* tends to publish articles that more frequently employ emotional language, invoke the Kosovo issue, and rely on the voices of Serbian citizens to advance meaningful representations of the main events. However, these rhetorical and topical choices often

indicate difference in the editorial style that reporters use to activate dominant interpretative repertoires, rather than a radical ideological difference in the representations of the EU, the Serbian state, and their relationship. The polyfunctional quality of interpretative repertoires allows for this variability, which in turn creates an impression of diversity and contestation between several ideological orientations while concealing the reproduction of the same identity politics across different discourses (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In the context of Serbian news media, this means that the existence of common narrative patterns and ideological assumptions does not erase differences in the editorial politics of the three news outlets; instead, the patterns suggest that some narrative choices have become common sense interpretations and modes of narration that news media use in their coverage of the country's EU integration. Although routinely invoked, these choices nevertheless profoundly shape how news readers are making sense of themselves as the members of Serbian national community.

In this chapter I will discuss these interpretative patterns across three news outlets and argue that in order to offer the readers means for overcoming uncertainty and ambivalence caused by the integration process, news discourse put into motion a particular model of identity politics to advance a state-centered identity as a rational expression of European belongingness. In that regard, this chapter does not aim to assess whether news outlets support government leadership and policies or whether their editorial politics articulate pro- or anti-EU perspective. Instead, my goal is to discuss how in the reporting of the 2009 visa liberalization and related events the media produce and validate particular meanings of Serbian state and the EU through a set of preferred interpretative repertoires that construct a sense of collective identity.

In the following sections, I discuss how news media engaged a range of thematic, linguistic, and rhetorical strategies to construct certain versions of the truth about EU integration and ascribe certain group characteristics through three main interpretative repertoires: EU integration as progress toward becoming a European state, EU as final destination, and Serbia as a source of manageable otherness. The purpose of each repertoire is to (a) naturalize contradictions produced with Serbia's simultaneously inclusion and exclusion from the EU and Europe proper; (b) present the situation as a problem that has an objective and practical solution; and (c) suggest that such solution is already available and put into effect by the state institutions and representatives. In the analysis, I identify how these interpretative moves and patterns of editorial emphasis enable a particular, state-centered identity claim that, ultimately, articulates a vision of the proper Serbian citizen as the only normative category through which Serbs can claim their European belongingness.

It is important to note that the term "proper" in this construct does not signify a set of clearly defined and universal criteria that could make any person, at any time, into a Serbian citizen and consequently a European subject. Instead, the meaning is contextually and historically specific because it emerges in relation to what are perceived to be internal flaws of the national character. As I argue later on in this chapter, the quality of being proper is intertwined with the process of socialization grounded on a taken-for-granted assumption that Serbia's inherent otherness inevitably separates Serbs from other Europeans. Therefore, the category proper Serbian citizen is a marker of Serbia's unchanged position in relation to the EU: It reveals existence of barriers and affirms the country's place in Europe's power hierarchy. In other words, the category suggests that Serbs can gain equal footing with other EU citizens and access to resources by demonstrating capability to manage their flaws;

uphold the EU order and laws; and strictly follow the conditions of their inclusion in the imagined European community.

To accomplish the objectives of this chapter, I first describe the elements of interpretative repertoires and present the major premises that are produced once news media use those elements to assign meanings to main events and define relations between significant actors. In the second half of the chapter, I will explain the relationship between the repertoires and the construction of collective identities by focusing on the news discourse on asylum-seekers between 2010 and 2011 and the discursive practices news media engage to position asylum-seekers as the enemies of the state and propose models of good citizenry as a rational solution for this threat.

EU Integration as Progress toward Becoming a European State

One of the major characteristics of this interpretative repertoire is its emphasis on Serbia's ambivalent position in the integration as a source of constant uncertainty. By strategically locating the issue in the narrative of progress, the repertoire establishes a sense of continuity between disparate events to advance an image of EU integration as gradual progress through a state-centered, objective process that will reward Serbia's compliance with EU imposed criteria to become a European state.

The activation of this repertoire was particularly prominent when events reported referred to delays, difficulties, and ambivalence in EU decision-making regarding Serbia's integration into the Union. Such events made evident the political tensions and contradictions that could erode the public's support for integration. In these cases, news discourse constructed a particular narrative of progress to mediate EU's ambivalence, local and regional political contradictions, and the uncertainty generated by the events. A narrative

of progress is indeed one of the common appeals in the political rhetoric about the EU expansion to Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) (Graan, 2010; Raik, 2004). In the Serbian news discourse, this rhetoric confirms an interpretive repertoire that allows for conciliation of conflicting situations to advance a view of integration as a gradual progress through state-centered, bureaucratic procedures that would enable Serbia to become a European state. In this context, news suggest that Serbia needs to develop a system of institutions, laws, and economic relations whose appropriateness and effectiveness can be assessed in relation to the EU as the dominant political and economic expression of Europeanness. The absence of any specification of the state model that Serbia is supposed to replicate reinforces a silent centering of the EU and its authority to judge Serbia's performance of unspecified, yet indisputable norms. In that sense, the news discourse objectifies this power dynamic by relying on two central thematic structures in repertoire of progress: the idea that integration is a sequential process with measurable outcomes, and that visa liberalization is a reward for progress made.

In news discourse, the narrative of progress allows for the conciliation of conflicting situations, such as when the EU had positively evaluated Serbia's efforts toward visa liberalization but Serbian citizens were still waiting for the White Schengen. One such instance occurred shortly before the November 30, 2009, official announcement of the visa-free regime. During this period, the Serbian government could not guarantee the date when the country would officially be granted such regime, despite the fact that various EU commissions have affirmed Serbia's fulfillment of the assigned criteria. Between May and November, all three media outlets published numerous reports about the delays of the date for visa liberalization that caused national anxiety over the people's inability to enjoy visa-

free travel. In the face of uncertainty, news stories privileged these angles through rhetorical choices and official sources quoted: 1) that the Serbian state had fulfilled the criteria established by the EU process and was making “progress” through “steps” taken in the “road” toward visa liberalization, and that 2) because of the Serbian state’s compliance with the criteria established by the EU officials “in charge,” it was reasonable to anticipate a positive outcome. The following excerpts from a story in *B92* titled “Serbia Without Visas from January 1, 2010?” illustrate this thematic cluster:

Serbia has fulfilled almost all the criteria from the “road map” for the liberalization of the visa regime, and the intention of the leading European Union officials in charge with the question of Enlargement is that the European Commission proposes visa-free travel by the end of next month.

“The Commission is pleased with the result, pleased with the overall performance of the Serbian administration. It was really a big task for us,” said Delević. [...]

The European Commission’s report about Serbia’s fulfillment of the criteria of the road map for visa liberalization includes 42 assessment criteria. This refers to Serbia’s progress in the field of security of the documents, control of illegal migration including readmission, public order and security, external relations and fundamental rights. On the basis of this report, in the upcoming period, the European Commission should make a draft decision on the liberalization of the visa regime for the country. [...]

“Today we have made another big step towards the White Schengen. This is a process that we initiated nearly two years ago and now we see that we are very close to the happy end of it,” said Djelić to the news agency Tanjug. (*B92*, June 12, 2009)²

In these excerpts, the event is described with two seemingly contradicting representations. On the one hand, the combination of active verbs (“we have made another big step”) and reported speech (“the Commission is pleased with the results”) affirms progress toward visa liberalization. On the other hand, such possibility is linguistically problematized with clear elements of conditionality such as hedged truth claims (“The European Commission should

make”) and insertion of a question mark at the end of the headline. Yet, the excerpt also notes that the actions taken by the Serbian state and the tentative approval of the EU are cause for an optimistic expectation of positive outcomes.

This reinforcement of the sense of continuous uncertainty and Serbia’s ambivalent position in the integration add significant ideological inscriptions on Serbian discourse on visa liberalization. Appeal to progress supports the premise that EU integration is about the procedural implementation of an objective, apolitical system of regulation that a state needs to meet in order to move to a more advanced stage on its path toward becoming an EU state. In addition to depoliticizing the discourse on integration, this repertoire’s emphasis on progress reinforces a paternalistic relationship between the EU and Serbia. It validates the need for continuous EU monitoring and the production of reports about Serbia’s advancements in a linear, step-by-step process to full EU accession. More significantly, the repertoire of progress is built upon two ideological assumptions: (1) EU countries and those that are official candidates for the membership are in a higher state of development than Serbia because they have met objective, pre-set, and standardized criteria; and (2) visa liberalization is a reward that documents fulfillment of those criteria and consequently validates the progress the state is making. The following sections discuss two thematic clusters that support these assumptions.

Integration as sequential and measurable progress. Through professional conventions and routines, journalists help readers situate facts and claims about an event within familiar knowledge repositories (Richardson, 2007; van Dijk, 1991). In this case, claims about Serbia’s EU integration are situated within the familiar understanding that a sequence of actions always precedes any EU’s decision. In that regard, progress becomes

visible when the Serbian state moves through a sequence of phases, which in turn advances the idea of planned and controlled development. A new phase in the integration process becomes accessible only when a preceding one is completed and positively evaluated by an external and objective entity. This emphasis on clear distinctions between phases and their restrictive sequential ordering reduces the range of meanings—polysemic character of the event—that readers can assign to visa liberalization and, consequently, the national future.

This tendency of the news media to fix the meanings of integration is significant when the narrative relies on ambiguous tropes of a “better future,” which the readers find in Djelić’s statement that “this is a process that we initiated nearly two years ago and now we see that we are very close to the happy end of it” (B92, June 12, 2009). Read on its own, this assessment of the present situation by Djelić communicates completion of a phase without establishment of any clear vision of the future of the nation, thus leaving that future open for readers’ interpretations. However, inserted in the discourse on sequential progression, the polysemic quality of the Djelić’s statement is reduced to a celebration of national accomplishment understood as a moment of reaching an important checkpoint. In other words, the excitement of getting closer “to the happy end” does not invite open interpretations of what should come next; instead, it instructs the readers to treat completion of “the process” as “another big step” in the restrictive sequence of remaining steps. Within this interpretative framework, visa liberalization emerges as checkmark that allows Serbia to move to the next phase, and as such it is a reminder that progress and hard work must continue.

The step-like nature of this progress in the news stories is reinforced through an appeal to proceduralism that normalizes integration as a series of objective procedures that

guide the decision-making process within the EU. The discourse on proceduralism can be traced in references to the interdependence of various EU entities: the EU Commission evaluates, but cannot make definitive decisions, which is a prerogative of unnamed “leading European Union officials.” In relation to the narrative macrostructure, proceduralism in EU decision-making almost always appears as contextual background that aims to demystify the EU integration and behind-the-scenes processes. Ideologically, however, such enlisting of the procedures rationalizes organizational hierarchy and minimizes readers’ ability to assign blame for unfavorable decisions (delay in the date for White Schengen, for example) to a singular entity. The legitimacy of each report or proposal depends on the decision of an institution that occupies higher position in organizational hierarchy. Furthermore, journalists’ appeals to proceduralism suggest an ideological association between integration and a well-oiled automaton whose functioning is not driven by political interests. The consequent naturalization of the politics of conditionality stems from the appropriation of a scientific and technical ethos. These excerpts illustrate the point:

The deputy head of the Czech Foreign Minister Jan Pozar said that there are “hundreds of pages of the report” and that it would “take time to get to the final evaluations and decisions based on them.” He states that, based on the first impressions, the results of the implementation of the road map of the individual Western Balkan countries are uneven, and that some countries have advanced less and some have advanced more. (B92, May 19, 2009)³

The fact that it's been a year since the EU signed the SAA with Serbia, and then blocked it has a negative impact on our accession to the EU despite the steady increase of the percentage of European laws that have been adopted. This is particularly problematic given the fact that among the countries in the region we are now at the bottom [...] (Blic, May 22, 2009)⁴

Within the scientific discourse, power inequality between EU and Serbia is both an outcome of objective procedures, and also a rational relationship enabled by expert missions

that produce “hundreds of pages of the reports” based upon which various EU bodies can make informed and fair decisions. Pragmatically, this discursive strategy transforms continuous surveillance into an activity of a benevolent group of people, often identified as *experts* from EU and Serbia, who have the skills and power to assess (but not to evaluate) whether Serbia is making sufficient progress. Their ability to scientifically assess and measure degree of progress often presumes existence of standardized objectives, which are indicated in the statement “road map for visa liberalization includes 42 assessment criteria” (B92, June 12, 2009).

Discursively, readers’ beliefs in the existence of standards, which are legitimized through an appeal to scientific ethos, support the idea that progress can be measured and that countries can be compared. *B92*, for example, foregrounds the ranking between the countries with the interpretation of Pozar’s assessment that “some countries have advanced less and some have advanced more” to suggest that this evaluation is meaningful and truthful description of Serbia’s current position in the integration (B92, May 19, 2009). As a rhetorical strategy, comparisons legitimize difference and division between “us” and “them” based on objective and logical criteria (van Dijk, 1991).

Integration as EU’s reward for Serbia’s progress. The existence of clear steps, procedures, and objective criteria creates an impression that the desired goal is attainable and that a procedure for reaching it is clear, thus motivating the readers to act and support the dominant EU’s politics toward Serbia. This action-function of interpretative repertoires explains why news stories often use term *reward* to define White Schengen, rather than *right* (which appears in the period when visa-free regime is in danger) and *gift* (which would reproduce negative images of power imbalance between EU and Serbia). As a rhetorical

choice, the metaphor of reward presupposes existence of active work, a degree of agency that enables Serbia to control its own destiny within the EU integration. As a linguistic choice, labeling a relationship as an act of rewarding something to someone fosters readers' acceptance that such agency is limited: Reward presumes a relationship of dependence between two parties (the giver and the recipient) by articulating the accomplishment (the reason for the reward) and the authority and credibility of the subject who acknowledges and rewards such accomplishment (the EU institutions).

News discourse never tries to conceal the relationship of inequality between the EU and Serbia. In fact, news stories univocally define the relationship as power hierarchy that justifies EU's politics of conditionality and a high degree of monitoring that Serbia is subjected to. The authors of the excerpts above engage common naming strategies to mark EU governing institutions (the Commission) or officials (Jan Pozar) as acting agents. In other instances, this marking is accomplished through metonymia in which the EU acts through its products (integration, visa liberalization, accession). Furthermore, typical and consistent use of transitivity within Serbian news discourse suggests that the EU representatives are not only the dominant speaking subjects that define the meaning of various events for Serbia, but also the agents who make Serbia the object of their actions. Therefore, the readers see that EU *initiates* and *holds* the meetings, *proposes* and *abolishes* visa regime, *opens* the gates of Europe, *create* opportunities for Serbian citizens, and eventually *evaluates* and *affirms* Serbia's capability to uphold European values.

This relationship does not change even when Serbia, its institutions, and individuals who are speaking for Serbian citizens are recognized as agents, which I note in Djelić's statement that "we have initiated" the process (B92, June 12, 2009). However, in the relation

to other elements of this interpretative repertoire, it is clear that these actions are not productive on their own and that their power to produce particular effects depends on the existence of particular set of conditions: Serbia's actions are interpreted either as the work done to fulfill the criteria that are predetermined by another subject (EU) or to demonstrate ability to protect EU project from potential threats. For instance, the first excerpt in this chapter illustrates government's determination to help EU against asylum-seekers. Furthermore, Serbia cannot ever vouch for the effectiveness of its work or the progress it is making. Rather than interpreting this form of EU dominance as an inhibiting force, readers are invited to read it as a rewarding relationship grounded in the narrative of progress towards the goal of accession to the EU.

The idea of visa liberalization as a reward also implies identification of a recipient or main beneficiary. Throughout the news discourse, readers are invited to see themselves as citizens of Serbia who are both the beneficiaries, and also the main group that will *suffer* if the actions of undesired individuals (e.g., asylum seekers, illegal workers) diverge Serbia from the right path. However, the underlying theme of the news stories that define EU integration as a state-lead process implies that these positions of beneficiaries and victims are premised on the affirmation of Serbian state as the only entity that can ensure the progress, even though it cannot independently vouch for it. Consequently, when news stories enlist Serbia's accomplishments or specify the progress that is being made, they predominately highlight reforms that contribute to the strengthening of the state framework such as "security of the documents, control of illegal migration including readmission, public order and security, external relations and fundamental rights" (B92, June 12, 2009).

In terms of the narrative structure, state representatives most often appear as the main characters or speaking subjects that define the meaning of visa liberalization for the readers, who are also referred to as *citizens of Serbia*, in all three news outlets. *Politika*, in that regard, makes an exception by featuring the statements of common people whose voices have the power to legitimize particular meanings of visa liberalization. For instance, the story published on December 20, 2009 (the day when White Schengen was put into effect), relies on a set of personal narratives of citizens who were waiting to cross the border. The reports advance preferred meanings of visa liberalization, as in the quoted statement: “Maybe in the future I will not go as often, but it's a good feeling that I can go to the European Union, whenever I wish to do so” (*Politika*, December 20, 2009).⁵ However, even with this privileging of vernacular narratives, the voices of the common Serbs are subordinated to the narratives of state officials who are shepherding the people across the borders. As the same story notes, prominent government officials and ministers such as Vuk Jeremić, Snezana Malović, and Ivica Dacić are the first to cross the borders and get the EU entry stamps in “the first minute of December 19.” Figuratively, the state also affirms its leadership by issuing the brochures for safe traveling (*Blic*, December 7, 2009), and by helping “travelers from Serbia to find their way in their first contact with the EU” (*B92*, December 20, 2009).

Aside from using clear references to state leadership to mark state-centered identity as a legitimate and preferred means for individual's investments in the EU integration, news stories also identify the Serbian state as an entity that is responsible for the progress. This discursive move is clear in journalistic use of pronouns “we” and “us” to simultaneously mark the whole national body or all Serbian citizens as well as to differentiate this group from government or the state. As Wodak et al. (1999) noted, these variations allow people to

have different attachments to their group memberships and, consequently in this case, to both take the credit for the advancements of the state and also minimize their responsibility for insufficient progress. News stories create possibility for this dual investments in state-centered identities with ambiguous use of “we” that appears in Djelić’s acknowledgment that “we have made another big step towards the White Schengen” (B92, June 12, 2009). In this statement, the personal pronoun is ambiguous despite the fact that preceding statement “it was really a big task for us” suggests that “we” should mean state representatives (B92, June 12, 2009). However, because Djelić articulates an accomplishment, the pronoun can be both addressee-inclusive and addressee-exclusive, depending on reader’s general orientation toward the EU integration.

This possibility for open interpretation accomplishes two discursive goals. On one hand, it allows journalists to position themselves as the watchdogs of the state and exploit power inequality between EU and Serbia to create an interpretative space in which readers can advance critique of the state. However, this ambiguity also have a pragmatic function as journalists acknowledge ineffectiveness of the state leadership only to affirm the idea that acceptance of Serbia into the EU would signify the recognition of Serbia as a European state. While the ability of the state to lead the nation may appear as a subject of journalistic and audience’s critiques, the fact that the state representatives are the only voice Serbia has within the news discourse indicates that the readers are invited to see themselves mainly as citizens of Serbian state.

EUropeanness as (Serbia's) Final Destination

The repertoire that focuses on the EU as Serbia's final destination shifts emphasis from progress thru steps and proceduralism to focus on the affirmation of integration as final benchmark within the reach of Serbia. Through a cluster of rhetorical tropes that evoke progress, the texts construct the belief in integration as an obtainable benchmark that is equivalent to Europeanness, even though the particulars of the road to this final destination are still unclear. The following excerpt from a news story that celebrated the official announcement of the visa-free regime toward the end of 2009 illustrates some of the textual strategies that build this repertoire. Under the title "A Group of 50 Serbian Citizens Traveled to Brussels Without Visas: Serbian Brandy Arrived to the Capital of Europe," the story quotes EU officials:

"I hope that we will soon be able to welcome you not only as free travelers, but as citizens of the EU," said Billström. [...] "The essence of the EU integration is a friendly community where we treat each other as equal partners. This is the home in which we would like to see Serbian representatives, to work together," said Silvana Koch-Mehrin, who also expressed hope that concrete negotiations about Serbia's accession to the EU would start soon. (Blic, December 20, 2009)⁶

This discourse marks the European Union as the symbolic and territorial materialization of Europeanness. For instance, the headline "Serbian Brandy Arrived to the Capital of Europe" accomplishes this task with a subtle insertion of a descriptive detail ("Capital of Europe") to describe Brussels, one of three administrative centers of the EU. Readers can find similar modes of description throughout the news discourse. Common phrases such as *European perspective*, *Europeanization of civil society*, *European metropolis*, *European borders*, *someplace in Europe*, and *European family*, perpetuate images that audiences can read Serbia's accession to EU as the accession to Europe.

The selected passages also reinforce the equivalence of meanings between EU and Europeaness by clustering a range of values around the term (EU) *integration*. In that regard, the news stories invite the readers (a) to recognize integration as a condition for realization of various markers of Europeaness such as *peace, stability, equality, familiarity, education, increased purchasing power, harmony, civil society, and human rights*; and (b) to subordinate them to the value of reaching the final destination, or EU citizenship.

These portrayals of the EU as a desirable final destination highlight a promotional function of the discourse that is selling the EU project to Serbian readership (Magistro, 2007). Most often, the news stories advance positive associations between EU and images of serenity, order, harmony, and togetherness that can be reached through systematic progress. The credibility and plausibility of these portrayals are reinforced through quotations of EU officials as well as with journalists' emphasis on EU's welcoming attitude toward Serbia and a desire "to work together" with it.

These news stories inevitably invite readers to view every talk about the EU as a talk about Europe and vice versa. In the process, news stories are also activating rhetorical tropes of an undeniably positive, but also ambiguous, future. By appealing to humanism, democracy, freedom, and enlightenment, the repertoire fails to produce direct comparison between past, present, and future and offer clear explanation why tomorrow will be better than today. Instead, by paraphrasing Bringéus on another occasion, reporters suggest that the readers should be satisfied to know that "the liberalization of the visa regime is a step that opens the door for the development of civil society" and that as such it is "an important goal for the citizens" that have been reached with enforcement of the White Schengen (Politika, November 30, 2009).⁷

I argue that such degree of vagueness allows readers to make their own investments in the EU integration. Simultaneously, however, this enabling of an interpretative vacuum in which readers can use their personal narratives to legitimate the value of EU, allows news discourse to conceal reproduction of another premise, and that is that the EU accession is the only path Serbia can take. Furthermore, the focus on the future facilitates the omission of potentially incriminating references to the collective past, which people in Serbia often identify as *situacija* [situation]. The term *situacija* is a dominant symbolic means for articulating individual feelings of discontinuity, entrapment in a not-normal state, and disappointment with socio-cultural degradation which occurred in the years after the collapse of Yugoslavia, and continued even after the overthrow of the Milošević regime in 2000 (Jansen, 2005, Simić, 2009). Infused with the myth of a national fall, memory of *situacija* or collective inertia emerges as an unpredictable element of national imagination, whose inclusion in news discourse would necessitate (a) acknowledgment of the collapse of the state, which would transform narrative of progress into narrative of return; and (b) clear description of the reforms that Serbia has made since its investment in the EU integration, which in turn could question the view of integration as an apolitical and desired outcome.

To manage this complicated aspect of collective memory and history, news stories rely on the uncontested imagined benchmark to minimize the relevance of past and the need to historically contextualize both the EU integration and Serbia's current position. Consequently, the evidence of progress is not established on the specific descriptions of the past, but with an unquestionable premise that a benchmark exists and that Serbia is capable of getting closer to it in the future.

The promotional tone within this repertoire is not only to sell the EU project to Serbian public, but also to motivate continuous support for its policies by assuring the readers that desired collective identity is attainable. To legitimize this assurance, news stories connect visions of sequential progress, reachable benchmark, and the trope of an inevitably good future into a singular idea that the EU accession is inevitable and a natural civilizational development of humanity. As I discussed earlier, the construction of temporal relationships between independent events plays an important role in forging readers' continuous investments in the national EU politics even after White Schengen was officially put into effect. Between 2009 and 2011, the majority of people in Serbia reported that the most important outcome of the EU integration would be access to better life for young people, freedom of movement, and the right to work outside Serbia.²⁴

Interestingly, gaining access to EU's financial funds designed for development of local organizations, civil society, and small businesses are not citizens' top priorities, even though news media have made an effort to inform public about these and other concrete benefits of the EU integration.²⁵ Limited public access to the information about these financial resources and lack of clear national strategy how these EU funds should be appropriated²⁶ are just some of the factors that contributed to the popular belief that the abolishment of the visa regime in 2009 and eventual EU membership are the only aspects of the EU integration that have impact on citizens' everyday lives. Considering this orientation

²⁴ These orientations are supported by bi-yearly SEIO's reports "European Orientation of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia: Trends" available at <http://www.seio.gov.rs/documents/national-documents.223.html>

²⁵ On June 19, 2011, Radio-Televizija Srbije (Radio-TV Serbia) has started broadcasting *Šta ja imam od toga?* [*What do I have from this?*]—a TV series consisting of 15 episodes that portray the EU integration from the standpoint of average citizen. More precisely, the show discusses what citizens can expect from Serbia's accession in the EU and how each movement forward affects their everyday lives (<http://www.rts.rs/page/tv/sr/series/20/RTS+1/3106/Šta+ja+imam+od+toga%3F.html>).

²⁶ Author's informal conversation with Vladimir Petronijevic, the director of nongovernmental organization Group 484, and representatives from City of Belgrade's Agency for European Integration and Cooperation with Civil Society, in summer 2012.

toward visa liberalization, the institutional narrative have faced a challenge in generating and sustaining public interest and support for national EU politics once White Schengen was put into effect.

Journalists' activation of the repertoire of EU as final destination aims to respond to this exigency. Within this interpretative framework, frequent references to *better* future, finality or *the ultimate goal, development* and *Europeanization*, and accomplishment of pre-set *prerequisites* create an image of evolutionary progression. In contrast to the previous repertoire that uses images of continuity to connect distinct events to the larger EU project, this cluster of familiar images and effective values exploits ideology of common sense to advance popular appeals as preferred representations of the final destination. With this strategy, the repertoire eventually marks the movement toward the desired benchmark as historical inevitability and a matter of moral responsibility. These quotations from both government representative and also common Serbian citizen illustrate the point:

“Euro-integration is a strategic priority for Serbia, despite the circumstances in Serbia and the European Union due to the unfavorable economic crisis. Serbia’s orientation toward the European Union is not a matter of a moment, but a rational choice among priorities and direction that Serbia wants to go,” says Delević. (B92, May 19, 2009)⁸

“We will be better when we join the EU, it is inevitable. We have to be part of Europe, not only with the territory, but as far as everything else,” said this cop [Goran Joksimovic, a police officer from Novi Sad and one of the winners of the competition *Europe for Everyone*]. (Politika, December 27, 2009)⁹

As these news excerpts indicate, news media invite readers to view the EU integration not only as progress, but also as an evolutionary development, especially when this development means democracy, humanity, and freedom. Furthermore, the claims that “Euro-integration is a strategic priority for Serbia,” and that “we will be better...we have to be part of Europe,”

reinforce the idea that EU integration is a process of becoming by suggesting movement to a higher stage in civilizational development.

One of the benefits of activating the evolutionary narrative and its implicit association with rational, scientific objectivity is that the call for progress and its unfolding are seen as a natural advancement of humanity that is disinvested from desire and bias. Introduction of the elements of evolutionary discourse minimizes the need for assigning responsibility and blame to any concrete subject, considering that progress and development are governed by the natural laws. In that regard, the repertoire affirms apolitical character of the EU integration without suppressing audiences' potential dissatisfaction with the pace of country's accession or with a long-wait for the visa liberalization to be put in the effect. Instead, the idea of attainable EU membership as the nation's destiny and desired benchmark aims to transform this dissatisfaction into an acceptance of Serbia's disempowered position and facilitate readers' symbolic surrender to mysterious, unpredictable, and dispassionate unfolding of evolutionary progress.

In addition, interpreted through Darwinian discourse, evolution can serve as a metaphor for the development of society that is based on the selection of the fittest, whose adaptability and complexity ensure the best chances for survival. Between 2009 and 2011, news discourse revived this mythic fear by using the image of EU as Serbia's final destination to transform national investment in EU integration into a moral obligation the state has toward its people. In this case, the elements of evolutionary paradigm allow readers to make subconscious linking between national survival and the EU into an idea that participation in the EU integration is the accomplishment of the nation's destiny. In other words, the audiences are invited to identify moral prescription in the words of Milica

Delević, who is saying not only that EU orientation is *our* “rational choice among priorities and direction that Serbia wants to go,” but also that the EU is the only choice Serbia and its citizens have (B92, May 19, 2009).

Serbia as a Source of Manageable Otherness

The news media interpretations of EU integration as progress and EU as a desired final destination become subject of discursive contestation whenever the course of events presents a questioning or negation of Serbia’s European belongingness. The following passage from a news story illustrates this tension: through the quotation of an EU official, the unequal status of Serbia is highlighted and credit is given to the EU, rather than to the Serbian government, for Serbia’s accomplishments:

“Nobody expected that these countries will be able to implement all these reforms within a year and a half, but they have done so and will be rewarded. What is important is that this process has shown that when there are clear conditions and a clear goal and reward, in this case very juicy carrot, a system of conditionality by the EU works quite well,” assessed Stiglmeier. (B92, November 30, 2009)¹⁰

Statements such as this one by Stiglmeier expose the limitations of the two interpretative repertoires discussed earlier—EU integration as a progress toward becoming a European state and EU as final destination. If these repertoires construct the power hierarchy as a natural order and the relationship between Serbia and the EU as rewarding paternalism, they fail to offer a rational account for why this relationship does not change even as Serbia progresses on the path to the full EU membership. To mediate the tensions, the news media employ a third interpretative repertoire that describes Serbia as a source of unpredictability and instability that can be contained through the EU integration. Thanks to the polyfunctional character of interpretative repertoires, whose use is not governed by any specific rules, news media are able to combine different socially accepted truths and values to reinforce the

legitimacy of a dominant argument and to discriminate against its alternatives (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the centering of the EU as the final destination and undisputable norm is a discursive means for reproducing an East-West axis whose legitimacy lies with the plausibility of evolutionary progression. In contrast, this third interpretative repertoire engages in the arguments about politics of place to re-interpret the division between the center and periphery as an outcome of natural geographic divisions between two regions.

News stories most often articulate this division through prominent and consistent use of naming strategies that refer to Serbia's EU integration as the integration of Western Balkan states whose Europeanness is always in question:

He [Božidar Djelić] said that with this vote European parliamentarians have shown that there was no more doubt about the European future of the Western Balkans. (B92, November 12, 2009)¹¹

The Head of the European Commission in Belgrade, Vincent Deger, said recently that the confidence of the EU towards the Western Balkan countries is steadily growing, but there are additional challenges ... (Blic, February 7, 2011)¹²

These naming practices are consistent throughout the news discourse. The discourse fixes Serbia's geopolitical position through comparison with neighboring countries such as Romania, which one of the journalists located next to "our biggest 'eastern gate'" (Politika, December 20, 2009). As I mentioned earlier, comparisons are important rhetorical strategies in the narrative of progress; marking the difference between Serbia and the EU by comparing the country with its surrounding neighbors contextualizes and limits the meaning of the nation's prospects for EU integration. News stories also mark the geographical space by tying Serbia's advancements with the discussion of how this progress can affect the *peace* and *stability* of the region, which news media often cite as the major goals of the visa

liberalization. For example, in a news article “One more step to the ‘White Schengen’” journalist cites EU representative Tanja Fajon, who refers to the reasons for granting visa liberalization to BiH and Albania:

We were reminded that it is not fair that these two countries are excluded from the process, because it could contribute to new divisions in the Balkans. (B92, November 12, 2009)¹³

Certainly, the frequent appearance of the term *Balkan* and its variations within the news stories result from journalists’ reproduction of the official rhetoric of EU institutions that define the fifth and sixth enlargements as the integrations of the Western Balkan states. However, this objectivization of the nomen Western Balkan does not erase the historical heritage, or the interplay of Ottoman and Byzantium legacies, that enables Europe’s knowledge of the Balkan region and fixes its borderline position (Todorova, 2006). When the perception of this heritage enters the news discourse in the form of contemporary national anxieties, it also becomes a significant discursive axis around which particular meanings of the visa liberalization, Serbian state, and Serbianness become possible. As Dixon and Durrheim (2000) noted, location is a site of identity formation; thus, every instance of naming such location and differentiating it from other places is also a discursive practice of narrating who we are and who we want to be.

In this case, the geographical locatedness of collective identity is inseparable from liminality that emerges in the mutually constitutive relationship between Western Europe and the region (Goldsworthy, 2002; Todorova, 2006; Živković, 2011). Within this discourse, Serbia becomes an abnormal hybrid of Europeanness and otherness manifested with elements of backwardness, violence, and barbarity. As Todorova (2006) argued, this position of in-betweenness needs to be read in light of the historical and geographic conditions that gave

rise to the Balkan discourse. In that regard, born within and extracted from Europe's own knowledge of Self, Serbia also serves as Europe's dark alter ego and irredeemable problem child whose claim of European status neither can be fully denied nor confirmed. Echoing the notion of unfulfilled Self, Serbian news discourse on visa liberalization emphasizes barriers and differences between Serbia and EU not only by invoking elements of otherness, but also by suggesting that Serbia's progress always falls short of the desired mark.

While the boundaries between center (EU, Western Europe) and periphery (Balkans, Eastern Europe) are reiterated in this repertoire, two prominent thematic structures in news discourse tend to redeem Serbian collective identity by locating it in a particular position in the spatialization of the dichotomy center-periphery. The following sections discuss these two thematic clusters as the dominant features in the repertoire of managing otherness.

Disorders and need for state intervention. In response to the EU's enforcement of the politics of conditionality even after November 2009, news stories began featuring more prominently a set of propositions that constructed Serbia as a space where otherness can be managed through some form of state intervention and law enforcement. The following excerpts from stories published in December 2009 and February 2011 illustrate the interpretative moves that produce Serbia as manageable difference:

For violations of the EU policies entry ban for five years

Old Rules

Visa liberalization does not mean the abolition of border controls because of the danger of illegal immigrants, and in some situations customs officers will behave as before. [...] Also, based on the reasonable judgment, the border police may prohibit entry to the Schengen area to a person who poses a danger to public order, or who already have been denied entry into the Union for some reason. (Blic, December 7, 2009)¹⁴

“Black Schengen” threatens Serbia?

Due to the sharp increase in asylum applications in the EU, Serbia and Macedonia in June threatened suspension of visa free regime [...] Belgium has warned the EU of “the dangerous consequences of the visa liberalization,” and Serbian authorities were invited to respond and prevent this phenomenon, which resulted in a drastic reduction of the number of requests in the second quarter of 2010. [...] “The case is with the Albanians from southern Serbia and Macedonia [...]” said [Ivica] Dačić. (Politika, February 12, 2011)¹⁵

As these passages suggest, readers are invited to make sense of a significant re-orientation in the news discourse: instead of the vision of flexible and traversable borders created with the image of EU as Serbia’s final destination, news stories now advance a preference for fixed, clearly defined, and policed boundaries. For instance, the first story quoted above, defines visa-free travel as a question of safety. Through extensive descriptions of the new and old policies that apply to traveling documents, duration of stay, airport taxes, turnpike tolls, and use of cell phones while driving, just to name a few, news stories create an impression that traveling to EU countries can be dangerous: any wrong step or improper behavior deemed to pose “a danger for public order” can result in delayed crossing and even an “entry ban for five years.” In addition, the description of the “Old Rules” and the metaphor “Black Schengen” indicate a change in the meaning of visa liberalization, which now signifies implementation of a preventive system that secures the borders and limits the movement, rather than a policy that enables visa-free traveling. In essence, this interpretive repertoire reminds readers that boundaries are not removed due to the threat of disorder and that with visa liberalization the boundaries become crossable through law enforcement and state sanctioning of the EU’s rules.

The safety of the passengers and the EU’s borders became the focus of the news reports, especially after November 2009, and readers could find more stories structured as

sets of advices (“brochure for safe travel”), warnings (“dangerous consequences of visa liberalization”), or threats (“will not be granted asylum and ... will be returned”). Although these prescriptions for proper use of visa liberalization appear in different forms, they gain validity based on a core assumption that Serbia is a source of manageable otherness: if border crossing and sustainability of the White Schengen are always conditioned by the existence of a barrier between EU and Serbia, Serbia’s internal flaws can always be localized and contained.

As is the case with the two other interpretative repertoires, the common sense understanding that Serbia is the source of disorder and other problems that can endanger the EU tends to support the idea that state leadership is needed for EU integration. In the context of news discourse on visa liberalization, Serbia, or to be more precise the Serbian state, performs this role by ensuring that the EU remains in a natural state of balance and order. This is particularly the case when journalists translate matters of national identity into technical issues that are considered to belong to the government’s domain.

A good example of this is a set of news reports published in early July 2009, in which all three media outlets identified the unresolved status of Kosovo as the major obstacle for the abolishment of the visa regime. Typically, these stories invoke the myth of Kosovo as Serbia’s imaginary homeland. However, in the interpretative repertoire of Serbia as a source of manageable otherness this symbolism plays an important role in reinforcing the feeling of collective belonging by reminding Serbia of its otherness. Journalists confined the issue to whether the security of Serbian traveling documents and of the EU borders could be endangered by uncontrolled immigration from Albania:

In addition to the political, one of the important reasons for supporting Kosovo’s independence was precisely the fact that this would solve the problem of migration of

the Kosovo's population. Various population surveys made before the declaration of independence were also supporting this position. Then, the Kosovar Albanians alleged that they need the [independent] status because they want to stay in "their country." However, the reality is different, and according to recent research, up to 70% of young Albanians want to go abroad. (Blic, July 2, 2009)¹⁶

In most cases, journalists construct Serbia's duty to protect the EU center from the (in)flows of *illegal immigrants, fake asylum seekers, and criminal elements* through Serbia's Southeast borders by creating an image of partnership between Serbia and the EU. Typically, news stories utilize the images of a benevolent and vulnerable EU to re-label the EU's demands or potential threats as invitations for engaging in mutually beneficial actions. Acting on the premise that the unequal power distribution is essentially a rewarding relationship that generates benefits for the nation, the Serbian state can joyfully respond to the call and assume the status of a hero even when its own ineffectiveness is the source of increasingly instable and porous borders.

As Todorova (2007) has argued, Serbia's position on the edge of Europe not only highlights unbridgeable differences between Self and Other, but also suggests how to manage gradations of difference (p. 74). Živković (2011) further developed this argument to note that, rather than locating the center-periphery relationship strictly on East-West axis, Balkan discourse utilizes Northwest-Southeast gradients of depreciation and appreciation, thus making possible the articulation of different degrees of peripheralization and agentive spaces. In the texts analyzed, the in-betweenness of Serbia in the European geopolitical map allows for the management of the nation's questionable Europeanness. At the same time, Serbia's position on the periphery of Europe also enables a validation of the image of the nation as a guardian who protects Europe from Eastern Others (Čolović, 2000; Kiossev, 2002; Živković, 2011).

Managing otherness through spatialization. Across the three media outlets I analyzed, news discourses locate the source of Serbia's otherness in the behavior of an internal Other—as in the improper use of the White Schengen—or in its spatial proximity to those who are positioned as undesirable and dangerous second-class Europeans. In particular, making a rational claim that some peripheral states are better than others allows journalists to strategically manage the uncomfortable reminders that Serbia is not part of the European proper. Within this repertoire, the practice of comparing the Balkan states serves as a rhetorical strategy to identify undesirable characteristics in Serbia's immediate surroundings. Arguably, as Bakić-Hayden (1995) noted, it can be said that the stories engage in a form of nested orientalism: News stories create gradients of depreciation by discursively re-distributing Serbia's otherness to groups that are spatially farther South or East, consequently making Serbia less threatening or backward in the eyes of the West. Expressed in narrative form, nesting or stratification of the periphery is often referenced through geographical designations and selective identification of other states as sources of otherness, as illustrated by a quote from this story on *B92*:

“It is our responsibility that we cut these channels at the start ... and thus avoid the problem that some countries, such as Romania, have with other states of the European Union,” Djelić said. (*B92*, March 2, 2010)¹⁷

The following excerpt from a story in *Politika.rs* further illustrates how this discursive strategy suggests the negative effects of Serbia's liminal position on the national imagination and state functioning. In a report titled “White Schengen divides Serbs,” the reporter states:

Some believe that the adoption of such decision would mean that Belgrade “betrays Serbs” because it would recognize independent Kosovo state, while others believe that it is “the right thing to do because the international community sees that Kosovo criminogenic zone.” (*Politika*, July 7, 2009)¹⁸

In other stories, the affirmation of Serbia's position as guardian of Europeaness in the East serves to combine appeals to national victimhood and fear of losing part of the Serbian essence because of proximity to the East, with a sense of pride in being selected to serve as a protective membrane that wraps EU's borders. In this mediation of otherness, the interpretative repertoire creates a means for purging the assigned stigma through the suffering caused by the country's interaction with or proximity to undesirable Others. The following excerpt illustrates the tensions in the discourse:

As 'Blic' finds out, over the weekend, thanks to the tip by the German police, Serbian police have returned the travelers from Macedonia who intend to apply for asylum in Germany. That the fight against the abuse of visa liberalization is not easy is confirmed with the events that followed, as the passengers protested in front of the Serbian embassy in Skopje accusing Serbia of the violation of their human rights. (*Blic*, November 19, 2010)¹⁹

In reports about the influx of immigrants to Serbia after 2009, *Politika* and to the various extents *B92* and *Blic*, rhetorically exploit the blend of horror and valor inscribed in Serbia's borderline status. Consequently, in the process of this marking of the degrees of sameness and difference between Serbia and EU, news media outlets construct and validate the vision of a "transitory space" as yet another metaphor related to those of a bridge or a crossroad that are common in Balkan discourse (Čolović, 2000; Todorova, 2007). Unlike the metaphor of a bridge or a guardian, the transitory space advances the image of Serbia as a source of ambiguous otherness, considering that the word transition means a state of not being fully here or there. The image of transitory space is an expression of movement across a three-layered hierarchy between: (a) EU as monolithic center; (b) Serbia as the periphery or immediate outside; and (c) the life on the other side of Serbia's southeast border as the absolute, non-European outside.

In sum, as the analysis of three repertoires in news discourse shows, along with emphasis on EU integration as progress and final destination, Serbs are persistently reminded of their otherness as cause of insufficient suitability for the European proper. Whether the issue is that Serbs are incapable of following the rules for visa-free traveling or that the state fails to manage its borders effectively, their unpredictable behaviors necessitate constant monitoring by the EU. The interpretative repertoires that enable these images suggest that Serbs are eternally bound to their otherness, and are consequently incapable of performing pure Europeanness. In that regard, rather than erasing externally-imposed stigmatizing narratives in which national history or Serbia's position in Western Balkan suggest that the country is Europe's powder keg, news stories highlight barriers to EU integration only to make them bearable for the readers through emphasis on proceduralism and progress. Although the ideological work of buttressing the EU walls is mainly accomplished through the interpretative repertoire of Serbia as source of manageable otherness, its presence does not undermine key assumptions of the other two repertoires, namely the existence of the benchmark and the progressive movement toward it. In other words, the repertoires work together against alternative readings of Serbia's position in relation to the EU (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

To an extent, Serbian news discourses activate and reproduce dominant ideological frameworks that drive the EU's extension of CEECs and reinforcement of the politics of conditionality. The frameworks rest on a presumption that the integration is procedural and systematic process of becoming one of the EU states, which in turn highlights the values of efficiency, expertise, inevitability, and European cultural belonging. In terms of the news discourse, reproduction of this interpretation of the EU integration and the emphasis on

apolitical progress serve as univocal and rational explanations for Serbia's current position in the EU integration.

The combination of the three repertoires discussed in this chapter support the idea that the EU project is an incarnation of the modern state, neoliberal democracy, civil society, and cosmopolitanism, and justify the need to create strong state leadership and to build public support for the adoption of domestic policies that would reflect such values (Graan, 2010; Raik, 2010). These interpretative repertoires not only fashion certain versions of truth, but also construct desirable group membership and invest them with meaning (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Oriented toward particular social actions, the three dominant repertoires provide mechanisms for responding to the ideological entrapment of being both European insiders and outsiders. Building on this argument, I want to conclude this chapter with a discussion of the identity politics that are put into motion with the activation and interplay of these three interpretative repertoires.

Constitution of Proper Serbian Citizens

Although polyfunctional, interpretative repertoires establish a restrictive range of positions from which particular worldviews and social relations can be seen as meaningful and more rational than others and, consequently, be advanced as taken-for-granted truths. In the case of news discourse, news media create positions from which readers can speak by helping them respond to emergent events; connect fragmented and often contradicting knowledge about themselves into coherent interpretations of daily life and hardships; and identify and make sense of their position in social hierarchy (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Most important for the purpose of this study, news media use interpretive repertoires to give

readers the language and knowledge claims to express everyday experience of their collective belonging (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005).

In the news discourse I analyzed, persistent emphasis on state leadership and the need for an effective network of state apparatuses constitute readers as Serbian citizens who have reasons to accept the position as Europe's other ascribed by the EU's politics toward Western Balkan states. However, the purpose of the news narratives is not to promote passive submission to power inequality and apathy; instead, news media aim to persuade readers that performance of proper state-centered identities is the only meaningful means for establishing some form of autonomy and independence. My earlier discussion of Serbia as the guardian of the EU borders already indicated the preference for this type of collective identification. Through three interpretative repertoires, news stories constantly recognize the Serbian state as the entity responsible for controlling people's cross-border movement, preventing disorder, securing the traveling documents, certifying proper uses of White Schengen, and collaborating with the EU. Furthermore, news media often use these repertoires to stress that state intervention is the effective means for managing and containing Serbian's otherness. What follows is that the activation of three interpretative repertoires and their prescriptions of state-centered identities are strategic choices that news media make to manage country's subordinated and often ambivalent position in the integration. Their narratives advance the category of Serbian citizen to acknowledge power hierarchy between Serbia and EU and transform it into a resource of agency.

The validity of the state-centered identities, however, depends on the ability of news discourse to convey continuity of state sovereignty and its right to protect the public good whenever it is necessary. But using the principle of territoriality to validate idea of a citizen

as node of collective identification undermines this effort because the European integration and its politics toward Serbia complicate the state's prerogative to determine and legitimize its own borders (Kostovicova, 2004). As a solution, news media highlight Serbia's role of trusted gatekeeper of EU borders to situate the category of Serbian citizen and contain potentially incriminating nationalistic sentiments that often monopolize discourses on Serbia's territorial sovereignty (Erjavec & Volčić, 2007; Kostovicova, 2004).

In the following sections, I present how the concept of a state-centered identity is supported by interpretative repertoires that concretize state-intervention as necessary for disciplining of the citizens and making them responsible for maintaining the progress. Specifically, I trace two sets of interpretative moves that produce asylum seeking as violation of the rules that define proper citizenry. In the first set, reporters produce knowledge about state sovereignty by positioning asylum-seekers as a threat to the public good, or more specifically, to Serbia's position in the European hierarchy and ability to continue with the necessary progress. The second set of interpretative moves localizes the threat by focusing on the character of the asylum-seekers as the source of the problem. In both instances, readers are invited to see themselves as potential asylum-seekers and engage in self-disciplining and self-examination as the effective practices for managing internal otherness.

Enemies of the state and the EU. Rather than ignoring territorial borders as the sites where citizens perform state sovereignty, news media use visa liberalization to create discursive spaces where readers can be made into state subjects prior to traveling and independently from it. The discourse on visa liberalization and border crossing certainly facilitate this ideological work. Immigration, emigration, and travel are not only acts through which individuals perform dominant identity politics (Greenberg, 2011), but they are also

movements that put border crossers at the mercy of disciplinary practices that are routinely performed at the border checkpoints (O'Byrne, 2001; Salter, 2006, 2008). Visa regimes, as a complex of discourses, practices, policies, and attitudes, furthermore promote delocalization of physical borders and creation of states of exception within the state territory (Jansen, 2009; Salter, 2006).

Salter (2008) noted that one of the characteristics of the borders as permanent states of exception is that they create an impression of persistent and imminent threat by securing the inside (order) from the outside (chaos). However, the position on the periphery, narrated through selected news stories, suggests that Serbia establishes its sovereignty by protecting the borders of the EU. The position on the margin of Europe means that discursively the Serbian state establishes its power to suspend the rights and discipline its subjects not by regulating the entry of others into its territory, but by regulating the entry in the EU. Consequently, news media create an impression of a state of exception by promoting symbolic admission of Serbia's otherness, one through which all Serbian citizens can be seen as potential enemies of the EU. Symbolically, avowal of state citizenship establishes the border before the border, which in turn makes state sovereignty visible through the identification of proper motives for travel; the type of knowledge traveler needs to have to ensure safe passage; and a range of sanctions for those who may engage in improper border crossing.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked the question: How do Serbian news media use European symbolism to prescribe social relations between people and advance state-centered identities as the dominant expression of those relations? From the standpoint of identity politics, readers' perception that the state of exception exists and that such state can

be invoked whenever actions of particular individuals or groups threaten to diverge the whole nation from its desired path serve as the major means for regulating group memberships. The created category of proper Serbian citizen draws a restrictive line between those who are group insiders deserving of the protection of the state and those who are group outsiders and enemies. Furthermore, the category also establishes intergroup hierarchy by separating good from bad citizens who should be denied access to resources, rights, and privileges. In the context of the news discourse on visa liberalization, these prescriptions are particularly acute in the image of asylum seekers who offer undeniable evidence of state's ineffectiveness in protecting the EU borders. As such, the category of asylum seeker in Serbian news discourse becomes the site of discursive work oriented toward objectification, normalization, and de-politicization of the category of Serbian citizen.

Prominent in the news stories published between 2010 and 2011, the category of a (fake) asylum-seeker becomes a dominant means for revealing and affirming state sovereignty and identifying group insiders, outsiders, and enemies. During this period, news consistently represented asylum seeking as a national threat, thus invoking the need for a state of exception in which individual civil and human rights can be suspended for the greater benefit of the whole state. To create an impression of a threatened public interest, news media activated elements of the three interpretative repertoires to define asylum seeking as the undesirable cross-border movement that leads to stalled progress, regression, and deviations from the national path.

As a result, news stories replaced the images of peace and stability that dominated news reports in 2009 with appeals to security and safety, mainly by invoking metaphors of uncontrollable *onslaught* of asylum-seekers who exert *perpetual pressure* on the EU borders.

I identify some of these choices in the two following excerpts from the stories published in the period when the crisis over asylum seeking seemed to reach its end point:

Belgians have decided to take this step because their country, together with Sweden, Germany and Luxembourg, is flooded with a wave of false asylum-seekers. [...] According to the Belgian secretary, in their demands, asylum-seekers were complaining about the violation of basic human rights, discrimination based on ethnicity and the reluctance of the authorities to provide them with protection and secure a better position. (B92, May 5, 2011)²⁰

“We will not allow thousands of people who abuse visa-free regime to threaten the freedom of movement of the whole nation,” said Božidar Djelić, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration. [...] “This means that we will take all the necessary measures. Currently, we are considering introduction of certain sanctions for those who are trying to abuse the White Schengen,” said the Deputy Prime Minister. “There is no reason to seek asylum because there is no political repression in Serbia. Serbia is a free country,” said Ivica Dačić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia. (Politika, May 6, 2011)²¹

After 2009, when the first reports of asylum-seekers from Serbia became the main news of the day, journalists modified their rhetorical strategies to construct EU as a desired and vulnerable entity that is in need of Serbia’s protection. Although these examples do not promote EU integration through positive images, they nevertheless position the EU as an unmarked center by identifying undesirable uses of White Schengen by certain groups of people. Furthermore, these examples also rely on the narrative of progress to interpret the issue as a problem not only for EU, but also for Serbia’s position in the integration. However, in contrast to the idea of moving forward which was prominent in early 2009, journalists now invoke the images of *punishment, suffering, threat, and denial of hard deserved privileges*. With constant reminders that asylum seeking is undesirable and could lead to *regression*, news media reinforce the idea that progress can be accomplished only if the country follows pre-determined sequence of steps. Any deviation from this path could have far-reaching

consequences, not just for Serbia, but also for “the whole process of visa liberalization in the Western Balkans” (B92, October 21, 2011).

The fact that individual’s inconsiderate choices and behaviors endanger state power and limit state ability to manage its population and implicitly the well being of the whole group justifies the right of the state to intervene and discipline its citizens (see Politika, May 23, 2011). By taking responsibility for the actions of individual citizens and justifying intervention with the need to protect the rest of the population, the state becomes the sole entity with an authority to police both the movement, and also the intentions of “those who are trying to abuse White Schengen” (Politika, May 6, 2011).

Asylum seekers and models of good citizenry. When attention is given to examining traveler’s motives as a self-evident solution for the problem, news reporters create another interpretative pattern in the discourse on asylum seeking: defining asylum seeking as a matter of individual caprice. The following excerpts from two different news stories published in March 2010 illustrate how news media describe improper use of White Schengen as an activity of individuals motivated by egoistical desires:

Asylum-seekers from southern Serbia and Macedonia usually go to Belgium because the country offers the best conditions like hotel accommodations, among other things. (Blic, March 2, 2010)²²

Rozemon also thinks that these are “the citizens of Serbia and Macedonia, who are speaking Albanian” who are not well informed about the conditions for using the visa liberalization. “It is obvious that these people were lied by someone that they would get asylum here, money and housing. We know that their problems are economic, and not political in nature, so the odds that any of them will get asylum are poor. They should be familiar with this before they get here,” said Rozemon. (Politika, March 3, 2010)²³

These excerpts clearly define asylum seeking as a cross border movement that is undesirable not because it violates the laws, but because it is motivated by unreasonable,

unpatriotic, and opportunistic goals. Asylum-seekers are individuals who do not care about the good of the whole nation, but rather about material benefits like “money and housing” or “the best conditions such as hotel accommodations.” They are not loyal citizens and would sacrifice the reputation of the state and the nation by talking about non-existent political prosecution and repression (Politika, May 6, 2011). Also, as Rozemon stated, they are individuals who do not make an effort to learn all information and fulfill responsibilities associated with the right to be mobile subject. Finally, journalists’ use of verbs such as *complaining*, *being lied to*, and *abusing* put into question the morality of the intentions of asylum-seekers and indicate readers should interpret asylum seeking as an unwarranted choice.

These signs of disapproval are cast within a premise that proper Serbian citizens worthy of benefiting from the liberalization of visas are expected to demonstrate some personal commitments and actions, including but not limited to being resourceful, knowing and following the laws, respecting state documents, and not seeking economic benefits without working for them. Such expectations emerge as self-evident truths and moral norms based on which improper behaviors and attitudes can be identified, categorized, and judged (Verkuyten, 2005). Furthermore, consistent explanations of asylum-seekers’ actions as personal choices rather than rational responses to the lack of choices suggest that: (a) readers should not empathize with these individuals and their hardships; and (b) the state is not responsible for the issue and potentially negative treatment of asylum-seekers in the EU and upon return to Serbia.

The discursive delinking of asylum seeking from legal discourse and the stress on individual motives and choices, allow news media to legitimize the category of Serbian

citizen as a dominant mode of collective belonging by justifying state regulation of readers' everyday lives. One of the main functions of listing motives as selfish is to devalue the purpose of asylum seeking and highlight the negative effects this form of cross-border movement has for the nation. In protecting visa liberalization and its sovereignty from a threat that is not legally defined, the state can resort to non-legal interventions and justify the right to police the actions, intentions, and desires of all potential travelers. The government can also decide which motives are valid and who deserves state protection with a single proclamation that "Serbia is a free country" (Politika, May 6, 2011).

By engaging these interpretative moves, news media are recreating the type of disciplining techniques that regularly occur on actual, closed borders. As people engage with material borders at the entry points and during the visa interviews with embassy staff, they necessarily subject themselves to a confessional discourse to ensure their certification as "safe" travelers. To gain the right of entry and protection of the state, cross borders need to produce acceptable truths about themselves by revealing all personal information and reasons for travel and return home (Jansen, 2009; Salter, 2008, p. 369). The news discourse on visa liberalization suggests to readers the contours of this confession and appropriates it for the purpose of identity politics by calling readers to engage in self-examination through which they can see themselves and others as proper Serbian citizens. In combination with the self-examination outlined within the stories about asylum seekers, the three media outlets accomplish this task also by advancing a range of prescriptions for proper use of White Schengen and communicating them as advice on how to travel ("With 'Nicky' to Vienna for 29 Euros"²⁷) and for what purpose ("Tourists Without Visas, Stop for Workers"²⁸).

²⁷ From "Sa "Nikijem" do Beca za 29 evra (Politika, December 12, 2009)

²⁸ Turisti bez viza, stop za radnike (B92.net, December 19, 2009)

These naming and argumentative strategies affirm the claim that Serbs, or more precisely their otherness, pose a perpetual threat to both Serbia and the EU: the admittance of a degree of otherness facilitates continuous state intervention and disciplining of Serbian people into proper citizens because there is not only a “probable cause,” but also a “reasonable suspicion” that Serbian otherness could at any moment *invade* the EU and disturb its stability and order (Salter, 2006, p. 172). In that regard, asylum seeking, when understood as realization of such ever-present potentiality for disturbance, justifies continuous disciplining of all Serbian citizens and the need for performance of prescribed behaviors. In other words, asylum seeking becomes a reason for permanent state of exception, despite the fact that news media note that the problem has temporal and contextual specificity. Narrated through the discourse on visa liberalization, the image of Serbia as a source of manageable otherness and EU integration as a state-led process of becoming constitute Serbian citizens prior to movement as a way of cleansing subjects from their flaws and preparing them for their entry into the EU.

Most important, the constitution of the asylum-seeker as a marker of deviant identities illustrates the fluidity of the inclusionary and exclusionary practices (Wodak, 2008; de Cellia, et al., 1999; Wodak et al., 1999). By being legally and discursively named as Serbian citizens, asylum-seekers symbolize fallen or spoiled citizens that affirm group homogeneity through stratification. They are the insiders who have failed to uphold group values and therefore are deserving of potential exclusion from the group and denial of rights.

Simultaneously, this identification of deviance through the discourse on state citizenship silently marks the norm or what it means to be good citizen. News stories often accomplish this by identifying asylum-seekers as *Serbian citizens*, *citizens with Serbian*

passports, or people *who declare to be Serbian citizens*. Typical omission of the word *fake* before *asylum-seekers* and identification of asylum-seekers as an ambiguous group of people (“those who are trying to abuse White Schengen”) within news narratives also indicates that asylum-seekers symbolize all citizens who fail to perform prescribed state-centered identities. Furthermore, interchangeable use of terms *asylum-seekers*, *fake asylum-seekers*, and *immigrants* erases the legal aspects of the issue, thus suggesting that the reason for these intersections between discourses on asylum seeking and visa liberalization is legitimization of the government’s prescriptions for proper travel.

In other instances, the representation of asylum-seeker emerges through the differentiation of the strategies used by these individuals and their association with groups that have disposition toward such acts. Earlier, I discussed how news stories utilize three dominant interpretative repertoires to translate orientalist symbolic geography into a meaningful and objective explanation for the existence of borders between EU and Serbia. This particularly applies to the repertoire on Serbia as a source of manageable otherness, in which visa liberalization symbolizes not only a system that controls permeability of the borders, but also a concrete measure that prevents contamination of the center with the elements of disorder, chaos, and otherness. In the context of the news discourse on visa liberalization, this allows for simultaneous existence of two premises: (a) all Serbs inevitably carry the kernels of otherness, and (b) Serbs can be cleaned from such stigmatized characteristics through localization of sources of otherness.

The category of proper Serbian citizen enables such containment or shifting of the otherness to individuals or the groups whose members are initially identified as *Serbian citizens* or *holders of Serbian passport*. The nesting is accomplished through mentioned

prescriptions for self-disciplining, which now serve as the means by which news discourse invests the ambiguous and abstract category of a state citizen with the qualities of ideal national character. On one hand, the existence of ideal character, here articulated through the news reports on visa liberalization, serves as a model and solution that assures readers that they can overcome or manage their otherness (Djerić, 2003). On the other hand, the narratives about those who have failed to perform this character, serve as explanations for Serbia's current position in the integration and the need for state intervention and EU's paternalism. As a multifaceted expression of the group members' mentality and behavioral dispositions, the national character and its narration through the category of Serbian citizen conceal instances of practical orientalism, which I find in some of the earlier examples (Blic, July 2, 2009; Blic, March 2, 2010; Politika, March 3, 2010) as well as in the following set of news excerpts:

Most of them are Roma. [...] These people have the wrong information (;) they may not follow Internet [statement by Krister Bringeus, Sweden Ambassador] (B92, March 4, 2010)²⁴

Most of them are actually the ones who are from Kosovo and who have failed to integrate. (B92, October 21, 2010)²⁵

Djelić said that more money need to be devoted to better the life of the Roma community, but also that those of Roma nationality have responsibility not to endanger the achievement of all the citizens of Serbia by acting [in particular way] or failing to act. (Blic, May 8, 2011)²⁶

Although “the Albanians from southern Serbia and Macedonia,” “the citizens of Serbia ... who are speaking Albanian,” “Roma,” “those who are from Kosovo,” are legally recognized as Serbian citizens, they are also marked as national strangers: their behaviors, character, and mentality do not seem to fit with the essential traits of the preferred national group. Once rationalized as the threats for state sovereignty, the patterns of problematic

behaviors can be interpreted as dispositions of those who cannot embody the ideal national character because of their ethnic, religious, cultural, or other forms of collective difference. To follow Verkuyten (2005), the emphasis on personal choice in this situation marks asylum-seekers as internal others, strangers who are both lacking in European essence and also refusing or failing to integrate into what is imagined to be national group. Therefore, they are viewed as outcasts, unnatural members of the national group, and perpetual source of disturbances before being also identified as asylum-seekers. Most important, the fact that these representations are couched in seemingly apolitical discourse on Serbian citizenship enables news media to conceal the premises of social exclusion and rationalize various forms of discrimination and marginalization based on national difference.

Conclusion: The (Unfulfilled) Promises of State-Centered Identities

I can read journalists' emphasis on state-centered identities as an echo of the political and social situation in Serbia between 2009 and 2011. After nearly a decade of Serbia's active engagement in the EU integration, public discourse on the matter progressively has been reduced to the questions of state effectiveness and proceduralism (Biserko, 2011). Furthermore, the news narratives analyzed here appeared during the period when "retraditionalization" and Serbian revanchism broiling under Milošević's leadership (Cohen, 2001, p. 371-373) collided with the call for rebuilding Serbia as a civic state. The tension between two orientations, mainly manifested through the political bickering and affairs, created an atmosphere where any talk about Serbian essence, heroic history, ethnicity, and unique culture could be interpreted either as a revival of a violent and undesirable nationalism or as a strategy for survival. The call for protection of Serbian values, history, and cultural identity was often advanced by prominent political parties (DSS and SNS) and

ultra-right organizations (e.g., Dveri and Obraz), which in addition to the looming conflicts in Kosovo, stimulated other narratives of an imagined homeland that further contributed to the stigmatization of national discourses.

In such a situation, journalists centered on the seemingly de-politicized and polyfunctional category of Serbian citizen, which could be seen as an effort to promote collective unity out of fragmented and contradicting discourses on Serbian belonging. The same applies to the narrative effort to reinforce Serbia's position on the EU periphery, which news media use to respond to the assigned otherness, without putting the blame for stigmatized identities on either EU or Serbs. In both instances, activation of the state-centered national imagination enables news media to create an impression of objectivity and appropriate arguments from two dominant views about Serbia's EU future without directly proclaiming support for either one.

To legitimize these discursive choices, news media build on the ideological framework of the EU project and its goal to validate the category of "civis europaeus" as a solution to the existing divides and conflicts between different nations (Balibar, 2004, p. 121). As a universally applicable form of collective belonging that is disassociated from national identification, EU citizenship carries promises of greater inclusion and expansion of civil and human rights to all of those who are already recognized as state subjects.

Within this framework, the category of Serbian citizen that emerges in news stories promises all Serbian citizens equal status with other EU citizens despite their burden of having an undesirable national past and being marked as Europe's problem child. By defining the travel as a right granted to anyone who has state approved traveling documents, news discourse seems to advance a critique of constitutive nationalism, which in the past was

the main mechanism for excluding and denying constitutive rights to Serbian citizens based on their ethnic, religious, and cultural differences (Hayden, 1992, 1996). With this in mind, it appears that Serbian news media discourse on visa liberalization and its advancement of state-centered identities strive for rebuilding civic society as well as regional peace and reconciliation threatened with the difficult process of confronting the past.²⁹

However, these efforts remain an unrealized democratic potentiality that conceals a network of inclusionary and exclusionary practices based upon which the category of Serbian citizen and knowledge about it can be possible in the first place. As the news media examined validate state sovereignty by making visible states of exception and identifying internal others whose rights are limited or inferior to those of proper Serbian citizens, they also reproduce one of the pitfalls of EU project: Citizen and human rights as well as equality are produced through exclusion and avowals of particular group memberships that at any point can be denied to foreigners, undesirables, strangers, and those group insiders marked as non-Europeans (Balibar, 2004).

The prominence of inclusionary and exclusionary strategies in selected news narratives can be explained through the interrelated factors that affect constitution of collective identities in postsocialist Serbia, such as: EU's politics of conditionality and Serbia's troublesome advancement in the integration; the difficulty in advancing state citizenship as legal, political, and cultural marker of collective belonging in post-Milošević Serbia (see Vasiljević, 2011a); and the consistent perpetuation of nationalistic hatred and discrimination by Serbian news media, even though some of the outlets such as *B92* and *Blic*

²⁹ Beogradski centar za ljudska prava (Ljudska Prava u Srbiji 2011: Pravo, praksa, i medjunarodni standardi) noted that the regional cooperation between Serbia, Croatia and B&H and legal collaboration has been threatened with difficulties concerning prosecution of war criminals in all three countries and disagreements over establishing official interpretation of crimes all three parties have committed during the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

played an instrumental role in the overthrow of Milošević regime (see Džihana & Volčić, 2011; Erjavec & Volčić, 2007). I recognize that each of the contextual elements deserves close scrutiny if we are to understand the challenges that Serbia faces in the process of rebuilding civil society and democracy.

These factors are also important for the discussion presented in the next two chapters, where I shift the focus from news narratives to the discussion of the news readers' vernacular discourses. These are discourses that, coincidentally use citizenship a symbolic stage for articulating other forms of social, national, and political belonging, and for rationalizing violence toward marginalized groups (Greenberg, 2006b). As I argue, in the online environment the journalists' legitimization of the premises of the three interpretative repertoires opens space for the dialogic co-construction of meanings between journalists and their audiences. To wit, the characteristics of online communication, namely its ability to enable asynchronous and polyvocal interactions between media and audiences, can undermine the power of news narratives to fix the meanings of state citizenship and normalize this category as the primary expression of social relations among members of the audience. At the same time, the fact that online news producers establish the structure of the public forum and the conditions for public participation gives them power to define the parameters of readers' dialogues and make the EU, the Serbian state, and state citizenship the objects of readers' knowledge. Hence, the tensions underlying the co-construction of identity in online dialogue become a point of my analysis in the next chapters.

In this chapter, I explored how news editorial emphasis on the procedural and rewarding character of EU integration, and on the objectification of EU as desired and abstract benchmark, created a discursive space for the constitution of collective identities. In

Chapter 6, I explore readers' use of this discursive space to establish control over representations of Self. I will focus the analysis on the forms of collective belonging readers produce within the limits of the news discourse. Or more precisely, how they make sense of the news discourse, invoke their intimate and everyday experience of Self in response to the interpretative framework set by the news media, and work through ideological dilemmas produced through such positionings.

Chapter 6

Yearning for Mobile and Stateless Serbian Identities:

Vernacular re-interpretations of visa liberalization

“As we were savoring the hotdogs in Skadarska Street during a hot summer evening in 2012, a close friend shared with me the type of future she desires for herself in Serbia. As my friend explained, after visa liberalization, having a good and ‘normal’ life in Serbia became inextricably connected with material and symbolic obstacles that were preventing people from actually using the resources that were made available with the country’s advancement toward EU integration. With a smile, she described this yearning for access as a simple instance of going to a bar and being able to choose and pay for a beer, wine, or ‘dobra rakija’ [good plum brandy] that will not make her feel sick the next day.”
(author’s reflection, 2012)

Throughout history, European symbolism and its appeals to modernity, democracy, liberty, and European essence have played a major role in the national imagination in the Balkan states (Čolović, 2000; Herzfeld, 2004). By drawing upon vague and ambivalent meanings of Europeanness, the inhabitants of this region are able to transcend, even if temporarily, the barriers inscribed in orientalist geographies. By organizing binaries such as civilization/backwardness and center/periphery along East-West and North-South axes, these symbolic geographies have produced the Balkans as a geopolitical place whose location in relation to the imagined center marks Balkan’s inhabitants as Europe’s internal others (Todorova, 2006; Živković, 2011). The resulting feeling of in-betweenness enables Serbs to constitute scales of inclusiveness that do not erase group’s stigma but allow these individuals to position themselves as an internal West to those groups which are located to the East of them (Bjelić, 2002; Živković, 2011).

In post-Yugoslavia and post-Milošević Serbia, people’s claims of Europeanness often provided a symbolic escape from the concreteness and materiality of daily life experienced as the chaotic cultural, moral, and economic degradation of all social strata (Jansen, 2005, 2009;

Simić, 2010). As people were seeking meaningful explanations for their inability to translate their desires into actions, especially during the period immediately after the fall of Milošević's regime, they often resorted to various forms of European belonging to disidentify themselves from institutionally imposed collective identities, which were often seen as the sources of the experienced entrapment (Greenberg, 2011).

Europe and ideals of pan-Europeanism have served as the nodes that engender difference and sameness among national groups. But because it is historically and genealogically secondary to the nation and the state, pan-Europeanism as an object of knowledge cannot displace the rich cultural repertoire that is monopolized by the nation-state (Borneman & Fowler, 1997). Hence, the imaginary of Europe and pan-Europeanism is usually confined to a limited set of representations that, nonetheless, constitute a discourse against which national belonging is articulated. I argue in this chapter that Serbian news media and readers' discourses on visa liberalization echo this dynamic as they construct Europe around a limited set of abstract futuristic images of freedom, market, cosmopolitanism, and individualism (Borneman & Fowler, 1997; Graan, 2010; Magistro, 2007). In effect, institutional and vernacular narrations of contemporary Serbianness in relation to Europe and the EU's cultural politics inevitably lead to a form of rhetorical and linguistic mirroring in which both readers and journalists utilize the same repository of images and tropes to construct in- and out-group memberships.

In this chapter, I interrogate the dialogic co-construction of identities that takes place when readers of online news become commentators and public interlocutors in the production of the meanings of the liberalization of visa regimes and Serbia's integration into the EU. The discussion of news discourse in the previous chapter charted dominant

interpretative repertoires that aim to fix the meanings of visa liberalization and consequently suggest new forms of collective identifications. In this chapter, I focus on the readers' articulations of Serbian and European belonging within the structural and thematic confines set by online news media. Specifically, I am interested in the meanings that emerge when readers express their self-understanding and compare this knowledge with the collective representations advanced in news stories.

This analysis of the vernacular narration of identities focuses on the interpretive repertoires activated by online readers, with attention to how they relate to the dominant news repertoires discussed in Chapter 5, and the goals their activation accomplishes in online talks. In the context of the discourse on visa liberalization, this involves the examination of readers' use of a discursive repository of European symbolism to re-articulate externally assigned stigma and challenge state-centered identities advanced through corresponding news stories. I organize the discussion of readers' discourses around a set of meanings of EU and Serbia constructed in online interaction, and the related activation of three interpretive repertoires: Europe as desired benchmark for everyday life, EUropeanness as yearning for a "normal" future, and Serbia as no man's land.

It is important to note that these readers' repertoires in various ways rework and appropriate journalists' premises to articulate different forms of collective identification and understandings of progress, national future, and resources that are needed to turn this future into lived reality. When these interpretive moves are related to the dominant news repertoires discussed in the previous chapter, the analysis reveals that they partially reproduce elements of the news repertoires to (a) legitimize Europe as a desired destination; (b) discredit news emphasis on state leadership and progress and consequently challenge the

category of Serbian citizen as meaningful expressions of everyday life; and (c) re-define cross border movement as a means for symbolic disidentification from problematic state-centered identities. Throughout the chapter, I focus on these re-interpretations as readers' responses to the news discourse in order to illuminate how state-centered identities formed through the news stories create ideological dilemmas for the readers and how they then employ their intimate knowledge of daily life to resolve those dilemmas. In that regard, the following sections of the chapter present descriptions of key aspects and thematic clusters of each dominant repertoire that readers' activate in online talks about visa liberalization. My purpose is to outline interpretative moves that participants in online news commentary engage to formulate their versions of the main events and advance collective solidarity and individual desires for better life as the legitimate markers of Serbianness.

Europe as Desired Benchmark for Everyday Life

“Finally, I can sit on the train as a normal person and visit my sister without waiting, administration, certificates and documents and planning for months in advance ... For me this is a great day.” (pravosudni, November 30, 2009 @15:35, B92.net)²⁷

Similar to the dominant news interpretations of the main events, readers' discourse also advances images of integration as progress and the EU as the final destination to make sense of the new symbolic boundaries that became visible with visa-free traveling. In fact, during the first months after White Schengen was put into effect, readers relied on journalists' ideas about reaching a desired benchmark and changing the current situation as dominant rhetorical and linguistic choices for explaining the importance of the event. However, in contrast to the focus on proceduralism and state-led action found in news discourse, readers linked the events surrounding EU integration to everyday life. The following accounts illustrate some of the common interpretative strategies that readers use to

connect their experiences of everyday life with the EU integration. The posts appeared in response to a news story that defined visa liberalization as a “big day for all Serbian citizens” and a call for continuation of efforts in “fulfilling requirements in the area of justice, respect for European values, [and] human rights” (B92, November 30, 2009).

[...] there were times when I had the money to travel, but dignity (and defiance) did not allow me to stand in [visa] queues. [...] But now, I am crazy happy about this news and just do not know where I would go for the January sales! :) And this is not just because of shopping, but again because of dignity (and defiance), I'm sick of how much we have been ripped off all these years ... misković³⁰ and the company - goodbye, I will not be your sheep anymore, not even by the force of circumstances. And to the young I warmly advise them to travel, travel, travel and travel, it is good and you can learn a lot, and we will feel much more as human beings. Bon voyage to all! (Gradjanka '67, November 30, 2009 @ 17:08)²⁸

[...] Finally, we can get out of the cage. Young people will see the life outside Serbia, they will not be fooled with Zara(s)³¹ and Mara(s), as they will be able to buy full outfits in H & M for €100, and spend the rest of the money on more beautiful and better things, maybe they'll learn about some culture, culture of coexistence, tolerance and respect for the laws and the community in which they live...[...] (tralala, November 30, 2009 @ 19:16)²⁹

While echoing the enthusiasm and a vision of collective movement forward that are present in news discourse, both Gradjanka '67 and tralala advance their own understandings of the news claim that visa liberalization “opens the door for further Europeanization of the civil society” (B92, November 30, 2009). Specifically, their personal narratives make a discursive equivalence between the EU and Europe to reinforce values of both humanism and consumerism as expressions of Europeanness. For tralala, the “culture of co-existence, tolerance and respect for the laws” are the qualities of “the life outside Serbia” that young

³⁰ Miroslav Misković is the owner of Delta Holding, one of the biggest companies in Serbia. At the time of this post, Misković owned numerous businesses such as the chain of grocery stores Delta Maxi, hypermarkets Tempo, and the shopping mall Delta City.

³¹ The reader makes a reference to ZARA, a popular clothing brand from Spain that is sold in many stores in Serbia.

people should strive for. Furthermore, this life is desirable because it marks accomplishment of a higher stage of group's development where "more beautiful and better things" are within person's reach. In line with the interpretative repertoire of EU as Serbia's final destination, both readers also advance belief that this movement forward implies transformation: By referencing young people as the representatives of "us" and as the symbols of new beginnings, tralala and Gradjanka '67 articulate their belief that the promise of the change can be secured through learning and, implicitly, socialization into Europe proper.

Although Gradjanka '67 and tralala rhetorically articulate Europeanness through a cluster of abstract and affective terms such as "dignity," "human beings," "culture of coexistence," and "tolerance," their visions of the future are concrete, individualized, and connected with the prospect of gaining practical benefits in the consumer society. The vividness of these accounts is mainly due to the presence of readers' intimate knowledge and experiences of everyday life in Serbia.

For instance, Gradjanka '67 uses the metaphor of a "sheep" to describe herself as a motivated consumer and to express dissatisfaction with the local economic elites and their monopolization of the Serbian market. In addition to expressing the feeling of shame associated with the memory of standing in the visa queues, the metaphor symbolically dehumanizes her subjectivity allowing her to connect the need for a particular consumerist lifestyle (attending January sales and having wider range of options) with threatened and denied human rights. In a similar way, tralala transforms consumerism into an aesthetic experience by noting that the ability to effectively spend their money will enable people to enjoy in "better and more beautiful things." Thus, in the process of articulating injustice and undermined human dignity, Gradjanka '67 and tralala are also endowing the discourse with

material and historical concreteness to interpret consumption in the neoliberal economy as a symbol of democracy, liberty, and individualism. Other readers make similar interpretative leaps to bring to life the idea that visa liberalization enables access to resources and forms of belonging, which affirms the idea that EU and Europe are desired benchmarks.

By texturing the discourse with details about the intricacies of daily life in Serbia, readers are reproducing some of the ideological links suggested by the news stories to craft their own investments in the EU project. For instance, the absence of everyday life accounts of the present situation in Serbia in news stories makes it difficult for readers to form an imagined community grounded in shared lived experiences. In an effort to respond to this interpretative vacuum and ambiguity, Gradjanka '67 and tralala, among other readers, layer their utterances with personal narratives or details that only group insiders can fully understand and converge upon.

For example, tralala references "€100" as a familiar and collectively accepted measure of purchasing power of an average person living in Serbia. In a more elaborated version, Gradjanka '67's conclusion that "we have been ripped off all these years" aims to form these identifications through collective pronoun "we." However, the truthfulness of her account also relies on an assumption that other readers have been ripped off in the past. The "how much we have been ripped of" and precisely by whom ("misković and company") do not need to be specified because there is mutual understanding between the group members. However, by engaging in this form of self-recognition to construct group membership and identify as Serbs, these readers are also becoming Foucauldian subjects who harness their own memory, experience, and creative capabilities to extend the news narratives and advance the EU project.

The selected examples illustrate that rhetorical construction of everyday life reproduces the EU as the object of readers' knowledge based on a repository of values and images that advance Europeanness as the nation's desired benchmark. The examples also suggest that readers are echoing news discourse and investing European symbolism with a limited range of commonplaces, or "moral maxims that are laden with clichéd appeals to common values" (Billig, 1995, p. 73). Reoccurrence of these depictions throughout the readers' discourse between 2009 and 2011 suggests a degree of uniformity in both the themes and also audiences' uncontested reproduction of center-periphery relationships, which are also the characteristics of post-socialist national discourses that unfold within the framework of the EU integration (Graan, 2010). In this sense, it may be argued that readers' choice to voice the desirability of the benchmarks through reference to individualized experiences in everyday life is an articulation of collective belonging under terms that are not of the authors' own choosing but influenced by the type of knowledge the EU discourse produces about Serbia.

In contrast to the news discourse that relies on taken-for-granted futuristic visions of better tomorrow, readers' posts recognize the present as the site where these visions can be formed and legitimized. In this regard, vernacular narration does not conceive the desired benchmark as the outcome of an objective evolutionary development. For the participants in the news threads I examined, the legitimacy of the benchmark depends on its connection to one's lived experiences as represented through discourse. It is at the level of everyday life experiences that different articulations of national future and desired models of living are contested, validated, and discredited. To decode these reinterpretations of the news narratives, I examine the building blocks, or the premises, temporal ordering, and naming

strategies based upon which Europe and the EU can function as “our” rather than “my” desired benchmarks and, thus serve as the signifiers of collective identities.

Europeanization of “our” everyday lives. Concretization of the universal benchmark and meanings of national future are accomplished through privileging everyday life experiences as the interpretative frameworks that legitimize the meaning and importance of EU integration; switching between singular and plural nouns to elevate individual interests to collective interest; and, shortening the distance between present and desired lives with the idea that EU has meaning only as lived future that a person can experience in everyday life.

Tralala’s post illustrates the typical swapping of premises as well as changes in degree of certainty that readers use as main means for accomplishing a temporal re-ordering of the news discourse. More specifically, tralala describes the present situation in definitive terms and offers assessments that do not require further elaboration or justification (living in a “cage,” being “fooled”). Aside from describing current life in Serbia, tralala uses these descriptions as the premises for defining visa liberalization as the force that can open the cage, and for making predictions about what will happen next. Unlike these premises that are endowed with a high degree of certainty and truthfulness, the accounts of the future advance set of possibilities (“will be able to” and “maybe”). In that regard, tralala echoes a causal relationship between two temporal moments, which I also find in news discourse. However, instead of positioning the prospect for reaching objective and universally applicable benchmark in the future as the reason for promoting the EU integration, tralala operates in a taken-for-granted present to construct a sense of possible future.

As readers struggle to strategically insert themselves in the EU discourse by validating their experiences as the experiences of the national group, their visions often rely

on an unproblematic switching between singular and plural pronouns. Gradjanka '67 and tralala employ these referential strategies both to present their personal views as the common views of the whole group and also validate their investments in the EU discourse as the sources of collective benefits. For example, Gradjanka '67 starts the account with a first-person confession (memory of queues and travel before White Schengen), which she complements with a reference to common experience (“we have been ripped off”). For the second part of the utterance, the author identifies the youth as the group that will have the most benefits from visa liberalization. Unable to claim membership in this group, Gradjanka '67 ends her post by saying “we will feel much more as human beings,” which establishes the hierarchy of benefits and beneficiaries (I/access to sales -> youth/traveling and learning -> we/feeling like human beings). Considering that the most significant benefit is associated with the speaker-inclusive “we,” the author is able to legitimize her present as a state that validates collective need to feel “like human being.”

To illustrate this important engagement of referential strategies, I analyzed the dialogue that unfolds in these posts that respond to the news story “Šengenski Zid Pao u Ponoć” (“Schengen Wall has Fallen at Midnight”) published on Blic.rs:

[...] Considering that I live abroad, my parents will now be able to come whenever it suits them and without needing to squat in front of the embassy with a bunch of documents to get visas. It makes me happy that the younger generation will have the opportunity to travel, learn languages, get to know other cultures. After so many years of isolation, this is finally something good and positive for the country of Serbia. (nata, December 18, 2009 @ 12:54)³⁰

[...] All of you are speaking as if you always had a few hundred Euros ready for travel, so one gets the impression that only the visa and the fees for those few certificates have been insurmountable problems. You're talking about queues – it's not that I have not gone through them, but I did not experience that with so much bitterness ... And to all of you European travelers, I wish you all the best, and certainly to travel to your country of dreams, if you can, and to find your place in it,

so that we, who are staying here, can finally see what we're going to do, because we have a bit more troubles in Serbia than that notorious visa regime. (Dule971, December 18, 2009 @ 13:51)³¹

[...] Since 1994 Croatia has a visa-free system, so I could travel anywhere without a visa. It's a great thing. I own a company and I am often in Austria, Germany, Slovakia and Italy, and as far as I know it was easier for me to do it than for my colleagues who had passports from Serbia. This will facilitate the business of many people in Serbia. And, of course, the most important thing is that we are finally out, we are no longer in prison, and we are part of the normal Europe. The psychological incentive is most important! (Peter Andric, Zrenjanin, December 18, 2009 @ 19:18)³²

The interaction between nata, Dule971, and Peter Andric, Zrenjanin reveals that the major stake in the discourse on Europeanness is the narration of Serbian national belonging in terms of lived reality. For these readers, the point of debate is not the degree of transformation or progress that Serbia has made or whether this progress signifies movement to a higher stage of civilizational development. Instead, they disagree over the accuracy of the representations of the present situation and their applicability to the whole nation. Dule971 articulates this disagreement in the clearest manner by echoing voices of other participants (“all of you are talking”) and using his intimate experience of the visa “queues.” By shifting between several naming options, the author advances the division between “we” and “you.” Furthermore, Dule971 introduces the discourse on patriotism to articulate desired collective identities (“we, who are staying”) and thus challenge one of the dominant representations of visa liberalization that emerged in readers’ conversations up to that point (traveling as an opportunity to leave Serbia).

Although other two posts advance different views of the present situation and the national future, they employ the same referential strategies and interpretative moves as Dule971 in order to legitimize the link between individual and group experiences. All three readers advance their personal stories as the premises upon which they can argue for

particular meanings of visa liberalization and, consequently, claim to have most reliable predictions concerning the national future. As they exploit the flexibility of European symbolism, they shift between the singular pronoun *I* and a plural addressee- and speaker-inclusive pronoun *we* to validate their belonging to the national group and simultaneously deny such membership to others (“all of you European travelers”). Most important, they use visa liberalization and Serbia’s advancement in the EU integration to stress the gap between lived and desired realities. They construct a form of collective belonging that is silenced in news stories or subordinated to the state-centered identification that news discourse establishes as the primary mode of collective identification. In doing so, the readers are exploiting the action orientation of the interpretative repertoire of EU as final destination to articulate preferred knowledge of Self.

Desire for imminent solutions. For tralala and Gradjanka ‘67, White Schengen is a means for accessing particular lifestyles that are associated with the uncontested images of material prosperity, legality, cultural enlightenment, and materialization of humanist values such as the “culture of coexistence” and “tolerance.” Interestingly, these two authors are speaking from the position of Serbian citizens who, before visa liberalization, had limited experience of traveling beyond the state territory. This claim of limited or no mobility introduces a degree of epistemological relativism, considering that these two speakers cannot legitimize their descriptions of desired lifestyles based on the experience of actually living them. To ensure the credibility of their utterances, tralala and Gradjanka ‘67 construct their ethos on binaries through which knowledge of the unknown (EU as desired destination) emerges from the contrast with what is known, familiar, unchallenged, and undesirable (everyday life in Serbia). These two readers are able to reduce interpretative ambiguity and

compensate for the lack of direct experience in Europe by accentuating the difference between two types of belonging encapsulated in the image of Serbia as not-EU or not-Europe.

These two readers, among other participants, identify the EU and Europe as desired benchmarks but emphasize incompatibility between two visions of Self—real and desired. Most often, the readers' utterances voice this difference through verbs that indicate possession of values and goods such as *freedom*, *dignity*, *financial resources*, and *mobility* as necessary resources for translating desires into practical actions. For instance, common references to the feelings of being *human* and *normal again* are not empty abstractions, but expressions of pragmatic values that signify readers' capacity to take control of their business (e.g., Peter Andric, Zrenjanin), financial situation (e.g., Gradjanka '67 and tralala), and relationship with others (e.g., nata). By focusing on the lack of resources and inability to fulfill these needs from the position of a Serbian national and citizen, readers devalue their own locations to create a polarizing contrast between Serbia and, as tralala said, the "life outside Serbia." Tralala, in particular, employs the term "cage" to describe both experience of entrapment and a concrete location. Like other idioms such as *ghetto*, *slavery*, *prison*, *mud*, *cattle pen*, *dark tunnel*, and *concentration camp*, which appear in readers' posts between 2009 and 2011, the "cage" is a hyperbole, or excessive exaggeration that shapes rhetorical visions of the present situation. By invoking these spatial tropes, readers are activating common Serbian mythic topoi and engaging in politics of place-making to mark both their locations and a degree of backwardness (Creed & Ching, 1997; Živković, 2011). Pragmatically, these metaphors and their derivatives are setting the framework for social action and limiting the range of possible interpretations of the White Schengen.

Because of the hyperbolic character of these idioms and their clustering around the idea of inhumane conditions of life, readers are able to advance representations of Serbia as an unsustainable place where order and stability are possible only through fundamental changes. The function of these rhetorical visions appears in the following post that respond to the news story entitled “Evropa Bez Viza Postala Realnost” (“Europe Without Visa Became Reality”) and published on B92.net:

Of course, this is good news, and it is perfectly normal that we are moving as free people. We have regained a dose of dignity. However, if this does not fix the situation in the state, it will be only a symbolic success. Because here, the bad situation is that our politicians are corrupt and the economy is falling apart as a result of various machinations and fraud, and that gangsters and those full of money are ruling Serbia as they want, and because people are not aware of what the term institutions means at all, and because we are morally and culturally degraded... Best of all, it seems to me, is that we will be able to distance ourselves from ourselves in order to better understand each other. When we see how this happens with them, in serious states, and when we realize that all of this does not have to be this way, and that above all it should not be like this. Maybe then we will start to change things. (toka, December 19, 2009 @ 11:55)³³

In this account, toka relies on various rhetorical tropes to paint the present as an all-encompassing collapse. The author indicates the existence of a benchmark with the pronoun “them” and reference to “serious states” to create contrast with the current situation in Serbia. With a set of cataclysmic metaphors, people can structure the knowledge of the present situation and foreground some images over others to create an impression of progressive degradation that necessitates an urgent response (Fairclough, 1992; Richardson, 2007). As toka notes, Serbia is on a downward spiral that puts into question its future existence. The government and other social elites have endangered all social structures that are vital for proper state functioning—economy, executive state power, moral order, and credibility of the institutions. Consequently, some of the structures are on the verge of disintegration

(“economy is falling apart”). Reinstatement of criminals, the rich, and corrupted politicians as social leaders has produced perverse morality: Those whose acts are morally and legally unsound dictate the actions of the rest of the citizens. This downfall also applies to the people’s identities that are literarily “degraded” to a lower level where individuals lose their capacity to enact proper selfhood.

The uncontrollable and downward movement, which toka maps with this rhetorical vision of the present situation, derives its legitimacy from a national myth of Serbia’s fall, which emerged as a dominant explanation for the experience of instability and chaos that occurred after the collapse of Yugoslavia. As Jansen (2009) explained, the idea of the fall is premised on a belief that everyone has a place in the world and that change of placement can be understood as linear movement forward or backward. In Serbian national imagination, fall from grace meant not only moving downward, but also a complete loss of place that has led to an entrapment in which people’s morality, mobility, and agentive capacities were determined by entities, groups, and representations that were out of their control. However, even though within the vernacular discourses on national belonging before visa liberalization Serbia’s fall functioned as uncontested premise, people could not specify the characteristics of the original or proper place from which the fall has occurred (Simić, 2010).

As toka’s post echoes this entrapment, it also advances a critique of the idea that movement in the EU integration is based on the progress that the state is making in regard to its transformation into a European state. In toka’s view, in 2009 Serbia was not progressing or moving forward; instead, its inhabitants have hit rock bottom. For toka, the existing economic, social, and political relations that structure the field of individuals’ action are both detrimental and disabling for one’s everyday performance of collective identities. Such

representation of the current situation sets the parameters for validating news representation of White Schengen as a “step forward.” Considering that toka understands the current situation as an existential dilemma that requires immediate resolution, the labeling of visa liberalization as “good news” is meaningful only as a radical change that will “fix the situation.”

A similar understanding of visa liberalization as a solution for experienced problems appears in other posts. For example, tralala and Gradjanka ‘67 reference cage, trickery, lack of agency, and animal-like treatment to modify the meaning of the scales “better, more beautiful” and “more human” and suggest that White Schengen is not evidence of continuous progress, but a break from the existing situation. This understanding of the White Schengen represents an alternative interpretation of the main events compared to those found in news stories: Although readers reproduce the celebratory tone constructed in the news discourse, they also validate this tone based on different expectations for the future. More precisely, change of the meaning of visa liberalization from a *step forward* to a *solution* and a *change* problematizes the news narratives, namely the premise that the path toward EU membership is a continuous, objective, and paced transformation of the state. The image of a radical break in readers’ discourse challenges this interpretation and indicates that insertion of personal narratives of everyday life has formative effects on the readers’ utilization of the interpretative repertoire of EU as the final destination.

I have argued earlier in this chapter that these individualized narratives reorder temporal hierarchy by making the validity of futuristic predictions conditional on the validity of author’s interpretation of the present. As the readers form these two temporal dimensions, they also highlight their emphasis on practical benefits and a belief that visa liberalization has

enabled imminent access to desired resources. The discursive practice of debasement makes the conditions of person's attachment to the present inhumane and unbearable, thus leaving the future as the only place where proper life and agentic capacities can be restored. From this position, where the need for transcendence is configured as a matter of existential survival, the future cannot be meaningful as a distant objective, as it is suggested by the news media, but only as a readily available discursive space where readers can find relief from the confines of their everyday lives. In other words, for those who identify themselves as Serbian nationals and citizens, visa liberalization is not a step toward the imagined final destination, but a sign that they have arrived at its doorstep.

This reinterpretation of the future suggests that the articulation of Serbian national belonging is never a linear process but an act that is accomplished through negotiation, contestation, and appropriation of Serbia's in-betweenness and peripheral position. As an empty sign, Europe and its contemporary discursive articulation through the EU integrations enable a certain degree of flexibility in regard to national image that can endow its creators with a sense of control over their destinies (Graan, 2010). Narratives of the present within the readers' posts create a space where their authors can exercise this control mainly by appropriating the EU's gaze to transform journalists' appeals to inevitability and objective progress into intimate yearning for normalcy and detachment from troubled state-prescribed identities.

Europeanness as Yearning for a "Normal" Future

“Although I do not have the money to travel somewhere, I will save a little bit, and I'll go somewhere in Hungary, Slovenia, Italy and Austria ... Congratulations to all my fellow citizens on the liberation!” (boro, November 30, 2009 @ 17:26, B92.net)³⁴

As I argued in the previous chapter, linguistic and rhetorical benchmarking through particular versions of Europeanness builds on the premise that barriers exist between the present situation and the desired future, and that state leadership can help the citizens overcome them. Journalists' interpretative repertoires outlined in Chapter 5 mediate this tension through the narrative of evolutionary progress and the idea that visa liberalization is evidence that Serbia has advanced to a higher stage of civilizational development. Readers' online discourses between 2009 and 2011 challenge this vision of a linear and objective progressive movement by reconfiguring the barriers as political, social, and economic forces that shape person's everyday access to the resources and capacity to act as agentive subject independent from state and citizenship regimes.

As scholars have observed, in the contemporary Serbian national imagination, collective memories of the Communist polity, Red Passport, and collapse of all means of collective identification during 1990s intersect and produce yearning for normalcy (Greenberg, 2011; Jansen, 2005; Simić, 2010; Spasić, 2003). After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the articulation of one's national and state subjectivities through Europeanness and discourse on normalcy functioned as a dominant response to feelings of loss, ambivalence, and decreased ability to manage external and internal representations of Self (Jansen, 2005; Spasić, 2003). Jansen (2005) noted that as the people were talking about normalcy, they were engaging any systems of meanings that could create a sense of ontological continuity, including but not limited to nostalgic memory of life before the state collapse and feeling of belonging to the world. Articulated in such way, yearning for

normalcy was premised on a belief that normal life is not possible within Serbia or within the national imagination prescribed by political and social elites. As an act of disidentification, narration of normal life often resorted to symbols of Europeanism and cosmopolitanism that were not monopolized by the dominant national and state discourses. Consequently, consuming Western music, associating oneself with particular intellectual circles and places (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and other cities in Central and Northern Serbia), and reinforcing the status of a citizen of the world quickly became signifiers of everything that was once part of good life (Jansen, 2005; Simić, 2010).

Although discourse on normalcy emerges when individuals dissociate themselves from the state and state-prescribed national imagination, its activation is rooted in people's need for stability and predictability, in other words, for a social order and state structures that produce moral and agentive subjects (Greenberg, 2011; Spasić, 2003). In fact, many readers whose posts I have analyzed for this study avow never to vote for the ruling party, and some even called for citizens' protest and overturn of the government for the purpose of establishing more effective forms of state governance. However, aside from direct calls for order, many individuals do not consider enactment of their voting rights as the proper mechanism for changing existing situation. Instead, they resort to personal narratives about the experiences of daily hardships to link increasingly opaque political life with their everyday performance of state and national subjectivities. More precisely, the readers use these narratives to enlist instances in which inaccessibility to desired resources have prevented them to fulfill promises they have made to themselves and others.

For readers such as nata, being normal means an ability to reconnect with the family without going through the scrutinizing process of applying for Schengen visa that did not

always lead to positive outcomes. In fact, until November 30, the applicants could never know with absolute certainty whether the process would delay travel or whether their application would be approved despite the 2007 visa facilitation agreement between EU and Serbia.³² For Piter Andric, Zrenjanin normalcy means capitalist equality, meaning that success of person's business does not depend on the rules that are not driven by the market. For Gradjanka '67 and tralala, reinstating the capacity to act depends on one's ability to maintain a financially stable life and control over the ways they spend their own money. Even Dule971, who dissociates himself from dominant expressions of Europeanism, sees visa liberalization as the elimination of uncertainties and obstacles (individuals who want to leave Serbia) that have prevented those "who are staying" to work on solving the country's problems.

As these examples show, readers' understandings of the obstacles and practical ways for overcoming them differ; however, their depictions of the EU and Europeanism almost always communicate personal needs for predictability and a stable framework of social, legal, and economic norms and cultural values around which people can organize their lives. Although news narratives emphasized progress and the government's efforts in improving state efficiency, the period between 2009 and 2011 was marked by a high degree of unpredictability that was deeply felt in all social spheres. As Biserko (2011) concluded, "hope and optimism have disappeared from nearly all strata of society" due to prolongation of difficult economic and political situations as well as uncertainty over Serbia's future

³² The report on Serbia's progress toward White Schengen in 2008 and 2009 by Group 484 and the Fond for Open Society noted that the agreement did not produce desired results, and that Serbian citizens still had difficulties obtaining traveling visas. Furthermore, the report noted that although the processing of the visas had been reduced to 10 days, a person still needed to schedule the visa interview two months prior to travel.

progress in the EU integration (p. 7).³³ In addition to popular belief that government is not doing enough to fight corruption and establish a clear national orientation, the citizens who were living in Serbia at the time also witnessed a worsening of their overall economic situation (Biserko, 2010, 2011, 2012).

As they were echoing unfavorable prospects for accomplishing minimal or desired living standards, many readers articulated the experienced precariousness of their everyday life with narratives about poverty and limited access to financial resources. Silja and kako da ne, the authors of the following posts, are just two among many readers whose understanding of the present situation is informed by the knowledge or experience of financial deprivation and insecurity:

I mean people, what kind of visa nonsense is this? Even when they abolish the visa [requirement], what will we do? Like we can travel around the world with a monthly salary of 20,000 [sic. RSD]? And children, who will feed them? Electricity? And gas, which is extra expensive? Telephone? Water? Utilities? All this should be solved first and then these visas. Our country is in a sorry state, people do not have the money to go from South Serbia to Belgrade to visit their children ... and now they are telling me that we will be able to travel easier through Europe (Silja, June 12, 2009 @ 19:37, Blic.rs)³⁵

So what if they abolish visa??? It is not like this is something important, and even now you can save a little bit of Euros, with which the agency would bribe the embassy (,) and there you are (,) in Western Europe or wherever you want. And now what (,) when you are there??? When over there you can be a tourist or an illegal worker who will be expelled in matter of two months and banned the entry into the european union! what's the point of having or not having visa??? and when I travel, I go through Serbia, Greece ... never in my life I would spend this little misery (,) that I earn (,) as a tourist on the west. (kako da ne, July 15, 2009 @ 14:19, Politika.rs)³⁶

³³ After months of speculations, on December 9, 2011, the EU ministers decided to postpone a decision about Serbia's status until March 2012, citing as the main reason Serbia's insufficient effort in solving the Kosovo question.

These two posts appeared in response to the news stories that addressed different exigencies: The *Blic* story emphasized uncertainty over the date for relaxation of visa regime, and the story published by *Politika* revolved around the EU's plan to deny White Schengen to Kosovo Serbs even though, at the time, the Serbian government still did not recognize Kosovo's independence. Despite the different contexts in which they were made, these utterances poignantly reflect common sentiments that readers used to describe the situation in Serbia between 2009 and 2011. As Silja states, people's ability to control their actions is undermined both with insufficient earnings, and also inability to secure conditions for civil life (having uninterrupted supply of "electricity" and "water," and telephone service). In contrast to Silja, who offers clear descriptions of life in Serbia, kako da ne constructs such representation indirectly through the "illegal worker" and the idea that "bribery" is widely accepted in Serbia as a tactic for managing financial hardships. Although kako da ne does not explain why a person would want to work illegally in the EU, I deduce that the author advances this possibility as common sense knowledge based on an unfavorable view of the job market in Serbia that justifies engagement in illegal activities and willingness to risk serious punishment (being "expelled" and "banned the entry").

The authors' questioning of the purpose of the visa liberalization openly challenges the belief that cross-border movement will change a person's current position, which I noted in some of the other examples (e.g., posts by Gradjanka '67, tralala, and Piter Andric, Zrenjanin). This alternative outlook is particularly clear in Silja's utterance, which ends with a trope of a distant and inaccessible Belgrade to connect visa liberalization with the everyday life. More precisely, Silja appropriates the image of traveling to establish internal borders and

centers (Belgrade) as well as to reinforce the severity of the present situation with the denial of mobility even within one's own country.

Other readers also rely on similar interdiscursive narratives and tactics of spatial positioning, which I found in statements such as “I hardly can go to Ada³⁴ for swimming,” “I cannot even go to Belgrade to have coffee,” and “I do not have money to come even to Belgrade.” The specific references to the state capital in these and similar accounts echo the authors' knowledge of the unequal economic development between the regions, namely North and South Serbia. Furthermore, they give an impression that the living standards in Belgrade and other bigger cities such as Novi Sad do not reflect the true situation for the majority of Serbs. Symbolically, however, the authors suggest forms of collective belonging that segment the national body and problematize news discourse and its emphasis on equality of all Serbian citizens who can enjoy unconstrained travel to the EU countries. Furthermore, the emphasis on immobility communicates the ideas of extreme deprivation of material resources and the resulting reduction of one's living space, both of which challenge the narrative of progress advanced in the corresponding news stories.

Silja's spatial positioning and reorganization of priorities (“visa nonsense” and “all this should be solved first and then these visas”), as well as the rejection of the West in the utterance by *kako da ne*, suggest symbolic dissociations from Europeanism. However, I argue that reading this and similar utterances as a critique of EU integration reveals only one layer of the readers' experiences as Serbian nationals and citizens. Narrated through visions of a normal life where a person has to worry about necessities such as electricity, water, heat, and children's basic needs, Silja advances an intimate knowledge of life in Serbia that does

³⁴ Ada (short for Ada Ciganlija) is a river island and a popular name for the artificial Sava Lake in center of Belgrade. During the summer season, Ada is one of the city's top spots hosting more than 100,000 visitors every day.

not directly deny the idea of Europe as a desired benchmark but only the author's ability to reach it. The same can be said for the second utterance in which the EU remains a desired destination even under conditions seen as negative (bribe, illegal work). Also, kako da ne seems to focus the critique on the policies that limit people's access to this destination (visa liberalization does not mean a right to work in the EU) and the forms of consumption associated with traveling. Although these readers assess the value of visa liberalization in regard to different sets of expectations, they view visa liberalization primarily as a means for articulating a gap between lived and desired realities. In that regard, the authors' use of the discourse on Europeanization facilitates self-recognition in which the existence of a benchmark or external models of normal life become essential measures of the type of deprivation and confinement that these individuals experience in their daily lives.

Consumerism as a mark of normalcy. This type of construction of desired models of normalcy based on individual performance in the market economy is an ideological assessment that normal life cannot be accomplished from the state-centered citizen position inscribed by the news' narration of Serbia's Europeanness. In addition to the comments made by Silja and kako da ne cited above, the following exchange between two other readers in response to a *Politika*'s news story highlights this positioning and the use of European symbolism to support it. The thread also illustrates how readers associate visa liberalization with changes in different aspects of their social, political, and economic lives in order to problematize the narrative of progress. The ease with which people invoke these connections even when the news story does not suggest this interpretation of the main issues and events indicates that particular expectations concerning visa liberalization are functioning as

common sense understandings of what should be the norm if Serbia is indeed on the road to becoming a European state:

Come to look and see there's nothing that you can buy. (Evropljanin, November 5, 2009 @ 23:35)³⁷

The response:

We already have many products with the same prices like in the EU, even many of them are more expensive in Serbia. It is not about watching and shopping but about the subjective feeling of freedom of movement for the people of this country after nearly 20 years without gathering bunch of documents and waiting in line for a visa. Thank God. (Igy69 Igy69, November 6, 2009 @ 11:22).³⁸

Evropljanin's utterance creates an ideological dilemma for Igy69Igy69 in a similar way that Silja's critique of visa liberalization challenges other participants who view visa liberalization as a change in the current situation. In this exchange, Igy69Igy69 reorders priorities and values in order to address a dilemma of interests ("it is not about watching and shopping but about the subjective feeling of freedom of movement"). More precisely, the author implies his personal investment in the EU integration as "freedom of movement" and corrects a flawed ideology that visa liberalization is about promoting consumerism. In the process, Igy69Igy69 acknowledges a problematic point without undermining the ideal itself, which is one of the major ways people engage polyfunctional meanings of important terms to solve experienced ideological dilemmas (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005; Tileagă, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Consequently, rather than attempting to delegitimize the taken-for-granted assumption that Serbs do not have sufficient money to act as proper EU consumers, the author advances an additional meaning of Europeanness grounded in the higher values of freedom.

More important, these two readers do not question the legitimacy of the EU as a desired benchmark. In fact, both Evropljanin and Igy69Igy69 imply that visa liberalization has made this benchmark visible and relevant for understanding everyday life: Benchmark enables comparisons between here and there and accentuates the difference between life in EU and Serbia, experienced hardships, and the difficulties in acquiring desired material goods (“there is nothing that you can buy” and “some of them [items] are more expensive in Serbia”).

In a similar sense, Silja’s denouncement of the importance of visa liberalization is not necessarily a critique of EU as desired benchmark, but an inward assessment of the situation in Serbia and its (in)compatibility with institutional representations of the situation. News media, political elites, and popular narratives have praised visa liberalization as the long-awaited removal of the last traces of isolation and reinstatement of freedom of movement; yet, these representations were also built on very specific understanding of freedom as an ability to travel and consume, possible only under the premise of mandatory return to Serbia. By reading this utterance in the context of the dominant public and political discourse on visa liberalization, I conclude that Silja is mainly expressing an ideological dilemma of having to perform a particular identity without being given the material means to do so.

The articulation of European belonging through references to consumerist lifestyles was a common everyday strategy for coping and managing life in Serbia even before the visa liberalization. As noted by Greenberg (2011) and Simić (2010) in their research, the subjection to a strict visa regime and an overarching perception that the “democratic” transition has resulted in deeper degradation of social, political, and economic institutions, have prompted Serbian citizens—namely urban youth—to resort to consumerism as the only

available path for establishing visible European belonging. This has meant purchasing goods that could be associated with the European market, going for weekend gateways, and attending the events that could be associated with a cosmopolitan and European polity. Similar emphasis on consumerist lifestyles continued after 2009 and especially in relation to visa liberalization.

Readers' narration of everyday life and expectations for the national future reproduce this discourse to advance consumerism as the most meaningful means for avowing European belonging after 2009. At the same time, individuals also use this type of yearning for normalcy to challenge the ideas of progress, state leadership, and state citizenship upon which consumerism is presumably possible. As Rausing (2002) argued, the emphasis on consumption as a marker of normal life in post-socialist national imagination does not advance the category of individual consumer, but it does articulate what should be the norm; in this case, if the state indeed produced promised progress. In contrast to Silja, others like tralala and Gradjanka '67 seem to ignore a possibility that many participants in online dialogues do not have "€100" that they could spend on the upcoming "January sales." However, their emphases on consumerist lifestyles establish consumerism as a norm and communicate that life in Serbia does not meet such standard, which is also the purpose of Silja's utterance. Readers' avowals of European belonging through the position of empowered consumers suggest that these individuals are working within the parameters of a dominant discourse on visa liberalization; yet, their purpose is to use available means to distance themselves from the state-centered identities that are grounded in the idea that state progress enables greater and more effective consumerism.

In contrast to the reporters' assurances that the life on the periphery promises progress and prosperity, readers' lived experiences of such life are sources of deeply felt dissatisfaction and desires for change. One of the dominant ways they express this disemia is through activation of an interpretative repertoire of Serbia as No Man's Land, which I discuss in the next section.

Serbia as No Man's Land

*"The last one to come out of this 'so-called state' should turn off the lights!"
(Katica, October 19, 2010 @ 00:55, Blic.rs)³⁹*

Yearning for normalcy emerges as a meaningful response to the present situation once people experience confinement and lose their ability to create spaces for agency within their own location. As I noted, one of the common expressions of those limitations is construction of extreme opposition between here and there. Among readers, Silja and kako da ne emphasize how a lack of change can negate possibility for overcoming barriers as well as challenge identities as suggested with the news story ("and now they are telling me that we will be able to travel easier through Europe" in Silja's utterance). In a different manner, toka's negative representations of the current life in Serbia and disastrous effects of state leadership indicate the author's locatedness in space and time and show how this creates urgency for acting. The cataclysmic representations of here also suggest means for transcending or removing oneself from unfavorable conditions, which toka identifies as a need to "distance ourselves from ourselves."

In contrast to toka, who maintains a certain level of hope that the situation can be fixed and improved, other readers articulate their disidentification through resignation, which they voice by creating a rhetorical vision of Serbia as no man's land. The vision is perhaps most succinctly summarized in Katica's cliché phrase that I introduce at the beginning of this

section. As one of the leitmotifs in the readers' dialogues during the period observed, *turning off the lights* meant not only that the people should move somewhere else, but completely give up on Serbia. Besides using this catchy phrase, readers advance a belief that the problems do not have solutions by using other rhetorical means such as calling Serbia *hell* and *bottomless hole*; suggesting that the only hope for those living in Serbia is if another country would *colonize* them; noting that people are *fleeing for their lives*; and avowing never to come back by buying a *one-way ticket*.

As these rhetorical strategies illustrate, the vision of Serbia as no man's land suggests withdrawal and acceptance of the negative external significations of Self, which readers translate into an image of ineffective state. With this reinterpretation of unfavorable and external assessments of Serbia's ability to uphold EU's values and rules, and the shifting of the blame to state leadership, the readers also challenge the belief that the most appropriate role for Serbia in relation to the EU is that of a guardian of Europe's Southeast border. In that regard, the repertoire articulates a critique of state leadership and apparatuses as well as the status quo that suggests Serbia's position on the EU's periphery. By describing Serbia as no man's land, readers recognize the state as a symbol of stasis and as an obstacle for changing Serbia's position in the imagined European community and the prospects for the creation of a normal life. In that way, vernacular discourse actively constructs a different reading of the narrative of progress. In this view, progress can be accomplished independently from the country's advancement in the EU integration and through disidentification from suggested state-centered identities.

The elements of withdrawal and detachment from non-functioning Serbian state are present in almost all readers' threads between 2009 and 2011. However, they are particularly

prominent during the periods when news stories advance assurances that state leadership can produce wanted outcomes. The following example illustrates such activation of this repertoire of Serbia as No Man's Land. Responding to the news story entitled "Suspenzija Vizne Liberalizacije?" ("Suspension of Visa Liberalization?") on B92.net—about the efforts Serbian government is making to control the "waves of false asylum seekers," discussed in Chapter 5—readers identified as da da and Brankica advance the following set of statements:

The people who are going away for the whit of happiness you will never get here are not to be blamed ... anyone who can would leave ... you the wretched, if you take this away from us, **THE ONLY PLUS YOU HAD FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS**, all of us will be gone, one can always find the way ... (da da, May 5, 2011 @ 13:31)⁴⁰

If I were younger I would not stay even 5 minutes in this country. So you youngsters, if you have any possibility to get out of here, the sun of somebody else's sky will warm you up faster than it will here ... I am telling you this, as a woman of 57 years with good experience in Serbia. (Brankica, May 5, 2011 @ 14:06)⁴¹

For these readers, yearning for order, stability, and ability to pursue their own happiness is a major symbolic framework for understanding the present and current situation in Serbia. However, unlike other readers, da da and Brankica do not use the binary of here/there to establish the difference between normal and not-normal life. Instead, they build on the EU's negative representations of Serbia as a place of instability and disorder found in the news story, to describe Serbia as a place not suitable for normal life. In these and similar readers' accounts, Serbia does not have a future: It is irredeemable and unfixable and as such it should be returned to darkness, literally indicated with the trope "turn off the lights." As Brankica most directly notes, the only way Serbs can have a chance for normal life is to leave their country. The author advises "the youngsters" to seek their happiness somewhere else and implies her own inability to do so by saying "if I were younger I would not stay even 5 minutes in this country." Considering that the future of the younger generations and

implicitly the nation is possible only outside Serbia, Brankica and those who are staying do not express any commitment or desire to work toward changing their lives.

According to scholars, these types of symbolic detachments from the state have been common elements in Serbian national imagination after the collapse of Yugoslavia. As discussed by Jansen (2005), withdrawal from political life was one of the common responses to the changes that occurred in this period: People developed political apathy and reverted to their private lives as the only means for resisting state-prescribed nationalism that saturated public sphere. The introduction of a rigid and, for many Serbian citizens, humiliating system of visa regime has also facilitated various forms of disidentification from the state-centered identities. During the period just before the relaxation of visa regime, the idea of order and stability was mediated by the memory of travel during Tito's regime, in which travel was a discursive practice through which individuals enacted the sovereignty of the state and exercised control over external significations of their identities (Greenberg, 2011). Without being able to travel without visas after 1990s, people developed the images of defunct state to advance knowledge of themselves and make sense of the situation in which the state could not produce subjects who could vouch for their own actions (Greenberg, 2011; Simić, 2010). Furthermore, the experience of examination, external certification, and dependence on unpredictable centers of power (embassy staff who had discretionary right to deny or grant traveling visa) indicated that people have lost their ability to control other aspects of their lives (Jansen, 2009).

I argue that the readers' self-denigration, or enactment of stereotypes, is a tactic of positioning through which they manage "self-definition through maximal contrast under unequal distribution of power" (Živković, 2011, p. 70). Simić (2010), also noted that

disidentification through self-recognition has been a main strategy that individuals in postsocialist Serbia used to negotiate their liminality. By recognizing that their “cosmopolitanism had been spoiled by their very location,” people were able to both establish their Europeanness, and mark their exceptionalism (p. 337). Readers’ awareness of the contradicting nature of visa liberalization that promotes equality under unequal terms facilitates similar recognition of national flaws, the feeling of in-betweenness, and simultaneous occupation of positions here and there. Although Serbian citizens can travel like every other “normal person,” they cannot work as one. Visa liberalization was not an affirmation of people’s right to move freely across borders and across “their continent”; instead, it was a permission given by the EU’s governing bodies. The country’s progress toward EU integration ushered with the visa liberalization was possible only after Serbia underwent a close scrutiny by numerous institutions designed to assess country’s ability to uphold core European values and acknowledge its failure to do so in the past.

In relation to these exigencies and their intensification with the visa liberalization, the image of Serbia as No Man’s Land in readers’ posts can be understood as a strategy of positioning oriented toward externally imposed stigma and as a support of an assumption that Serbs inherently are not capable of upholding values of civic, modern life, and EU culture. However, unlike self-denigration that exoticizes Serbian flaws or backwardness to make them desirable for the EU, readers enact voluntary self-debasement to express incompatibility between their lived reality and the reality that is implied with the news narrative of progress. In particular, the posts by da da and Brankica illustrate a linguistic effort that highlights entrapment as a core marker of Serbian collective identity. The authors do not claim to lack freedom to leave, but reinforce a feeling of confinement by identifying

obstacles for movement and interpreting mobility as an opportunity for an *escape*. As these two posts indicate, getting out of Serbia is not easy because it presupposes means that are not available to everyone (“anyone who can would leave”). In a different form, the narrative of abandonment and feeling of confinement appear in other posts that do not use the image of Serbia as no Man’s Land. I noted this in instances when Gradjanka ‘67 bids farewell to the situation in Serbia (“misković and the company—goodbye, I will not be your sheep anymore”), or when readers do not see any solution for improving their situation, such as Silja who asks “even when they abolish the visa, what will we do?”

This is not to say that readers do not believe in improvement. Gradjanka ‘67, tralala, and pravosudni recognize that the EU integration leads to material benefits. Dule971 and toka note that visa liberalization facilitates awakening, self-recognition, or self-reflection necessary for improving the collective image and solving urgent and escalating problems. What is specific and different from the news stories, however, is the readers’ conviction that benefits and progress can be claimed only through the physical displacement from Serbia, and that emigration is the only means by which normal life can be possible. As Brankica and Igy69 Igy69 suggest, even when the posts view visa liberalization as an improvement of the people’s lives they are not associating those improvements with the life in Serbia. I found a similar interpretative framework in posts by Gradjanka ’67, tralala, and toka, who do not treat visa liberalization as an evidence of an evolving Serbian state but as access to resources and models of “normal” life that always remain the property of places outside Serbia. In other words, even though the readers talk about the prospect of leaving the *prison*, *cage*, or *ghetto*, they never advance a belief that any of these confinements will disappear or change over time.

Nonetheless, as an articulation of a spatial dimension of collective identity, confinement both reinforces the barriers between Serbia and the world and enables their transcendence. For instance, readers invoke feeling of confinement to respond to externally imposed representations of Serbianness and to restore (cross-border) movement as the means for constructing and avowing desired collective identities. Although these instances suggest that readers are advancing arguments for emigration and directly challenging news discourse that promotes a disciplined and state-approved movement, drawing this conclusion would also overlook that these arguments are meaningful only in regard to the purpose they have in the discourse. For the readers, immigration to the EU countries functions as a symbol of change and the only available discursive means for negotiating assigned otherness and moving out of the position on the periphery of Europe. Yet, immigration is also a symbol inscribed with particular moral orders that prescribe whose (cross-border) movement is allowed and under what circumstances, which in turn regulate in- and out-group memberships. This action-function of discourse on migration is evident in readers' talk about asylum-seekers, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7.

Relaxation of the visa regime prompted a reinstatement of cross-border movement as discursive means for affirming and performing state citizenship. In addition, White Schengen has also enabled the state to reconfigure its power and reclaim, at least partially, the prerogative to certify its citizens for travel by issuing new biometric passports in 2009 or by prohibiting exit from the country to those identified as potential asylum seekers in 2011. As I mentioned earlier, the state has recognized this opportunity and launched several campaigns and projects to promote travel and insert itself as the entity that effectively manages its own population. The previous chapter also outlines how news media contribute to this goal and

prescribe state citizenship as the only legitimate category for avowing European belonging: As news stories analyzed suggest, visa liberalization has enabled the state to produce moral and agentive travelers whose movement affirms state sovereignty, leadership, and progress toward full EU membership.

Yet, despite these efforts, the vernacular online discourse I analyzed for this study shows people's yearning for normalcy as a yearning for disidentification from the state-centered collective identities narrated through the news discourse. Although readers felt that they can regain their dignity, morality, and humanity as well as cross the borders without humiliation, they could not envision themselves as citizens of a properly functioning state capable of creating conditions for "normal life." By pointing out the unfulfilled promises of progress through intimate narratives of everyday life, readers faced the challenge to establish their European belongingness without avowal of state-centered identities inscribed by both official Serbian EU politics and the news media. To resolve this dilemma, the readers appropriate the discourse on normalcy and related narratives of abandonment as negotiating strategies, whose implications for the news discourse and collective identities warrant closer examination.

Conclusion: Europe as a Means for Disidentification from State-Centered Identities

"Someone is going to write, what will now happen with Serbia when everyone leaves? Let everyone do whatever they want, every man has the right to go wherever he wants and to live wherever he wants to. He does not have any responsibility to the nation, state and to other nonsense. Travel and good luck!" (Milos, November 30, 2009 @ 13:31, B92.net)⁴²

For the readers, the need to respond to state subjectivities ascribed through the news discourse with avowals of intimate knowledge of everyday life creates a positioning as mobile citizens of a not-normal state. Their desire to be normal or live a normal life does not presuppose the transformation of the place (Serbian state in this case), but rather its

reconstruction through disidentification from state-centered identities. To accomplish this problematization of the category of Serbian citizen, readers employ available EU symbolism to express collective belonging and question some of the knowledge claims in the news discourse.

It is pertinent to note here that within the framework of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, the readers of the news stories are already affirming their agency simply by engaging in news commenting. As a dialogic narration that forms within the parameters of an institutionalized discourse, online commenting is a practice that thrives on hybrid authorities (Howard, 2008a, 2008b).

One manifestation of this hybridity is the narration of Serbian and European belongings through narration of everyday life. More precisely, the commentators advance double-voiced utterances mainly by using the voices of journalists and their sources as tools for the insertion of their own voices and views. This is the insertion of a "new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 150). In this sense, to establish control over meaning making, readers appropriate the legitimacy of the images of EU as the final destination and narrative of progress, shift the hierarchy of temporal dimensions, and change the means by which truthfulness of the advanced claims can be established and judged.

The reversal of temporal hierarchy in news comments, supported through arguments about principle and practice, exposes the polyfunctional character of the repertoire of the EU as the final destination and narrative of progress as radical change of person's living conditions. This interpretative flexibility allows participants in these online threads to exploit representations and interpretative choices that are already legitimized within the news stories

but use them for particular social action. For the readers, the image of EU as the desired final destination can be a representation of their lived reality that does not depend on the progress of the Serbian state but on the type of limitations that a person experiences in performing daily routines.

Reliance on striking oppositions between Serbia and Europe and on self-debasement to describe everyday life in Serbia suggests that readers reconfigure the boundaries advanced within the news stories and thus negotiate the terms of their own transcendence. Similar to the news writers, the authors of commentaries recognize the differences between life in Serbia and in the EU, and they interpret them as the differences in living standards, and economic and cultural maturity. However, in contrast to the news premise that movement to the next phase of societal development occurs once the state fulfills objective and universally applicable standards, readers rarely acknowledge the progress of the Serbian state or advance a belief that visa liberalization will change the existing state of affairs. In fact, readers assume that visa liberalization does not change the place in which they are currently trapped, but only enables their movement to another state.

By negating the idea that life in Serbia has changed in the past 20 years, the readers suggest an alternative reading of the narrative of progress. As I stated earlier, news discourse suggests that visa liberalization is a checkmark and evidence that Serbia is advancing in the integrations process and getting closer to the full inclusion in the EU. Within this framework, travel and celebration of the visa-free regime are practices that affirm and legitimize the effectiveness of the government and its effort in transforming Serbia into a proper state-nation. In contrast, the readers treat White Schengen not only as an affirmation of the impoverished, dissatisfactory, and unbearable life they live in Serbia, but also as a breaking

point that creates conditions for change. Within this context, travel becomes a major means for bringing the EU to Serbia through the acts of individuals rather than state leadership. By enacting the movement physically or vicariously, these individuals become mobile national bodies and vehicles of progress.

Although a desire for normal life most often involves a critique of government or the network of state structures and institutions, it should not be equated with the desire for stateless identities. To build on the arguments by Greenberg (2011) and Spasić (2003), readers' need for predictability and their belief that the government is responsible for providing jobs and creating conditions for proper life suggest that yearning for normalcy is also yearning for functional regime of state structures that would enable readers to act as moral and agentive subjects. Read through this framework, the position enacted in the commentary by Milos that no one has "any responsibility to the nation, state and to other nonsense" poses significant question: What types of disidentifications and identifications, exclusions and inclusions, resistance and reproduction of social orders are concealed within the nation-less and stateless cosmopolitanism that readers like Milos proclaim? The answer to this question may lie in the closer examination of the role readers' cultural intimacy has in this disidentification from undesirable identities and in the ways this intimate knowledge of collective belonging brings the readers vis-à-vis externally imposed significations of Self, which are the tasks I take on in the following chapter.

Up to this point, I focused on the discourse on Serbian Europeanization as a resource for social action, namely how readers have used it to respond to the limited access to resources that affect their performance of daily routines. Although my discussion highlighted the polyfunctional character of the European symbolism and strategic deployment of

commonplaces in online dialogues, it does not suggest that reproduction of the dominant discourses is driven by individuals' utilitarian motives. Rather, I stress that the readers' employment of interpretative repertoires is oriented toward negotiation of the positions that are already made for them. In line with Foucault's (1982) approach to subject-making, strategic employment of European symbolism is meaningful only as it epitomizes the double character of subjection and subjectification that at once makes individuals into members of Serbian national community and constitutes them as the bearers and producers of this nation-state discourse. In the context of EU integrations, this involves responding to and managing the ascribed position on the margin of Europe.

Readers' articulation of confinement and their reinstatement of the movement—specifically of traveling as the only means for restoring one's agentive capacities—address this entrapment as a strategic response to externally imposed representations of Self. Readers reinforce the spatio-temporal dimension of collective identities to advance physical displacement as a rational means for symbolic disidentification from state-centered identities. Readers' employment of binaries, self-debasement, and claims of limited mobility show the localization of problematic positions and their attachment to physical and metaphorical environments such as *state, here, (South) Serbia, ghetto, cage, prison*. Through the emplacement of stigmatized identities and newly gained possibility for cross-border movement, readers are able to negotiate unfavorable representations of Self suggested by news media.

The readers accept that the differences between the EU and Serbia explain both the current status of the country in the integration as well as the range of actions that will be possible in the future. They recognize that, regardless of their views of government and its

effectiveness, the decision of whether or not they can use their human right to move freely is ultimately in the hands of EU institutions and officials. The readers also recognize that travel has restored their agentive capacity, but that capacity does not involve ability to change situations in Serbia—only the means for removing themselves from it. In all instances, Serbian nationals and citizens did not only need to confront the ghosts from the past and negotiate their position of Europe's Other, but also to attend to contradicting positions that the EU discourse has created for them. With every change in Serbia's position in the integration, the people were expected to act as Europeans; however, their position on the margin often denies them the symbolic and material resources to actually perform those identities.

The following chapter attends to this problematic and approaches self-recognition as a form of social practice that regulates in- and out-group memberships and prescribes who can claim European belonging and under what conditions (Herzfeld, 2004; Simić, 2010). More precisely, in the next section of this study, I explain the discursive effects of dialogic constructions of collective identities through which readers avow their Europeanness and rationalize social hierarchies that respond to an externally prescribed position as flawed European subjects.

Chapter 7

Damages of the Past: Readers' Negotiation of Stigmatized Collective Identities

*I have arrived to Belgrade in early April and in time for the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections. Feeling under-informed and insecure about my own national identity, I have decided not to vote. As the voting day for the second-round of presidential elections was coming to an end, I asked a close family member whether she had already gone to the designated polling place. She said that she would only if she had time after work. Not convinced, I followed up with a remark that her vote would be important because many signs indicated that the race between incumbent Boris Tadić and the SNS leader Tomislav Nikolić might be a close call. Without much hesitation, she ended the conversation noting that her vote would not matter anyways because the elections and Tadić's victory have already been decided by the EU.
(author's reflection, 2012)*

In 2009, Serbia made significant strides toward its accession to the Union: By the end of the year, the government's list of accomplishments included re-activation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), the first positive evaluation by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in a few years, visa liberalization, and submission of an official application for the EU candidacy. However, as it is the case for other Balkan countries, whose European belonging is always in need of justification and external confirmation, every step in the EU integration reveals a new obstacle and the potential futility of the attempt to join the Union (Graan, 2010; Herzfeld, 2004). Despite the efforts of political elites to shape public discourse by minimizing the impact of Serbia's position in the integration process on the daily lives of citizens, the EU discourse has constantly reminded Serbs of their position in Europe's immediate outside (Jansen, 2009). Therefore, despite the advancements, the White Schengen has only heightened the visibility of Serbia's dependency on the EU and its supporting structures (International Monetary Fund and ICTY), as well as public awareness that Serbs can enter the EU only through the back door, as, what I will refer to in this chapter, second-grade flawed Europeans. This position

was evident in the ongoing discussion between EU and Serbia about the country's stigmatized national history, which proved to be not only the factor that affected EU's relaxation of the visa regime but also a discourse that would continue to direct the country's future progress in the integration.

Within the EU's politics of expansion to Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), the status of a EU candidate or a full EU membership indicates that a selected country has reached sufficient levels of maturity and proven its capability to protect the political and economic stability of the Union. Aside from the adoption of the EU's legal framework and measures for protection of the borders, positive assessment of maturity also involves the formulation of an institutionalized national history that is compatible with the history of the European integrations and the histories of other EU candidates and member states. In the case of Serbia, this evaluation involves government action on three interrelated levels that determine Serbia's advancement in the integration: cooperation with the ICTY, efforts in fostering regional peace through cooperation and reconciliation with former Yugoslav states, and work on resolving the constitutional and administrative questions concerning Kosovo statehood (Biserko, 2011; Gordy, 2009; Ristić, 2009).

Public discussion of these three issues invokes narratives of the past that, in turn, activate contemporary discourses on Serbian and European identity. Whether through narratives of the nation's founding events, imagined homeland, or group spirit, narratives of the past configure an interpretive repertoire that can mediate the establishment of common ground and a sense of ontological continuity (Billig, 1995; Hall, 1993a; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Collective history and memory are indeed central for forging collective sameness and difference. In the particular case of Serbia, this repertoire brings Serbian nationals face to

face with a stigmatized national history and the kinds of negative representations of the Western Balkans that guide EU's politics toward Serbia and the region. Furthermore, attempts to connect ambivalent and incompatible discourses on national history and victimhood reinforce the existing ambivalence of identification as insiders and outsiders in the discourse on Europeanness. For instance, the external pressures to confront the blame and responsibility for the wars that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, under non-negotiable conditions that were not of Serbia's choosing, produce undesirable and contradicting identities. By engaging a discourse that fuses national pride, shame, anxiety over national survival, and the desire to leave the past behind, Serbs are forced to face and manage sensitive issues for which they do not have clear answers (Pavićević, 2003).

In Chapter 5, I discussed how journalists respond to this problem by avoiding it: news stories do not use national history to contextualize the relaxation of the visa regime and instead offer limited references to *the last 20 years* and *period of isolation*. In addition, this news discourse undermines the need for confronting the past by focusing on the cause-effect relationship between present and future and situating that relationship in the narratives of progress and civilization. In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 6, the centrality of everyday life in the readers' discourse complicates this discursive silencing of the collective past. In an effort to translate individual accounts into collective experiences, readers draw on the past as a source of commonplace understandings that can unify otherwise diverse and contradicting knowledge of the current situation and life in Serbia.

This chapter focuses on the narratives of the past that emerged in news readers' commentaries as a salient interpretive repertoire that enables these individuals to construct positions of collective identification in the context of public debate on EU integration. I

examine thematic, linguistic, and rhetorical constructions in readers' vernacular discourse on Serbia's collective past as: (a) responses to external stigma and ambivalence of identification; (b) strategies for negotiating more favorable speaking positions within unequal power relations; and (c) a regulatory mechanism for prescribing in- and out-group memberships within the confines of the existing news media discourse. I argue that although strategic, the linguistic and rhetorical choices of readers and their resulting representations of Self and others are not made solely by agentive individuals. Rather, they react and conform to repertoires inscribed by the power dynamic between Serbia and the EU and by the knowledge that this dynamic routinely produces and legitimizes difference and inequality. In that regard, I analyze the readers' naming of the of past and resulting identity politics in situ or, more precisely, within the general Serbian EU discourse in which claims of European belonging can be accomplished only through acknowledgment of the exclusionary politics that question such belonging.

The three main sections of this chapter trace the strategies and process through which readers regulate their group memberships while simultaneously acknowledging, questioning, and reinterpreting conditions of their own exclusion and inclusion in an imagined European community. To accomplish this task, I first discuss how readers invoke the interpretative repertoire of the collective past to reinforce feelings of injustice, innocence, and suffering as meaningful explanations for Serbia's unfavorable position in the EU hierarchy. Through the discussion of two salient thematic clusters about lost time and denied European identity, I explain how these individuals interpret the effects of the collective past on their personal lives by linking assessment of the living situation in Serbia with intimate experience of limited agency, and by identifying those who are responsible for the readers' inability to

engage the future in desired ways. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on the action-function of this repertoire, which facilitates readers' ways of untroubling the potentially incriminating collective identities through acceptance of internal flaws. In this case, they recognize that ascribed otherness is an outcome of a historically specific expulsion from the desired European community as well as the source of individual and collective agency. The last section of this chapter further examines the discursive interplay between readers' disidentifications and identifications with stigmatized collective identities. My goal in the section is to illuminate the constitution of restrictive moral orders that enable readers' flexible use of exclusionary practices and state-centered identities to rationalize reproduction of social inequalities.

Visa Liberalization as a Reminder of Collective Suffering

*How it would look like if I would take someone else's car and return it to him after 19 years?
Would he thank me and buy me a beer?
(The_Great_R & R_Swindle, November 30, 2009 @ 14:59, B92.net)⁴³*

Readers of online news seem to confirm that Serbs find it difficult to produce universal truths about the pre-visa period from fragmented discourses on national history. In the three news web sites I examined, readers tend to use intimate narratives of lived experience to architect meaningful interpretations of the past. By relying on the present as the only legitimate source of the knowledge about the past, readers tie their memories to a specific period of collective suffering that does not involve discussion of recent wars and other reasons for the initial implementation of a visa regime in 1990s. To build on Djerić's observations (2009, 2010), I argue that readers activate particular politics of remembering to challenge the apolitical character of the EU integrations; promote symbolic purging of the assigned guilt; and, prescribe collective identities through identification of common sources

of understanding for diverse problems. The following set of excerpts, which appeared in the dialogic exchange among three readers on Politika.rs, illustrates how collective memory becomes a mark of Serbian belonging through avoidance of potentially incriminating confessions:

[...] good news with a bitter memory (.) we all remember the Golgotha that EU has afforded us. We have endured the punishment as a nation (,) so congratulations to all on perseverance [...] (Vesa, November 30, 2009, @ 15:29)⁴⁴

Good news for all of us, really. However, I can feel a taste of bitterness. I guess, they have been humiliating us for twenty years that now I cannot look forward to it sincerely, from the heart. (Ljiki, November 30, 2009 @ 15:48)⁴⁵

After many years of unlawful keeping of the whole nation under a house arrest (prison camp), they have decided to allow us, under certain conditions and concessions, to exit and enter our own country, in other words to MOVE AROUND ... Horrible! (banana šargarepić, November 30, 2009 @ 17:33)⁴⁶

Despite the absence of clear agreement on the duration of the period of “punishment” that ended with the relaxation of visa regime, these utterances clearly situate the discourse on visa liberalization in a specific historical timeframe. Ljiki, like many other readers who participated in online dialogues, refers to the last “twenty years” to identify the moment when a strict visa regime was imposed for the first time. Banana šargarepić, on the other hand, identifies the period of suffering with the more ambivalent phrase “many years.” And readers like Vesa do not confine collective suffering to any particular period, symbolically suggesting that the “Golgotha” could be a recurring and prolonged experience that applies to situations beyond the imposition of visa regime. Although lacking temporal concreteness, Vesa’s utterance still asserts concreteness of suffering by limiting collective memory to the memory of lived past (“we all remember... we have endured the punishment”).

Narration of a lived past performs a significant ideological re-interpretation of the initial news story and news discourse in general. By claiming to have experiences of collective “Golgotha” or a long period of “humiliation,” readers are able to build their ethos on uncontested and socially motivated reconstructions on national history as well as to engage the news discourse on two levels. First, readers echo journalists’ naming of visa liberalization as a *historical event* but only to challenge the ideas of progress and reward emphasized in news discourse, given the power imbalance between Serbia and the EU. In readers’ utterances, the liberalization of the visa regime is a historic or significant event not because it marks the beginning of the new phase in the integration, but because it ends a long period of waiting and suffering. In that regard, by inserting of collective memory, people expose the contested and multi-faceted nature of the national history, where each version aims not only to define the national future but also make itself as the basis for the constitution of preferred collective identities (Norval, 2001).

Second, and more important, in the discussion of the national past the readers dissociate blame, responsibility, and victimhood from the memory of recent ethnic, religious, and civil wars based on a premise that readers did not actually participate in those events. The motifs of victimhood and collective suffering have particular importance in Serbian national imagination: social and political elites, intelligentsia, students, and news media have invoked these symbols to unite people for different purposes, such as motivating popular support for the wars in 1990s and more recent conflicts in Kosovo, and fostering resistance to Milošević’s regime (Erjavec & Volčić, 2011; Jansen, 2000; Willmer, 1997; Živković, 2011). Since news narratives do not connect visa liberalization to particular versions of collective

history, news commentators have the room to manage the problematic national history by engaging a narrative of collective victimhood as a polyfunctional commonplace.

The readers cited above also produce a binary opposition between present (here) and future (there) to support the feeling of physical confinement found in the interpretative repertoire of Europe as desired benchmark for everyday life (Chapter 6). They employ hyperbolic metaphors to narrate the past and describe their present situation as confinement to an inhuman and not-normal life. Vesa's references to "Golgotha," "punishment," and "perseverance" endow the utterance with a poetic tone that facilitates its acceptance and puts forth the interpretation of past hardships as mythic and religious martyrdom. Similar stylistic representations of history appear in other two posts, which stress that prolonged "humiliation" and imprisonment ("house arrest") have detrimental outcomes for the future (e.g. inability to be happy "sincerely, from the heart"). In addition to these figures of language, other readers also use words and phrases such as *lag*, *tortured people*, *agonizing and painful years*, *cage for wild animals*, and *survival* to communicate a sense of Serbian's perpetual subjection to inhumane punishment and suffering.

Of importance for the revival of national victimhood are also spatial tropes that readers use to communicate confinement and collective innocence. I found these tropes in the post by banana šargarepić, who references "prison camps" to connect collective suffering with images of injustice and torture. Interpreted through the memory of suffering, readers use the tropes such as (*concentration, prison*) *camps*, and *reservation* and thereby engage in recontextualization and appropriation of strategies and knowledge claims from one historical context to the present one, a process described by Fairclough (1992). In Serbian national imagination, the prominence and appropriation of the "Jewish Trope" promotes identification

with archetypical victims to validate and moralize Serbia's suffering, exile, and survival (Živković, 2011, p. 198). Even though readers do not consistently invoke this trope or describe their suffering as the suffering of Jewish people, they nevertheless rely on mentioned spatial tropes of physical confinement to facilitate purging of blame via vicarious re-living of the suffering of the groups that historically have been subjected to forms of imprisonment and torture.

In addition to passive victimhood that negates readers' responsibility for their current situation, Vesa's utterance expresses the belief in victimhood as part of a celebration of collective "perseverance." These and similar rhetorical references revive Serbian political mythology grounded in images of death, warriors, and battles to reinforce the belief in collective innocence and purposive sacrifice (Čolović, 2000). Ivan and Tibor, the authors of two following posts published on B92.net, rely on this political symbolism to explain the meaning of visa liberalization:

This is what we fought for two decades! Only normal people were suffering, and the only ones who were traveling from Serbia without problems were politicians and criminals and thieves with fake "patterns"³⁵ [...] (Ivan, November 30, 2009 @ 13:55)⁴⁷

Thank God I again have it [visa-free regime], I guess this is that first light at the end of a dark tunnel that goes back to 1989 and a famed Gazimestan speech. In the meantime, 20 years have passed, the most beautiful in human century, but it is ok, at least I lived to see this day. Unfortunately, many did not, so now I humbly pray and cry for them. (Tibor, 30 November 2009 17:51)⁴⁸

³⁵ Reader's reference to "patterns" [sare] most likely relates to the coats of arms displayed on Serbian and Croatian passports. After proclamation of Croatian independence in 1991, Serbian nationals who are descendents of ethnic Croatians could also get Croatian passports. This was particularly relevant for the children from mixed (interethnic) marriages. The situation was made possible as each new successor state attempted to inscribe ethnonationalism in their new constitutions. As a result, granting of citizenship rights was premised on the person's ability to prove desired ethnic identity rather than residency (Hayden, 1996). The fact that the international community did not impose a visa regime for Croatia sparked wide public speculations that Serbian nationals and citizens who could prove their Croatian lineage have opted for Croatian citizenship to protect their freedom to travel.

Ivan's reference to "normal people" who have "fought" for this and Tibor's mourning for "many" who did not live "to see this day," reveal the framework that supports a celebratory tone that permeates many conversation threads, especially in the period before visa liberalization. Common references to *survival*, *liberation*, and *fight* imply that readers re-interpret meaning of visa liberalization from a reward to an affirmation of a collective victory. As I discuss in Chapter 6, readers' yearning for normalcy presupposes an awareness of a loss (of *humanity*, *dignity*, *respect*, *choices*); it is also a reminder that the life a person believes to have had in the past leaves a "footprint of normalcy" that shapes expectations for the future (Spasić, 2003, p. 104). Although the image of a victory won on a battlefield suggests that the victors will be able to reclaim symbolic and material resources that were once in their possession, its secrecy is established mainly with the memory of irrecoverable loss or sacrifice.

The Serbian national imagination often employs these images, namely the narratives of heroic death and Serbia's sacrifice, to respond to Serbia's liminality and position on the margin of Europe. For example, the narrative of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the related myth of Serbia's choice of a Heavenly over Earthly Kingdom valorize Serbia's peripheral position, remind Europe of its shortcomings, and reveal a proper path for healing of faltered Europe (Čolović, 2000; Di Lellio, 2009; Živković, 2011). To an extent, Vesa's and Tibor's utterances revive this national mythology as they advance implicit references to lost lives. However, by reading these references in the context of both the EU discourse that confronts Serbs with an undesirable past, and the ongoing dialogue among participants in this particular online thread, I can identify a different purpose for this irrecoverable loss: instead of valorizing sacrifice and suffering as heroic and necessary deeds, readers invoke these motifs

to purge themselves and the national group from externally assigned blame. In that regard, direct and indirect references to an irrecoverable loss establish collective innocence by suggesting that the consequences of the punishment outweigh the reasons for its initial implementation, thus deflecting responsibility for the visa regime in 1990s and Serbia's exclusion from the European community. My analysis reveals that readers accomplish this goal by advancing two dominant meanings of irrecoverable loss, which they narrate through intimate and sorrowful memories of lost time and denied Europeanness.

Memory of lost time. In the web sites I analyzed, references to lost time are associated in readers' comments with loss of abilities, desires, and opportunities. This is often articulated through rhetorical constructions such as a longing for *20 best years in human life* and lamenting the *youth that is gone now*. In all instances, readers note that being *humiliated, imprisoned, or exposed to other forms of collective suffering* for certain periods of (lost) time have minimized possibilities for restoring control over their own destiny. The affirmation of lost time also functions as a temporal designation of confinement, which I also noted, for example, in Tibor's interpretation of visa liberalization. After the official announcement that White Schengen would be put into effect, many readers, including Tibor, expressed their feelings about the event with common Serbian saying "thank God" and similar articulations of relief such as *it was about time, finally, and better late than never*. In relation to the collective memory of suffering, these expressions of relief suggest that readers understand the present situation and recent past as one long period of existential, social, and economic languish. Tibor's metaphor of a walk through a "dark tunnel" communicates hope for a better future as well as the discomfort of being trapped in a liminal state interwoven with uncertainty, disorientation, powerlessness, and idleness. Symbolically, the time of

isolation, imprisonment, and humiliation is understood as time devoid of meaning. This is especially evident in the posts such as the ones by Ivan and Tibor, in which the images of death, battle, and collective suffering prevail.

Denial of our European essence. In an effort to deflect responsibility for the loss of normalcy and address Serbia's unfavorable position in relation to the EU, readers develop the beliefs in injustice and dispossession of European identity. The excerpt from a thread that formed in response to a news story in *Blic*—titled “Šengenski Zid Pao u Ponoć” (“The Schengen Wall Fell at Midnight”)—illustrates readers' belief that the visa regime and the country's isolation were not only severe punishments, but also the means by which Serbs were denied their rightful position in the world.

May God help us so that this is only the beginning of Serbia's return to the great European family of the nations, where it has always belonged; [...] I also pray that we do not forget those who are responsible for the fact that our youth, without the ability to see the world, has become “blind.” (Mrs., December 18, 2009 @ 06:39)⁴⁹

Let's show over there that we are still one of the cradles of culture in Europe and that Milošević's politics could not take it away from us! [...] (savche, December 18, 2009 @ 12:38)⁵⁰

I am pleased that we are again part of Europe as we were until 1992. I felt humiliated when we were given lessons by the people of the Eastern Bloc, such as Slovakia and Hungary, about the EU and some sort of Europe that they could see only the world map and in no other way!!!! Europe (,) we are a part of you again as we were before 1992!! (Branislav, December 19, 2009 @ 07:02)⁵¹

For Mrs., savche, and Branislav, collective suffering means more than *humiliation* and *imprisonment*. For them, it is an abnormal situation created by internal enemies (“Milošević's politics”) and, in other cases, foreign forces (*U.S.*, *EU*, *West*) that attempt to strip Serbs from their inalienable rights. The underlying premise that connects these three readings of the visa liberalization and views of collective future is that Serbs have always

been Europeans and that consequently they are entitled to privileges, rights, and superior position over non-Europeans or those viewed as second-rate Europeans. As Branislav implies, Serbia's exclusion from Europe has led to power relations in which those seen as having equal or lesser worth and capabilities ("the people of the Eastern Bloc") gained the right to patronize *us* who were part of Europe "before 1992."

To a certain extent, these notions of exclusion and questionable Europeanness reproduce the premise that Serbia's position in the integration is the position of an EU outsider. Readers interpret this position as evidence of their internal flaws or lack of desirable characteristics, and translate the assumptions of the three interpretative repertoires in the news discourse: suppressed or undermined Europeanness and the resulting delayed start in the integration communicate Serbia's otherness, need for more progress, and a lower stage of civilization. Similar to the readers who engage spatial binaries to articulate extreme difference between here (Serbia) and there (EU and Europe), Mrs. communicates a belief that "we" can enter the EU only from an underprivileged position. In that regard, the writer engages in self-debasement to explain the difference between Serbia and the EU and to note that Serbs are not like other Europeans because "our youth," a symbol of the nation's future, has acquired undesirable and potentially non-European attitudes and behaviors (notion of being "blind").

The typical outcome of these interpretative choices, especially the use of common sense assumption that Serbs are true Europeans, revives Serbian national mythology and its ambivalent treatment of Europe as both a desired center and an epitome of spoiled Europeanness (Čolović, 2000). In the context of the readers' discourse on visa liberalization, this tension becomes visible through articulations of ideological dilemmas that individual

experience once they attempt to manage positions of inclusion and exclusion from the desired community. For instance, for Branislav and Mrs. this dilemma revolves around the need to simultaneously assign importance to the visa liberalization (avowing position of an outsider) and use it to untrouble externally assigned identities (avowing position of an insider). In both instances, the common sense claim that Serbs are Europeans fosters the feeling of injustice because readers invoke it through the collective memory of suffering and lost identity. Consequently, readers are able to re-interpret exclusion or position on the margin as ostracism or expulsion from the polis that is not grounded in justice or law but in a perception that the member of the community poses a threat to the order and the ruling elites.

The concept of a discretionary right to expel or deny Serbs their position in the world hierarchy, inalienable rights, and identity allows readers to refocus the discussion from legal guilt for the events of the national past to the question of responsibility. As Gordy (2009) noted, this is also one of the common strategies that people engage to discuss the legitimacy of the ICTY and negotiate collective stigma without offering potentially incriminating confessions about the national past. Here it is important to note that ostracism does not facilitate readers' denial of the guilt. In fact, passive victimhood as expressed in the posts by Mrs. and savche assigns members of Serbian national community political and moral responsibility for allowing "Milošević's politics" to happen and "our youth" to "become 'blind.'" However, by narrating ostracism through the memory of collective suffering, these authors are able to subordinate the guilt associated with failure to respond and prevent events (e.g., armed conflicts, nationalistic politics) to the responsibility of others for depriving Serbs of their identity and rightful position in world hierarchy.

The awareness of undesirable external representations of Serbia and its people are constitutive elements of individuals' intimate knowledge of Self and feelings of belonging (Herzfeld, 2004). In this study, the readers' narration of the collective memory of the recent past is a discursive practice that untroubles their collective identities. Their comments illustrate the polyfunctional character of the vision of suffering for its diverse interpretations enable readers to adjust their understanding of loss and injustice to the type and degree of stigma attached to their collective identities. In online news discourse, suffering is invoked in response to a stigma that is assigned to Serbia in the content of the news stories. Shaped and limited by the interpretative field set by news representations of difference between Serbia and the EU, readers' narratives of collective suffering are discursive struggles between self-understanding and institutional representation. In the following section I discuss how readers articulate responses to this tension between intimate and institutional representations of Serbianness to simultaneously disidentify from externally assigned, essentialized otherness and identify with stigmatized identities, which are the sources of readers' control over existing, yet distant power dynamics.

Collective Memory as a Source of Negotiation Strategies

As the previous examples illustrate, readers relate to the elements of three dominant interpretative repertoires in news discourse to challenge the premises that validate state-centered identities: state leadership, progress, and the linearity of the EU integration. For instance, the readers advance a belief that Serbs were ostracized for events not of their own making, which in turn devalues the idea that the EU integration is a process of becoming. In their view, Serbs cannot be socialized into European proper because they already are true Europeans. Furthermore, the memory of lost time allows readers to both develop a

celebratory tone and treat visa liberalization as a reminder of historically specific stagnation that has undermined their capacity to fully engage with the future.

Such interpretations of the period of collective suffering reinforce the dominant representation of visa liberalization as a rupturing event that has potential to radically change or end the current situation. In Chapter 6, I identify several dominant interpretations of this rupture as newly-gained access to desired resources; an opportunity to build better future and restore normal life; and a moment that highlights the urgency of solving existing problems within Serbia. The memory of lost identity and the related experience of ostracism add to this repertoire by suggesting that visa liberalization cancels Serbia's peripheral status and initiate return of the Serbs to their rightfully deserving position in the European community. In this regard, I examine next the elements of this negotiation of externally ascribed stigmatized identities and the identities constructed and negotiated by readers through online interaction.

Return to Europe. In the Serbian national imagination, everyday narratives of life before and during the period of suffering are important resources for creating ontological continuity and generating positive models of normal life for the future. In the context of Serbia's integration into the EU, these narratives also suggest people's understanding of their European belonging. The belief that visa liberalization means re-establishment of normalcy and denied Europeanness enables readers to challenge news discourse and interpret integration as a return to Europe instead of an unfolding civilizational development. Among the readers of the online news sites analyzed, the meaning of return is constructed through selective memories of recent and lived past thanks to which these individuals (a) negotiate stigmatized identities based on a conflictive collective history; and (b) respond to

institutionally produced collective identities that exclude, contradict, or complicate their daily experiences of being Serbian nationals and citizens.

Scholars have pointed out that prior to the visa liberalization, the symbolic return to Europe was often mediated through yugonostalgia— a collective memory of Titoist or communist polity from 1960s to the first few years after Tito's death in 1980. Although People did not invoke yugonostalgia to articulate a desire for the return to this form of communist society, they did connect it to normal, apolitical, neoliberal, and nation-less forms of belonging (Greenberg, 2006a; Jansen, 2005). Consequently, the memory of a different life in Yugoslavia provided people an escape from the harsh and chaotic Serbian reality, and the means for reconstructing a sense of collective belonging (Jansen, 2005; Spasić, 2003; Volčić, 2007). Invoked during Serbia's territorial isolation, yugonostalgia also served as a discursive site where people could negotiate their tarnished Europeanness through a Yugo-symbolism (Greenberg, 2006a; Volčić, 2007); exoticization and romanticization of Serbia's otherness (Volčić, 2007); and retelling of the stories about traveling with the Red Passport that symbolized not only Serbia's Europeanness, but also international recognition and critique of Eurocentrism (Jansen, 2009; Lindstrom, 2004).

In the texts analyzed for this dissertation, yugonostalgia and the memory of life and travel under Tito's regime are not common elements in readers' narratives of visa liberalization. By noting this difference, my intention is not to suggest that yugonostalgia does not play a significant role in contemporary Serbian national imagination. To advance such conclusion would ignore the demographics of the online news media readership or the generational differences between those who are engaging in online dialogues and those who are not. In the context of the contemporary Serbian national imagination, age is a significant

characteristic of a person's identity because it shapes the content of the memories and the understanding of what a return to Europe means. As Jansen (2005) noted, younger generations gain knowledge about the communist polity only through the memories of their parents and representations in popular media. Their emotional connections with the Titoist collective identity are thus mediated and formed in a present time when this past was both celebrated and censored (Jansen 2005, p. 253).

As I mention in Chapter 5, news stories tend to silence narratives of the past and of return and, instead, emphasize state leadership and travel as a cross-border movement and opportunity to visit and shop in European cities. In regard to these interpretative orientations, it is possible that minimal presence of yugonostalgia in readers' comments is due to the fact that younger readers, who also comprise the majority of online media users in Serbia,³⁶ do not have the lived experiences of traveling with a Red Passport. For these participants, who grew up during Serbia's isolation, travel may mean an opportunity to discover rather than return to Europe.

Despite the lack of reliable data concerning the demographics of online audiences and research on the dynamics of intergenerational readings of the past, the limited presence of yugonostalgia among readers of news sites examined is significant in that it points to a specific aspect of identity politics in these online discourses. Their emphasis on a lived future, or the future that readers can experience in their lives, as a readily available solution for the obstacles faced suggests that the readers aim to reconstruct a sense of ontological continuity without invoking yugo-nostalgia and a memory of the normal life before 1990s.

³⁶ The information about online news readership for each news outlet in Serbia is sparse and often inaccessible. B92 is the only site that publishes this information. According to the marketing page on B92.net, 64% of visitors are between the ages of 20 and 39. Alexia.com suggests a similar pattern for both B92.net and Blic.rs, noting that the audiences of these two web sites consist mainly of individuals who are between the ages of 25 and 45. No such data is available for Politika.rs

Simić (2010) noted similar choices among Serbian urbanites after the democratic changes in 2000. In that context, Serbian nationals aimed to disarticulate their national identities from ethnicity and re-establish these subjectivities on the categories of class and subcultural capital to define themselves as the citizens of the world. Most important, this framework illuminates the importance of treating collective memory as a strategy invoked for particular discursive goals in particular moments.

In the context of Serbia's integration into the EU, I note at the beginning of this chapter that institutionalization of national history—namely the official acceptance of responsibility for the crimes committed in the Yugoslavian wars—is one of the major requirements for accession to the union and the symbolic return to Europe. To respond to this criterion, readers activated a collective memory of lived suffering to remove the need to discuss the stigmatized national history and affirm collective guilt. Readers' interpretative choice to limit the memory of a collective past to a specific period to reinforce a feeling of complete confinement can be approached as a form of selective memory and "strategic forgetting" (Esbenshade, 1995, p. 86). Further, emphasis on suffering and desire for normalcy among readers becomes a critique of the Serbian government and the EU that allows them to advance an understanding of the return to Europe as a form of re-claiming what has been denied in the past.

In effect, in the commentaries analyzed, readers do not build visions of a better future by returning or re-fashioning old models of normal life. Instead, the lack of comparison with past models enables readers such as Ivan to legitimize their dissatisfaction with the present life and focus on the tension between where they are now and where they should be in the future. As in utterances that refer to the yearning for normalcy, readers claim a rightfully

deserving place in Europe is based on the view that that is where Serbia should have been if the nation's fall had not occurred and if others did not deny Serbs their rights and entitlements.

In this light I read Ivan's statement that EU integration is "what we have fought for two decades" as a negotiation of the past that allows for a critique of the step-like progress and plausibility of Serbia's peripheral position. Furthermore, the feelings of experiencing inhumane and degrading life conditions that cannot be measured in state-centered measurements of progress or through comparisons with past models of normal life help the readers assign moral responsibility to those who have produced isolation and those who may enforce it in the future.

Collective memory of a lost identity provides another way for expressing and resolving ambivalence through taken-for-granted claim that Serbs have always been Europeans. Tralala and other participants in the online conversations discussed in Chapter 6 articulate the tension between positions of inclusion and exclusion with an emphasis on place as a dimension of collective identity. Their views paint the image of Serbia as an isolated and inhabitable place in the world. This discursively produced knowledge of ostracism allows readers who may be entering or traveling to the EU for the first time to construct the concept of collective suffering not as a common sense or a cliché statement, but as deeply felt exclusion. Premised on the belief that we are Europeans who have been denied their rightful place, readers interpret exclusion as material, timeless, and lived signifier of one's collective identity. Building on the memory of collective suffering and innocence, readers view White Schengen as an opportunity to highlight and correct injustice as well as to restore

proper sense of Self by showing “that we are still the cradles of culture in Europe” (savche, December 18, 2009).

Serbs as damaged Europeans. The concept of return as a re-claiming of denied identity complicates state citizenship as a necessary mechanism for purging Serbs from their otherness. It also facilitates reader’s negotiation of externally assigned stigma. Unlike the interpretative repertoires present in news stories, the repertoires of readers do not essentialize the defects of Serbs and then claim that internal otherness is manageable; instead, they interpret these flaws as detrimental consequences of historically specific circumstances, namely territorial isolation between 1990s and 2009. As Mrs. states, the Serbian youth “has become blind” because they do not have the “ability to see the world.” By establishing a causal relationship between loss of time and identity and externally assigned stigma, readers are able to temporally situate and localize collective otherness.

Rather than ignoring geopolitical, symbolic, and economic structures whose interplay creates the position of a flawed European for Serbian citizens and nationals, readers utilize a collective memory of suffering to translate stigmatized collective identity into a normative category that I call damaged European. Formulated through self-recognition, the category serves as a resource of positions that allow these individuals to communicate pride, morality, and control even as they speak as second-class or half-baked EU subjects. Being damaged is a quality of collective identity that reminds other Europeans of their unfair treatment of those who are like them. As such, it is a taint that readers do not desire to erase or discipline, but to embrace as a marker of Serbianness.

Although oriented toward managing external stigma and reconciliation with the past, insertions of collective memory within readers’ utterances is a social practice that results in

production of identities and moral orders (Hall, 1993a; Tileagă, 2012). Furthermore, because this reconstruction of lived national past draws its legitimacy from a regime of commonplaces, the categories that emerge through interaction serve as criteria for avowing proper Serbian identity (Djerić, 2009). The view that Serbs are damaged Europeans suggests two such criteria: participation in collective suffering and possession of a European essence.

In regard to the possession of a European essence, readers do not directly and consistently articulate what it means to be European. Instead they associate this identity with a range of spatial, cultural, and historical markers such as Serbia's geographical location on the European continent; natural affinity toward certain activities (*drinking coffee in Vienna, going to concerts, visiting European cities for cultural enlightenment, shopping*); claim that the group historically has been the center or a "cradle" of Europeanness; right to be free and move freely across borders; entitlement to dignified, normal, and organized life. Each of these associations is both a prescription of how a person should demonstrate or affirm Europeanness and also a means by which readers can identify Europe's others or those that are lacking this essence. However, these avowals of sameness with the rest of the Europe do not necessarily mark a person's membership in Serbian national community.

The intersection between European and Serbian belongings emerges instead in the readers' belief that their ostracism from the European community is an irregularity that has produced an abnormal power hierarchy—a hierarchy that allowed those who are less European compared to Serbs to benefit from EU's favoritism and have better positions and access to resources than "we" do (see Ivan, November 30, 2009; Branislav, December 19, 2009). It is in this irregularity that Serbian's European essence most clearly reveals its contours because it is invoked as an evident fact, rather than a quality that Serbs should

defend and perform for others. In that sense, claim that Serbs have a European essence is inextricably connected with the feeling of injustice. Consequently, to avow a preferred Serbian identity one should not only claim Europeanness as a natural right, but also recognize and overcome obstacles that persistently challenge the validity of such claim. Considering these assumptions, in the following sections I argue that the two criteria for collective identification of Serbs as damaged Europeans create restrictive norms because of their mutually constitutive relationship. Their interdependence is the source of unceasing tension for the readers, who simultaneously feel dissatisfaction and agony for being marked as flawed Europeans and pride for being able to challenge such position.

This argument has implications for the type of interpretative mirroring that occurs when readers reproduce inclusionary and exclusionary practices and knowledge claims about internal others that are similar to those advanced in news discourse. As with the news stories, readers' articulation of internal gradients suggests that Europeanness emerges through re-organization of internal boundaries rather than discursive policing of Serbia's external borders. However, the emphasis on the irregular power hierarchy and collective suffering in vernacular discourses changes the ground upon which this stratification is legitimized.

A post by Beogradjanin that offers his interpretation of the problem of asylum-seekers from Serbia illustrates this tension between readers' and journalists' representations of internal others. The post emerged in response to a news story entitled "Lažne Azilante Vraćaju iz Belgije" ("Fake Asylum Seekers Returned From Belgium") that identifies asylum seekers as "the citizens of Serbia and Macedonia, who are speaking Albanian' and who are not well informed about the conditions for using the visa liberalization" (Politika, March 3, 2010; see also p. 154 for the full context of this quote). Beogradjanin commented:

Gentlemen Belgians, how come they are now citizens of Serbia if we take into account that you recognize Kosovo's independence? They are coming only to thank you, don't you understand? It is not ok that one minute they are citizens of Serbia and the other they are citizens of Kosovo, as you find it suitable in any moment ... Make up your mind ... (Beogradjanin, March 3, 2010 @ 8:35)⁵²

In line with the news discourse on visa liberalization, namely ethnification of the category Serbian citizen and the localization of the essence of otherness, Beogradjanin also describes state citizenship as a dominant form of collective identification and shifts blame for the problem to specific group of people. By relying on naming strategies (“they,” “you,” “we”), the author defines asylum seeking as a transgression committed exclusively by those whose status as Serbian citizens can be questioned based on their location (Kosovo vs. Serbia). Considering the meanings constructed in the communicative chain of journalist's and readers' utterances, it can be deduced that Beogradjanin exploits place-dimension of collective identity to distance any wrongly accused Serbian citizen from true offenders, and thus rationalize exclusion based on ethnic difference (Albanians and those who speak Albanian). In Chapter 5, I discuss how news stories justify these exclusionary practices based on the objectivity and limited state sovereignty. In contrast, Beogradjanin inserts a rhetorical reference to injustices done to Serbs by expressing indignation toward the third party that presumably aided the Other and created the problem (“They are coming only to thank you, don't you understand?”). In other words, the author accomplishes social exclusion and conceals ethnic discrimination by invoking a self-explanatory moral code entrenched with the memory of collective suffering and innocence (Herzfeld, 2004).

For readers such as Beogradjanin, the combination of the narratives of lost time and undeserving ostracism allows Serbia to re-claim its position within the European power hierarchy through recognition, reconfiguration, and localization of stigmatized aspects of

national character. Yet, the process of re-entry is marked by restrictive moral orders that emerge through online dialogues between readers who struggle to negotiate their position and sense of Serbian belonging within the confines of the news discourse. Beogradjanin's utterance is an example of this struggle: the writer uses the moral code to regulate in- and out-group membership and the meaning of state-centered identities, as well as to signify moral orders that are different from those advanced through the news discourse. In other words, his reference to injustice and blaming of others indicates disemia or tension between authors' interpretations of what it means to be Serb and the external representation of Serbianness suggested by the news media.

In order to understand how these moral orders are created, I also examined readers' descriptions and categorizations of historic collective suffering and the belief that Serbs are entering the EU from a damaged, unfavorable position as discourse practices that exclude particular groups from national community. The following section discusses this ideological work and related politics of national identity as they unfold through readers' posts and fragmented discourse on asylum-seekers from Serbia.

Idealization and Morality of the Damaged Character in Discourses on Asylum-Seeking

Acceptance of stigma through the collective memory of suffering is one strategy that readers use to construct moral character and turn stereotypes into tools for negotiating more favorable positions under unequal power regimes. In the readers' utterances, these practices are manifested through the constitution of a moral character and ethical relations, a process present in readers' discourses on asylum-seeking between 2010 and 2011. As I noted in Chapter 6, readers use narratives of cross-border movement as a discursive means for disidentification from problematic state-centered identities. Within this context, the issues

related to immigration are relevant because they activate discussion about boundaries of the nation and Europeanness and situate arguments within the narratives of escape and moral maxims that support such narratives.

The talk about asylum-seekers from Serbia and problems associated with their growing numbers, namely potential suspension of visa-free regime and stricter control of the borders, have created ideological dilemmas for the readers. On one hand, they needed to rationalize this form of cross-border movement as the right they have earned by being unjustly confined to a not-normal living situation, and as a symbol of change in their sense of European belonging. On the other hand, readers also needed to respond to the elements of otherness that news media and EU associated with asylum-seeking, and thus mark the activity as violation of a desired order and localize it as the acts of those who do not belong to the Serbian national community. To negotiate this tension, readers invoke moral orders inscribed in the category of Serbs as damaged Europeans to decide who can make these transgressions and for what purpose. Building on these orders and a polyfunctional representation of asylum-seekers as Serbian citizens and internal others, readers advance contradicting standpoints on the same issues as rational explanations for the emergent situation, mark asylum-seekers as both group insiders and outsiders, and ultimately stratify membership in the national community based on subjective assessments of the type and degree of damage each member can claim.

The following comments of participants illustrate the accomplishment of social exclusion premised on the belief that unjust ostracism has endowed Serbs with higher moral ground and greater skills to overcome their own limitations. The thread developed on B92.net in response to the news story “Pojačane Kontrole za Putovanje u EU” (“Increased

control for travel to the EU”) about the government’s intentions to minimize the number of asylums seekers through surveillance and examination of all Serbian citizens. As the first post below shows, this commentator develops a range of moral stances to simultaneously legitimize and denounce asylum seeking:

Dear Mr. Djelić, you have no idea what it means to be poor citizen in Serbia and that is why you do not allow us to go to neighboring countries to beg. But if you would ever to be judged for all your criminal offenses, you will also find yourself in the same position as 99% of the population of Serbia. (financijer, May 18, 2011 @ 15:18)⁵³

The reader identified as *financijer* references collective poverty to confirm that Serbs will enter the EU from a position of underprivilege and to rationalize a moral transgression such as engagement in socially inappropriate activities (“to beg”). Furthermore, the author also notes that “99% of the population in Serbia” is poor, which in turn indicates constitution of collective identities. Thematically the post seems to valorize asylum seeking. Yet, an interpretation of *financijer*’s utterance as an echo of the news story points to a different purpose of the moral language of poverty. *Financijer*’s post is not oriented toward validation of particular knowledge about asylum seeking. Instead, it deflects possibility of being identified as an improper Serbian citizen and potential state enemy, which are the positions that the original news story ascribes for its audience. To understand how *financijer* and other participants in this online dialogue rely on flexibility of moral discourse to untrouble troubled identities, it is important to take a look at how the concept of damaged identity makes those moral orders possible in the first place.

Measure of damage. Although prescriptive, the category of collective suffering and its articulation through terms like *poverty* are ultimately established on ambiguous grounds. Similar to the belief in national fall that dominated the national public discourse before 2009,

collective suffering derives its legitimacy from common sense assumption that people in Serbia are not living the lives they are entitled to (Simić, 2010). In turn, this allows for the concept of collective suffering to serve as measure of stigma without having universally agreed upon starting points or a base line. Consequently, the collective memory of suffering, translated as permanent damage to Serbian identity, has the power to regulate in-group membership by producing knowledge about those who cannot claim participation in this collective experience. As *financijer*'s post illustrates, the author's ideological work is not oriented toward defining and measuring poverty and establishing its threshold, but toward affirming the existence of the outsiders or those who cannot have moral ground that comes with collective suffering. Who are those who are not among "99% of population" and whose moral transgressions should be sanctioned and met with collective disdain and disapproval?

The set of interpretative moves that a another speaker in the same thread, *BegIzKukavicijegGnezda*, made to try to resolve ideological dilemma indicates that readers form a sense of collective belonging by identifying internal others or those who are not sufficiently or permanently damaged, or damaged in a proper way:

[...] Although, frankly, in an all-encompassing uncertainty, poverty and misery, I do not know how to solve the issue of people fleeing for their life. [...]Third (,) I've read in one commentary a claim that there are no false asylum seekers – there are. These are the people who apply for asylum and for a certain amount of time (depending on the state) enjoy the benefits of that status only to withdraw the request for asylum just before the end of the procedure. Of course they do not return the money. [...]
(*BegIzKukavicijegGnezda*, May 21, 2011 @ 22:42)⁵⁴

Like *financijer*, this commentator builds the interpretation of the emergent situation by establishing moral ground that questions the effectiveness and appropriateness of proposed government measures. Without offering explanation, *BegIzKukavicijegGnezda* presents an exaggerated rhetorical vision of collective suffering ("all-encompassing uncertainty, poverty

and misery”) that forces people to resort to socially and morally inappropriate coping strategies to survive (“fleeing for their life”). However, the author is also among those Serbian citizens who will be subjected to government surveillance and will potentially have more difficulties crossing the borders in the future. The awareness of these limitations reinforces the feeling of unjust suffering and the need for identifying responsible agents, which the author accomplishes through the articulation of the position of a “fake asylum seeker.” To preserve the stability and objectivity of the category of damaged subject and economically deprived citizen, BegIzKukavicijegGnezda constructs a particular moral order. Most important, the order gives the author of the comment the means to differentiate “people who apply for asylum” from “people [who are] fleeing for their life,” even though the motives for both activities are potentially the same.

This segmentation of Serbian belonging is possible because readers’ memories of lost time and identity transform collective suffering from a traumatic reminder of ostracism into a narrative that continuously shapes people’s understanding of their European belonging. As an expression of this node of collective identification, being damaged becomes an inseparable element of avowals of Serbian national identity and a quality that individuals need to continually affirm and perform for others and themselves. In the context of BegIzKukavicijegGnezda’s utterance, the asylum seekers are not identified as undesirable internal others because they do not belong to “99% of the population of Serbia.” In fact, BegIzKukavicijegGnezda neither affirms nor denies such possibility, but rather subordinates its importance to the subjective assessment of whether the damage claimed is permanent, sufficient, produced in the proper way, and uncomfortable for those who are marked by it. Failure to meet any of those criteria can lead to social exclusion and give participants in these

online dialogues the means not only to trouble particular identities by questioning the legitimacy and truthfulness of the accounts advanced by undesirable individuals and groups, but also to advance social discrimination from unmotivated positions.

As I discuss earlier, readers confront negative images of Self and articulate meaningful explanations for their (in)ability to restore normal life by narrating their everyday experiences of life in Serbia as deeply felt confinement. Understood as ostracism, meaningless existence, inhuman conditions, or denial of privileges and rights, the feeling of confinement symbolizes acceptance of Serbia's position on the margin of Europe. Most importantly, confinement reinterprets assigned otherness as a historically specific taint and gives readers the means for seeing their damaged identities as sources of exceptionality, agency, and opportunity. Consequently, anything that readers identify as social privilege that changes the conditions of this all-encompassing confinement can be rational and objective reason for social exclusion. Often, this includes assessment of a person's ability to leave Serbia before visa liberalization, access resources that can permanently improve one's living conditions, or advance self-serving interests to the disadvantage of the common people without being punished for it.

This function of damage as a discursive mechanism that regulates national belonging is crucial for explaining how asylum seekers signify both group insiders and outsiders, which is a situation that emerges from the dialogic exchange between financier and BegIzKukavicijegGnezda. This is because the link between asylum seeking and financial deprivation, which is suggested both by news media and public discourse on asylum seeking, complicates the concept of social privilege as an objective and relevant measure of person's damages. In fact, news stories describe asylum seekers as individuals who lack any social

privilege. As news media state, these people (a) seek asylum to improve their *difficult economic situations* and gain *social assistance*; and, (b) often sell everything they own before leaving. Furthermore, they are not wanted by the EU countries and are forced to return to Serbia where they can be charged for violation of the law. The consideration of this context and of the fact that asylum seeking emerged as a public issue after visa liberalization warrants the question: How readers' online dialogues value the damage of the asylum seekers and re-interpret it as social privilege that differentiate "them" from "us"? These readers suggest that the issue is the ways social privilege is used to erase, fix, or change Serbianness produced through the period of collective suffering and ostracism. In the following section, I examine how these individuals construct the meaning of social privilege not only in an effort to position other participants in the ongoing dialogue, but also to untrouble their own social status, benefits, and personal history by emphasizing their compatibility with the dominant moral order.

Social privilege and removal of damages. The position of Serbia in relation to the EU shifts with every event or bureaucratic decision that brings the nation closer to EU membership. In the process, current national events are read through the framework of European cultural politics (e.g., cancelations of Gay Pride in 2009, 2011, and 2012), or as political acts that potentially violate the requirements for the integration (e.g., delays in capturing and extradition of former political leader Radovan Karadzic and military general Ratko Mladić to the ICTY). To make sense of and respond to these shifts and re-articulations of the barriers to Serbia's full inclusion into the EU, participants in online dialogues advance different meanings of collective suffering and confinement. More importantly, the polyfunctionality of these two markers of Serbianness allows these individuals to exclude

others from national community based on any aspect of identity that separates a person or a group from suffering, innocence, and the category of *normal people* trapped in abnormal situations.

The constitution of an internal scale of inclusiveness and assessment of social privilege are two of the most prominent elements of readers' discourse. For instance, Ivan's utterance (on p. 211) illustrates the type of moral order that emerges once privilege or benefit is used to draw a line between "normal people" and "politicians and criminals and thieves." For Ivan, the difference between proper and improper Serbs is not based on identification of ethical standards that motivate actions of these groups, even though naming and clustering of three undesirable groups suggests that these individuals disrespect the law and betray citizens' trust. Instead, the author notes that the defining characteristic of these three social positions depends on how their holders had access to resources (e.g. ability to travel) that would spare them from collective suffering.

The power of these categories to complicate and even deny in-group memberships is evident in the sequential positioning of two or more participants in the online conversations. Although they are not always clearly identified as direct responses or developed into extended turn-taking sequences, these exchanges illuminate how people engage moral language as social practice (Tileagă, 2007). The position of privilege that at some point has prevented a person from partaking in collective suffering is particularly restrictive for the participants who negotiate their national belonging from a location outside Serbia. This dynamic is seen in this dialogic exchange between readers Alex Danska [Alex Denmark] and Zoran:

And now what? I live in Denmark, and I have to send money and return ticket to my mother, before she comes to visit me???? Nonsense ... [...] I do not care how the state will deal with the problem of “illegal asylum seekers.” Surely this should not be done over the backs of the normal citizens of Serbia! ...! Serbia is a mockery of the state!! (Alex Danska, May 18, 2011 @ 22:33)⁵⁵

Hey Dane, do not rock the boat, lucky you. NOT EVEN ONE asylum seeker will go to Denmark by plane. Here, poor people do not have the dough for a bus ticket to Mladenovc and not to mention for the plane to Kob'nav'na [...]. Do not send your mother the money with the specific purpose, but make it a routine. Monthly, let's say half milke [brand of chocolate], what is that for you. [...] (Zoran, May 19, 2011 00:25)⁵⁶

In this case, the opening statement “I live in Denmark” excludes Alex Danska from the national community based on two premises: inability to claim the type of confinement experienced by those living in Serbia, and the unlikely possibility of being directly subjected to the government’s border security measures. In order to negotiate reentry into the national community, the author vicariously relives on collective suffering through reference to the suffering of the mother who is still in Serbia. By constructing suffering in this manner, the author is able to identify with “normal citizens of Serbia”; to dehumanize, criminalize, and cast out “illegal asylum seekers” by expressing indifference toward their destiny (“I do not care how the state will deal with the problem”); and to conceal a troubled identity (being able to send money and return ticket denies Alex Danska the experience of “being a poor citizen in Serbia,” which *financijer* uses as a marker of collective belonging).

Zoran, on the other hand, adopts a different meaning for collective suffering to question Alex Danska’s credibility and consequently trouble this author’s self-positioning. Similar to *financijer*, Zoran also utilizes asylum seeking as a symbol of extreme financial deprivation. However, this author does not aim to untrouble moral transgression made by asylum-seekers, even though his observation that “poor people do not have the dough for a

bus ticket to Mladenovac” implies conditions under which asylum seeking could be justified violation of the moral order. Instead, Zoran invokes language of extreme poverty to highlight place-dimension of Alex Danska’s identity and interpret it as a mark of social privilege or wealth (“what is that for you”). Furthermore, the sarcastic tone in the metaphor “half milka” devalues Alex Danska’s vicarious reliving of Serbianness as damaged Europeanness.

Zoran’s discursive exclusion of and contempt toward those who are identified as members of the Serbian Diaspora echo some of the dominant public views of the role that these groups and high-skilled expatriates, some who have decided to come back, have in Serbian society (Bajić-Hajduković, 2010; Pavlov, 2011). Due to numerous changes in immigration patterns, the representation of these individuals in Serbian politics and the public sphere has changed over time. However, despite variability, those representations consistently reinforce mobility, financial stability, good life, and access to resources, all of which presumably prevent these individuals from fully understanding or experiencing the everyday hardships of those living in Serbia. Once interpreted in such way, social privilege becomes a sign of a person’s status as a social elite, symbol associated with Western paternalism toward Serbia and, consequently, evidence of a betrayal of common Serbs (Greenberg, 2006b).

Readers like Zoran often build on this deeper struggle between common people and elites to trouble positionalities of other participants in the dialogue mainly by problematizing their moral character and ability to advance truthful and representative accounts of life in Serbia. This especially applies to those marked as Serbian elites, a category that includes *guest workers* [gasterbajteri], individuals living in the *city center* [krug dvojke], *gents* [gospoda], those who have been *having coffee in London*, those that *live in the West*, and

children of rich parents. As one of the self-proclaimed voices of *common, poor, and normal* people of Serbia, Zoran questions the national sentiments and sincerity of elites and their authority to interpret the meaning of visa liberalization for others in the ongoing online talk. As he says, the elites “rock the boat” by advancing concerns and predictions that are not grounded in true knowledge of life in Serbia.

In response to such discursive troubling of their identities, the individuals who are positioned as elites by other participants in the dialogue often engage in numerous interpretative moves to craft extensive explanations of their privilege. This justification often reproduces the shame and stigmatization of social privilege, but it also allows these individuals to reassert their national belonging through suffering articulated as personal sacrifice, financial struggle, and lack of agency even though they may have escaped Serbia’s confinement. I observed those re-interpretations of personal benefits and privileges at work in the statements such as:

When I come to Serbia and see the misery of the people and cannot help everyone and share this little pittance of what I earn here for mom and dad, it is hard for me. (andjela, Decembar 19, 2009 @ 07:22, B92.net)⁵⁷

I live in the EU [...] and my working day lasts from 10-12 hours a day, I have never, or will embarrass my people, because with my behavior I am trying to fix world’s negative image of the Serbs. (Anja, December 20, 2009 @ 12:51, Blic.rs)⁵⁸

The whole case is economic in nature, (and) all of us poor souls who have escaped from the Balkan remoteness follow the same story. Bitter is the bread of guest workers. (Rovcanin-Ranko, March 2, 2010 @ 16:28, Blic.rs)⁵⁹

Aside from being an attempt to untroubled their national identities, these interpretative moves suggest that readers do not necessarily aim to deny their social privilege but rather to affirm continuity of their national belonging by re-localizing collective suffering and identifying the role of it in their lives outside Serbia. To accomplish this, these individuals often remark about their financial struggles, hard life, regret for having to leave Serbia,

separation from family and friends, discrimination by the host country, and desire to help the home country in any way possible. In other words, they identify the specificities of their lives as Serbian elites that ultimately differentiate them from their immediate environment (non-Serbs who are enjoying the same privileges and living conditions). By highlighting the burdens, commitments, and obstacles these readers map borders of their damaged Europeanness to suggest that the reason for exclusion from national community should not be social privilege per se. These readers suggest that the issue is the ways social privilege is used to erase, fix, or change Serbianness that is produced through the period of collective suffering and ostracism.

These sequential patterns of troubling and untroubling identities in online dialogue reveal a prescription for performance of Serbian national identity in the EU and in the context of the EU integrations. Produced through the memory of collective suffering, the prescription is entrenched in the motifs of injustice, collective victimhood, and irrecoverable loss. Consequently, readers call for maintaining and reproducing the external stigma and the feeling of being damaged European as a matter of their moral obligation and a source of national pride and exceptionalism.

Reproducing this moral order, the reader identified as BegIzKukavicijegGnezda marks (“fake”) asylum seeking as a violation of the prescriptions because “those people enjoy the benefits of that status,” while other Serbs are trapped “in an all-encompassing uncertainty, poverty and misery.” However, this author does not denounce asylum-seekers and excludes them from the national community because they have left the country, and perhaps not even because their actions will make traveling more difficult for those who are still in Serbia. Rather, the author sees this activity as a moral transgression (“of course they

do not return the money”) because it is motivated by a person’s desire to (temporarily) fix their damaged identities (BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, May 21, 2011). Understood in such a way, “fake” asylum seeking in this particular utterance is interpreted as a form of social privilege because asylum seekers aim to make their life better in an improper way. In contrast to BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, who does not recognize asylum seekers either as proper Serbs or Europeans (“removing the request before the end of the procedure”), financijer’s account validates asylum seeking as an activity that does not change a person’s identity as damaged European (“you do not allow us to go to neighboring countries to beg”).

This segmentation of national belonging based on different understandings of asylum seeking as performance of damaged Europeanness appears throughout the readers’ discourse. On the one hand, participants in online conversations validate asylum seeking as a rational response to an irrational situation, appealing to continued suffering and little prospect for radical change of one’s life. On the other hand, they denounce this type of cross border movement when asylum seekers aim to end their participation in collective suffering by benefiting from resources that are not available to other *normal people*.

The need to maintain the feeling of being damaged even when conditions of confinement change and a person is capable of producing a better life also regulates readers’ interpretations of the purpose of asylum seeking. The comparison between the utterances by Sasha and BegIzKukavicijegGnezda shows how these individuals develop different understandings of the “benefits” that asylum-seekers gain by leaving Serbia:

They are the wise people, everyone who seeks asylum. What they would do here when even God said goodnight. To be honest, it is difficult everywhere, but this (,) right here, is rock bottom. I’d ask for it too (,) but did not know how to do it. (Sasha, May 19, 2011 @ 02:06)⁶⁰

... I've read in one commentary a claim that there are no false asylum seekers – there are. These are the people who apply for asylum and for a certain amount of time (depending on the state) enjoy the benefits of that status only to withdraw the request for asylum just before the end of the procedure. Of course they do not return the money. [...] (BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, May 21, 2011 @ 22:42)⁶¹

The tension between these two posts, and more precisely between viewing asylum seeking as a violation of moral orders and as praise-worthy survival tactic, reveals another layer of the morality of suffering: playing the system to gain personal benefits. This belief is rooted in the common understanding that the period of ostracism has given those who identify as Serbs both the right to play the system and the knowledge and skills to do so. However, similar to the concept of social privilege, the morality of playing the system is also regulated by its outcomes, namely the assessment whether they affirm person's damaged Europeanness. As a result, readers are able to draw a thin and bendable line between proper and improper tactics, or to differentiate between “fleeting for life” and “enjoying the benefits” by relying on the same moral order.

Playing the system through personal sacrifice. In the context of the readers' discourses on visa liberalization, avowal of one's capacity to play the system to overcome obstacles reproduces the concept of collective suffering on two levels. First, the idea of an individual playing the system is possible only as readers' recognize their damaged Europeanness. In this respect, the period of ostracism is not only seen as the main reason for person's inability to fully engage with the newly emerged opportunities, but also as an experience that taught Serbs the tactics for overcoming limitations. Second, the practice of playing the system essentially challenges what are officially presented as objective and rational barriers. For example, despite the official rhetoric of integration, Serbs cannot be the same as the rest of the EU citizens or Europeans because of their flaws; yet, by playing the

system they can gain equal ground and minimize the effects of their undesirable characteristics.

Nonetheless, playing the system to challenge the order of things is a transgression that places the readers outside the externally prescribed social orders that support the category of proper Serbian citizen capable of upholding EU rules and values. To legitimize these transgressions as survival tactics, readers rely on the narratives of unjust subjection to abnormal situations, which translate violations of rules into moral rights that only those who have participated in collective suffering can have. However, enactment of this right is not without personal risks: the moment readers decide to endorse this practice they are placing themselves in danger of recreating confinement, reinforcing negative stereotypes, or losing higher moral ground and, with that, the control over internal and external significations of Self. In that regard, playing the system is also an affirmation of Serbia's damaged Europeanness. Presence of obstacles and the need for personal effort to overcome them are reminders of Serbia's underprivileged position in the EU hierarchy, and the means by which collective suffering can continue even if a person's use of survival tactics leads to better life and access to desired resources.

In that sense, in online dialogues, the readers' stories about ways to trick the system celebrate personal sacrifice either as a mark of resilience or personal victimhood; therefore, they are also the stories about desired collective identities. More precisely, enabled by the sense of having a damaged Europeanness (seeking the cracks in the system affirms the status of a European outsider), playing the system is more than individual display of skills and expert knowledge. It is a positioning strategy in which readers play out stereotypes to their

benefits, thus creating a space where they can defy stigmatization and regain a sense of control over the existing representations of Self.

The discussion of tactics to overcome the limitations of the visa liberalization policy was particularly prominent in the first weeks after the official announcement of the new policy. For many people, attempts to bend the rules and circumvent restrictions inscribed in the White Schengen were means for managing a newly emerged ideological dilemma: because of the visa liberalization, Serbs were allowed to re-claim their European belonging and normal life and, yet, they were not provided with economic means to accomplish this. In many posts before 2010, readers expressed this contradictory experience of liberation and continued confinement by stating their desire to travel and inability to do so due to the poor economic situation and lack of money.

At the same time, references to specific everyday coping strategies such as *working harder*, *saving*, or *traveling on a budget* identify the means for actually overcoming these barriers not by relying on the state, but by investing personal effort. In readers' discourse, fashioning European belonging from a situation in which such belonging was either denied or challenged is linked to a sense of pride. For the majority of the participants in online dialogue, the successful overcoming of limitations is viewed as a result of a person's own abilities, resourcefulness, will, and readiness to face the risks associated with transcendence of the existing barriers. Although readers expected the state to produce a social order with "normal" living standards, they always attributed the attainment of a better future to individual *determination* to "find (additional) job"; "research the cheapest way to travel"; cut some expenses and "save money"; or challenge limitations by engaging in risky activities such as "marrying those who already have citizenship of the [host] country" to avoid

deportation and gain the status of an EU citizen. Most important, reliance on one's own skills, use of additional knowledge, and effort to identify system's loopholes includes some form of personal sacrifice such as risking arrest and deportation, working a low paying job, depriving oneself of some financial benefits, or traveling only with the "backpack on our backs." The following post by Markobgd summarizes some of these points:

For those young adventurers, there is an opportunity to hitchhike and go through Europe with another person like those 3 Poles who came last summer. There are sites like couchsurfing.com where you can find accommodation, for free for anyone who is willing to accept the wayfarers, check this for a little bit :). I know most will say they do not have money etc. but through youth organizations, there is unloading of a truck for 1000-1200 dinars; all in all, I could talk forever, but it will not change the attitudes of some people who are always whining about something, and often do not do anything ... (Markobgd, November 30, 2009 @ 19:47, Blic.rs)⁶²

After crisis situations with asylum seekers prompted EU warnings to the Serbian government and the news media defined *asylum seeking* as a national problem, citizens faced barriers that were not necessarily related to financial deprivation but rather to enforcement of stricter border examinations, surveillance, and potential suspension of visa liberalization. Despite the barriers, news readers attempted to make sense of emergent dilemmas by employing strategies such as figuring out the holes in the system; seeking the means for fulfilling desires even when normal means for doing so are not available; and justifying these choices as moral rights that are given to those who were unjustly subjected to a prolonged period of suffering and denial of a rightful place in the European world.

A reader identified as Sasha, for example, praises asylum seekers for their knowledge ("I'd ask for it too but did not know how"), which seems to be a necessary tool for overcoming both the existing barriers (e.g. stricter measures for border crossing and inability to permanently work and live in the EU) and also the system that imposes them (Serbian

government). As in earlier online dialogues on resourcefulness, Sasha and other readers who praise asylum seeking as a “smart” choice also stress personal effort, use of personal resources, and difficulties in accomplishing desired goals (“it is difficult everywhere, but this (,) right here, is rock bottom”). From this perspective, asylum seeking for Sasha seems to be a self-sacrificing coping mechanism. Sasha does not deny obstacles, but recognizes them as a part of the condition of being Serb, a condition that also forces individuals to engage in irregular activities (asylum seeking) to respond to extreme confinement.

BegIzKukavicijegGnezda also recognizes that the abnormal situation in Serbia justifies an escape as necessary tactic for existential survival (“people fleeing for their lives”). However, the author also notes that this justification does not apply to everyone, namely “fake” asylum seekers who are marked as the violators of the preferred moral order, in a way that does not delegitimize Sasha’s view that playing the system is a desired skill. BegIzKukavicijegGnezda accomplishes this by highlighting different elements of the moral order, or more precisely by foregrounding the absence of those elements in the actions of “fake” asylum-seekers. In this author’s account, asylum-seekers’ movement out of the confinement is an unwarranted reward rather than the outcome of personal sacrifice, hard work, and resourcefulness. The benefits these individuals may be enjoying are provided by the system itself that awards financial support to those who apply for an asylum. Although this commentator does not deny that asylum seekers have skills to play the system, the author does not associate such skill with personal effort that produces opportunities for a better life, but with an ability to recognize opportunities within the system and exploit them passively until being caught (they “apply for asylum and for a certain amount of time enjoy the benefits of that status”).

This utterance also suggests that asylum seekers make risk-free transgressions. Unlike people who are “fleeing” because their lives are at stake and people who may face stricter controls on the borders, BegIzKukavicijegGnezda portrays the position of “fake” asylum-seekers as a comfortable situation (“enjoying benefits”) that can have predictable outcomes and safe passage through potentially uncomfortable situations (they can “withdraw the request for asylum just before the end of the procedure”). In fact, they are gaining a benefit of the transgression (money) to the disadvantage of the rest of normal people, including those who are fleeing for their lives. Even though asylum-seekers’ participation in past collective suffering is not disputed, thus giving these individuals moral right to play the system, the selective use of information about their status implies that asylum-seeking (temporarily) ends collective suffering. Furthermore, considering the emphasis BegIzKukavicijegGnezda places on lack of personal effort and risks, I argue that in this case the author marks “fake” asylum-seekers’ survival tactics as an undesirable violation of the moral order because it (temporarily) erases their Serbianness.

What these two utterances and the meanings created in their dialogic interaction illustrate is the polyfunctional use of the discourse about damaged Europeanness as a rational explanation for social exclusion that is based on commentators’ assessment of whether asylum-seeking is a moral transgression or a moral right. As my discussion of the morality of survival tactics illustrates, readers legitimize their evaluations by backgrounding and foregrounding different elements of the same dominant moral order produced through the narratives of collective suffering and tarnished Europeanness as qualities of Serbian national identity even after the 2009 visa liberalization. With that the readers construct a fragmented discourse on asylum-seeking that produces different forms of collective solidarity. At the

same time, they also advance a platform for the constitution of fairly uniform collective identities premised on flexible exclusionary practices that are oriented toward the same social actions.

Conclusion: The Implication of Social Exclusion for the Category of Serbian Citizen

As discussed throughout this chapter, taken-for-granted assumptions that Serb people went through a period of collective suffering in the past that resulted in some form of collective damage is a rational means that participants in vernacular discourses use to regulate group memberships. As noted, this vernacular discourse often advances dis-identification from state-centered identities as a form of membership. Yet, when articulated by readers, identification and dis-identification with state-centered forms of citizenship are significant utterances that suggest how the category of citizen is a polyfunctional discursive mechanism that allows for the stratification of positions within the national community; exclusion of specific individuals and groups from it; and formulations of claims that would deny European identity to those marked as internal others and national strangers.

In this sense, I close this chapter with a discussion of a meaningful exchange between two commentators to illustrate this discursive mechanism. I identify the range of exclusionary and inclusionary practices that individual authors use to accomplish these actions in the utterances by evita zivkovic and ana kefal, who echoed voices of other participants in the thread that developed in response to *Politika*'s story about asylum-seekers. Their utterances also illustrate interpretative patterns and moves that characterize comments of other readers who engaged in online dialogues between 2010 and 2011 to discuss the issue of asylum-seekers and the status of these individuals as Serbian citizens. I return to Beogradjanin's view of asylum-seekers and the assessment that "it is not ok that one minute

they are citizens of Serbia and the other they are citizens of Kosovo.” This view is affirmed in the subsequent utterances by evita zivkovic and ana kefal:

From my experience, every Belgian deserves a medal for all the “asylum-seekers” who for the past decade or two has accepted and suffered and financially supported them [“asylum seekers”] although a few of them really integrate into the host society. As far as their government’s policies, they have largely contributed to the emergent situation, especially regarding Shiptars because they were treated as poor, oppressed by the Serbs, political refugees, especially from the late 90’s. Now, when it turned out that they mainly deal drugs (they are working as “security” for disco which is very handy for dealing drugs) and at the time they also had Serbian passport, the authorities found it convenient to call them “Serbian citizen,” because the Serbs already have be promoted as an evil [...] (evita zivkovic, March 3, 2010 @ 20:09)⁶³

Why do you say the citizens of Serbia (?), say Albanians. There are more and more of them in all countries, they receive assistance first, and then bring their brothers and wives, slowly there are more and more and wives get pregnant right away, so because of the child they receive residency, and after also the rights and so on. SORROWFUL! (ana kefal, March 12, 2010 @ 11:02 am)⁶⁴

In these utterances, evita zivkovic relies on the narrative of collective suffering and ideas of reversed moral order to articulate a negative valuation of the Belgium and the EU authorities’ manipulation of the category of citizens of the Serbian state. Similar to BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, these two authors are not concerned with a patriotic defense of citizenship, the improper the performance of state-centered identities, or the questioning of the choice to leave Serbia in search for a better life. Here, they talk about the instability of the category of Serbian citizen and express disapproval of both asylum seeking and European politics because they prolong the collective suffering and stigmatization of Serbia (“Why do you say the citizens of Serbia, say Albanians”). This disadvantaged position is the standpoint from which the commentators construct views of stratification and exclusion, and their denied Europeanness.

In effect, both utterances build on talk about others (Belgians, authorities, “asylum-

seekers,” Albanians) to advance the talk about “us.” Evita zivkovic, in particular, makes a set of interpretative moves to reinforce Serbian victimhood and social privilege of undesired others. In her utterance, the suffering of the host country (Belgium) is re-interpreted as the collective suffering of the Serb citizens who, undeservingly, end up being “promoted as an evil.” By making a shift in the naming strategies, the victim (Belgium) becomes the agent that induces collective suffering. In that regard, “asylum-seekers,” later identified with “Shiptars”—a racial slur for ethnic Albanians—who are given Serbian citizenship status by mistake, are viewed as a common problem. The addressee-exclusive “we” or “the Serbs” are identified as innocent victims. “They” or “Belgians” are agents who suffer but also create suffering for others. “They” or “asylum-seekers” are immoral agents (“they mainly deal the drugs”) who are hiding their true intentions and personality (“they were treated as poor, oppressed by the Serbs,” and “as “working as ‘security’ for disco which is very handy for dealing drugs”). Unlike Belgians whose moral transgression is a result of “government’s policies,” asylum-seekers are judged based on their character. Similar characterization emerges in ana kefala’s utterance. The author constructs the Albanians’ character to suggest that the inherent immorality of their inner dispositions justifies unequal treatment, which is an ideological assertion that is a discursive strategy for blaming the victim or asylum seekers for their own discrimination (Tileagă, 2007; van Dijk, 1991).

The combination of these linguistic and rhetorical strategies completes the interpretative circle in which readers move from judging moral appropriateness of the event or action (asylum seeking) to judging the actions, behaviors, and characteristics of those identified as non-Serbs. Furthermore, these interpretative moves and their reoccurrence in readers’ threads rationalize extreme prejudice in which person discriminates others because

of their ethnic difference and also delegitimizes the group by placing its members beyond moral and social orders (Tileagă, 2005, 2007). As the example illustrates, “asylum-seekers” are a constant threat, they do not “integrate into the host country,” and their status as Serbian citizens is an irregularity. But in contrast to news discourse that employs similar negative images to identify internal others and justify state-lead socialization into proper European citizenship, the commentator articulates a more restrictive normative category that produces absolute exclusion: those marked as internal Others can never hope to be one of “us,” even if their legal status makes them Serbian citizens.

Furthermore, constant reminders that these Others were able to change their status because Belgium and implicitly the EU have helped them serve as evidence of social privilege, which in turn transforms praise-worthy survival tactics such as tricking of the system into violation or disturbance of the existing order. As I noted in some of the earlier examples about asylum seeking, vernacular discourse reverses the blame by transforming those who potentially can have high moral ground because they were forced to escape from abnormal situation into perpetrators and threats for “our” well-being.

As this discussion suggests, readers’ recognition of power dynamics that place Serbia on the margin of Europe creates tension and an uncomfortable ambivalence of identification, which these individuals manage by using the same discursive practices that I noted in news discourse. More precisely, they engage in nesting of otherness, which is a practice of redrawing the symbolical borders between periphery and complete outside, and shifting the essence of otherness to those who are located further away from the imagined center (Bakić-Hyden, 1995; Cioroianu, 2002; Živković, 2011). At the same time, the talk that articulates limited understandings of a person’s moral ground, social privilege, and skills in tricking the

system, shapes the meaning of the category of Serbian citizen in a way that would rationalize various forms of social exclusion. The reason for this is because readers' self-recognition is entrenched with the collective memory of suffering which enables these individuals to both avow and disavow their state subjectivities. More precisely, by drawing on uncontested assumptions about Serbian national belonging, participants in online conversations draw upon collective identities legitimized through news discourse to rationalize practical orientalism, and also to express their experience of abnormal life and critique state leadership (see Chapter 6).

Such polyfunctional use of the category of Serbian citizen is also apparent in the discourse on asylum seeking that readers tend to interpret as an issue of ineffective state citizenship. For the most part, individual authors such as Beogradjanin and evita zivkovic speak from a position of Serbian citizens to reinforce the feeling of injustice and the image of a fallen West or EU as an inauthentic materialization of true European values. For instance, evita zivkovic notes that one of the EU members has sacrificed citizenship ideals for political purposes and "convenience." In other instances, readers proclaim their commitments toward proper state citizenship only to disidentify with the Serbian non-functioning state that fails to protect its citizens. In these instances, readers engage in similar exclusionary practices as evita zivkovic and ana kefala and complement them with the elements of the interpretative repertoire of Serbia as a No Man's Land by referring to ineffective state ("You should just continue giving the passports to Kosovars [Kosovo's residents] left and right" and "How many asylum seekers can pass without the "support" of the police???"). In that regard, the readers question not only the identification of internal others who are making moral

transgressions as Serbian citizens, but also the state's ability to restrict the access to state citizenship only to true Serbs.

In sum, and building on my earlier discussion about collective memory of suffering and its use as discursive practice, I argue that the deployment of the category of Serbian citizen within vernacular discourses is driven by a common understanding of what it means to be a damaged European. This subjective interpretation departs from the news media's conception of citizenship as a formal, objective category of identification legitimized by the state. In readers' discourse, the legitimacy of this category of collective belonging depends on how this category signifies the type and degree of damage that, in a particular moment in discourse, serves as undeniable marker of Serbianness.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Review of Findings

On the basis of a critical discourse analysis of news reporting and readers' comments in three Serbian online, interactive news outlets, this dissertation explains the constitution of a sense of national and European identities in contexts that expose and reinforce fragmentation and instability of dominant forms of national imagination. By situating this analysis in post-Milošević Serbia and focusing on online public dialogue about the 2009 visa liberalization, I illuminated dialogic tensions between news media discourse on Serbian national belonging and Europeaness and the cultural intimacy or self-recognition based on everyday life experience articulated in the vernacular discourses of news audiences. Building on the concept of subject positioning as a discursive practice people use for negotiating troubled identities and boundaries between Self and others, I theorized about the characteristics of online disemia—or tension between self-recognition and official representations of national belonging—in institutional and vernacular discourses, and the implications of this discursive practice for the development of communal solidarity, constitution of moral orders, and rationalization of social exclusion.

To identify the stakes in the identity politics and struggles to legitimize particular meanings of Serbia's integration into the EU, I first identified the types of interpretative repertoires that news media and readers use to advance interpretations of the 2009 visa liberalization. More precisely, I asked what is the relationship between institutional and news audience's representations of the main events? My analysis showed that both groups utilize these interpretations as resources for securing particular narration of collective belonging in

different and conflicting situations. Meanings co-constructed in dialogic exchange between news producers and readers who post commentaries online demonstrate that a national imagination emerges through fragmented and contradicting arguments and the delegitimization of their alternatives. In this sense, my findings illuminate the theorizing on discourse and constitution of community as suggested by Colombo and Senatore (2005) and Wetherell and Potter (1992).

More specifically, news media most often combine arguments and premises of three repertoires—EU integration as progress toward becoming a European state, EUropeanness as final destination, and Serbia as a source of manageable otherness—to normalize the EU integration as an objective policy and as a project aligned with Serbia’s state-centered politics and inevitable destiny (Chapter 5). Depending on the context and the official explanation for the EU’s politics of conditionality toward Serbia, news media define visa liberalization as a reward for accomplished and measurable progress, a reminder that such progress must continue, and a security measure that protects the EU from dangerous and undesirable Others. Invoking these meanings in a single news story produces interpretative tensions that news media use to systematically produce an argument for state leadership and state-centered forms of citizenship, even when the events and the sources in the news story question the effectiveness of the Serbian government and the plausibility of imagining Serbia as a sovereign state. In all instances, the formation of a functioning Serbian state legitimized by the EU becomes the only available solution for the country’s problems and the only means by which Serbian people can join the EU and see themselves as proper Serbian citizens and European subjects.

Shifting between different systems of meanings for the purpose of social action is one of the qualities of vernacular discourses. In the cases I studied, readers' posts often interpret visa liberalization as the symbol of normal and desired life, freedom, and access to material resources; and as an objective measure and a reminder that unfavorable economic and political situations in Serbia urge immediate solutions. These individuals employ flexible and taken-for-granted symbols of Europeanness such as democracy, liberty, consumerism, tolerance, and cultural enlightenment not necessarily to justify support or critique of the EU, although their utterances often accomplish both. Rather, these representations discursively center EU to delegitimize the image of the Serbian state and citizenship narrated in news stories.

In this process, they connect familiar images, descriptions, and affective values associated with Europeanism with the accumulated knowledge of Self or everyday experiences of being Serbian citizens and nationals to advance a set of interrelated re-interpretations of the core assumptions of the news discourse. Consequently, the idea that EU is a universal and static benchmark becomes an intimate and flexible vision of normal life that person should have, if the narrated progress has been made (Chapter 6). The recognition that the EU is an inextricable element of Serbia's future is not based on promotion and accomplishment of steady progress through state policies, but on a desire for a radical break from isolation, stagnation, and confinement that is deeply felt in everyday aspects of life in Serbia (Chapters 6 and 7). Finally, readers interpretatively re-work the idea that visa liberalization symbolizes the process of becoming a proper state into a belief that the event marks a moment of becoming their true self and re-claiming a denied identity as Europeans (Chapter 7). The prominence of these re-interpretations also confirms that online news

commenting is a local and highly occasioned activity in which individuals validate new and alternative interpretations of main events by appropriating and re-combining the elements of available interpretative repertoires.

The narratives about the country's present and future are also narratives of who Serbs are and who they desire to be, both of which were the focus of the second research inquiry that guided this project. In that regard, I examined what interpretative repertoires of national belonging Serbian online news audiences utilize when commenting on stories about the 2009 visa liberalization. Furthermore, I explained how these individuals use these repertoires to articulate their understanding of Serbian national community and mark their position within that community. By relying on the narratives of past and present, readers linguistically mark group sameness and difference to make sense of themselves as flawed, half-baked Europeans, which is an externally ascribed position that these individuals view as the major reason for Serbia's current standing in Europe and for the lack of normalcy in their everyday life.

The news media discourse produces and manages this position by acknowledging the existence of internal flaws and rationalizing Serbia's peripheral position, both of which provide the category of a proper Serbian citizen as the dominant expression of collective identities. Associating predisposition to cause disturbance to desired harmony and order with the group's character and its location on the outside of the EU, news media advance state-centered identities as necessary correctives through which otherness can be contained and Serbs become socialized into European subjectivities.

For readers, Serbia's position on the periphery of the EU and its rationalization through narratives of progress and state leadership cause discomfort and uncertainty, which

they manage by constituting collective identities that align national and European belonging without the need to affirm faith in state-led progress. To accomplish this, readers invoke cultural intimacy to acknowledge their backwardness or other negative characteristics as markers of Serbianness and their status as ostracized European subjects. They create collective identification through solidarity in suffering and physical confinement described through cataclysmic and vivid images of inhuman conditions of the current life in Serbia (Chapters 6 and 7). In the process, they rely on naming strategies and commonplaces to translate and normalize specific personal desires into markers of collective identities. To build on Herzfeld (2004) and Wetherell and Potter (1992), in these instances collective community emerges as people transform individual experiences into grand explanations of national crisis and dramas.

Furthermore, readers' utterances denaturalize externally assigned stigma through identification of forces, events, and agents that are responsible for "our" damaged identities and tarnished Europeanness. Particularly important in that regard are narratives about a lived collective history that reinforce feelings of injustice, overly-harsh punishment, and undeserving expulsion from the imagined European community (Chapter 7). Narration of these memories reinforces collective self-recognition through victimhood, and it also allows for vindication of the group's character, whose negative traits are re-interpreted as the outcomes of historically specific period of exclusion and suffering. In other words, displaying these flaws reminds the authors and imaginary audience that changes in the power hierarchy now require Serbs to justify their European belonging to others even though such belonging has always been part of their nature. By articulating collective identity through the normative category of Serb as damaged Europeans, readers can justify visa liberalization as

their moral right to re-claim what was undeservingly taken from them in the past.

Consequently, they do not reproduce the category of Serbian citizen as the main expression of collective belonging, even though they often recognize themselves as Serbian citizens.

The last research question in this project asked about the relationship between identity politics activated through news commenting and sociocultural practices. More precisely, I inquired how interpretative repertoires of national belonging provide individuals with a discursive platform for advancing desired interpretations of Self and Other, regulating group memberships, and maintaining dominant moral orders and hierarchies. For the speakers in the online dialogues analyzed, invoking the memories of the past is a routine that produces formulaic and familiar explanations of everyday life, or more precisely, of one's current economic, political, and economic position and ability (or inability) to restore agentive capacities. They are prescriptions about who "we" are and where "we" should go next that turn seemingly unmotivated utterances about visa liberalization into the vehicles of banal nationalism and social exclusion. More precisely, intimate memories of past suffering establish collective suffering and the resulting damaged identities as markers of Serbianness. This enables readers to articulate national identities through subjective evaluations of who has higher moral ground and the most rights to benefit from visa liberalization.

The moral orders constituted through dialogue create restrictive criteria, based upon which membership in the national community can be stratified and denied according to a subjective assessment of degree, type, duration, and outcome of a person's suffering. Readers accomplish these internal scales of inclusiveness through the pairing of mutually constitutive concepts of social privilege and praise-worthy tactics of survival that mark the same actions either as moral transgressions or as rights granted by the existing moral orders. In that regard,

vernacular discourse subordinates one's membership in the community of Serbian citizens—a membership that internal others can access through state-lead socialization and disciplining—to membership in the moral community of Serbian nationals.

In particular, the category of Serb as a damaged European regulates in- and out-group membership by reversing moral orders, which is a discursive strategy that assigns the blame for emergent situation to the actual victims or to those who are already subjected to social marginalization (Tileagă, 2007; van Dijk, 1991). Readers rationalize their exclusionary practices based on a premise that the existing power hierarchy enables internal others or social elites to get closer to the desired center, instead of the proper Serb who has natural and moral rights to be included in the imagined European community and to benefit from it. The position of these internal others is interpreted as a reward given by powerful entities and not as an outcome of personal sacrifice and participation in collective suffering. Consequently, the potential change of the social, political, and economic status of those who are marked as undesirable or different from common Serbs is devalued and interpreted as moral transgression. Interestingly, the concept of a reversed moral order complements a common sense premise that a change in the status of the undesirable Other does not erase otherness. For instance, the reference to ethnic Albanians with the racial slur “Shiptars” marks them in dialogue as backward characters with immoral behaviors despite the EU's preferential treatment for them and related stigmatization of Serbia.

Implications

Discourse and nation. The findings from this study affirm that the national imagination is a fragmented and a contested discursive practice and a site of social struggle to secure limited and patterned interpretations of collective belonging (de Cella, et al., 1999;

Hall, 1993b; Colombo & Sanatore, 2005; Wodak, et al., 1999). Furthermore, my analysis of dialogic co-constructions of meanings between journalists and their audiences in the online environment indicates that this imagination is not oriented toward representation of national communities. Rather, it is an activity that produces frameworks or conditions under which people can see themselves as national subjects and act on the nation's behalf even when reconfigurations of territorial and symbolic borders question the group's ability to define itself as a national community. In that regard, online talks about the 2009 visa liberalization in Serbia illuminate the negotiation of subject positions as a central process through which decentralized, action-oriented, and historically specific narration of markers of collective sameness and difference produces national community as an object of people's knowledge. With this argument, the study offers a nuanced lens for explaining both re-organization of national discourses in response to regional and global flows as an interplay of ascending and descending nationalisms (Hall, 1993b), and also shows the implications of this dynamic for democratization and development of inclusive categories of collective belonging in postsocialist countries such as Serbia.

The rupturing of existing national discourses results from ongoing European unification and a tension between supranational, regional, and local identities and creates new spaces where "smaller nationalism" is legitimized as a necessary solution to increased ambivalence of identification (Hall, 1993p. 355). This argument is particularly relevant for understanding forms of institutional and banal nationalism that have permeated all social strata in Serbia after the 2000 October Revolution. Consequently, the current situation in Serbia can be described as a mosaic of paradoxes in which slogans such as *Kosovo je Srbija* [Kosovo is Serbia] still entice patriotism and strong emotional responses; where ultra-

nationalistic groups are speaking on behalf of the civil society (Kostovicova, 2006); where citizenship regimes are both liberalized and nationalized (Vaslijevic, 2011b); and where political parties and individuals that propagated Milošević's nationalistic politics even after 2000 act as the legitimate leaders of the country's integration into the EU.

Rather than interpreting the merging aspirations for unified national communities as a failure of democratic changes in post-Milošević Serbia or as an outcome of Serbian mentality, this study argues that articulation of national belonging on online news media discourses is a highly occasioned discursive practice that people use to negotiate entrapments experienced in everyday life. For the most part, these entrapments are produced and understood as the outcomes of Serbia's position on the margin of Europe, which has not changed even after the abolishment of socialist regimes. Consequently, Serbian citizens and nationals find themselves in need to constantly negotiate their national identities, which are simultaneously viewed as the sources of stigma and solutions for experienced problems (Chapter 7).

Attentiveness to the malleability of interpretative repertoires of national belonging and their activation for the purpose of social action enables scholars to "deprovincialize Western Europe" or to examine the effects of Balkan discourse in Serbian national imagination without reproducing the West as imagined center (Todorova, 2006, p. 35). This is particularly the case in co-constructions of collective belonging through discourses about asylum-seekers in which ambivalent images of the EU as desirable and threatening entity are used as a powerful mechanism to engage social exclusion in discourse. In these instances, scales of inclusiveness can be legitimized without necessarily marking groups and individuals as non-European or backward or more Eastern than us. Instead, banal or practical

othering—through common assumptions and everyday practices (Haldrup, Koefoed, & Simonsen, 2006; Herzfeld, 2004)—often emerges as a bi-product of exclusion premised on improper acquisition of social privilege and a person's desire to conceal or erase damages acquired during the period of collective suffering. Narratives of daily hardships and the benefits that others undeservingly have enable participants in online dialogues to establish reversed moral order. Consequently, membership in a particular ethnic group can be re-interpreted as a sign of social elitism even with the acknowledgment of that group's backwardness. By combining lay and institutional knowledge of international power dynamics with collective solidarity in poverty and confinement to abnormal conditions of life, individuals can regulate access to human and civil rights and freedoms without being accused of advancing prejudice, discrimination, and xenophobia.

The analysis of the action-orientation of the discourse also reveals how European symbolism in news stories and readers' descriptions of the relationship between Serbia and the EU function as strategic choices rather than a linear reproduction of the EU's cultural politics. To follow Graan (2010), the concept of a strategy does not ignore the power of the EU discourse to consistently produce knowledge of Serbs as flawed, half-baked Europeans; instead, it points to the negotiation of those positions through which Serbia's dependency on the EU is viewed as an opportunity for people to restore their agentive capacities and sense of control over power relations that are beyond their reach.

Forms of collective belonging accomplished in readers' talk about the 2009 visa liberalization indicate that individual recognition of negative stereotypes of Self and re-interpretation of common sense assumptions about Serbianhood are crucial strategies people use to give meaning to emergent experiences. These discursive practices revive familiar

political myths, visions of ideal national character, common collective history, and territorial unity, which can point to readers' aspirations to establish national community on the primordial collective origins and essence. However, as Čolović (2004) noted in regard to the contemporary revival of Serbian national mythology, the meanings of these elements of national repertoires are constructed in the context of the news media discourse on European modernity that makes these commonplaces possible and meaningful. In other words, they are appropriations of available national topoi for the purpose of contextually specific social action, rather than as static symbols of collective belonging.

Online news and media-audience dynamics. Concepts of appropriation and negotiation are particularly important for the study of online news discourses and their potential to promote diverse, alternative, and potentially inclusive categories of collective identification. For participants in the online dialogues, everyday life is the main source of diverse and contradicting experiences that problematize institutional national imagination, namely the category of Serbian citizen articulated in news stories. Could reader's activation of cultural intimacy and resulting disidentifications from identities suggested by the news media symbolize resistance and formation of alternative forms of national belonging? This study suggests that to answer this question, we need to move away from simple comparison between audience's and reporter's representations of main events, and instead examine their interdependency.

Emergence of disemia in these online discourses suggests that readers can take control over meaning making by using knowledge of collective self-reflection formed independently from news media, which means that news media cannot guarantee equivalence between encoding and decoding. However, this tension also emerges in a dialogic interaction

between news stories and news comments as two sites of knowledge production that enable, legitimize, and limit each other, as has been suggested by Howard (2008a, 2008b).

In that regard, by creating the need for response and negotiation of subject positions by audiences, news media control what type of resistance is possible and what purpose such resistance can accomplish. In particular, news media set the parameters for the expected response by systematically producing internal others and knowledge of externally ascribed stigma. They create ideological dilemmas for the readers, thus channeling individual's interpretative work and social actions toward their resolution. As a result, news media and readers can accomplish the same forms of social exclusion and normalize discriminatory practices through mutual disagreement. This is particularly the case with readers' use of the news media's discourse on citizenship: the category of Serbian citizen inscribed with an orientalist inflection in the news discourse is the means for vernacular rationalization of exclusion, even though the readers devalue the category as the main expression of collective belonging.

Consistent appearances of these dialogic co-constructions of meanings between journalists and their audiences in three news media outlets also point to the importance of examining socially accepted forms of narration of events of economic, political, and cultural relevance in the news media. As this study shows, formulaic representations of Serbia's integration into the EU that emphasize proceduralism, state leadership, and issues related to state sovereignty rather than citizens' everyday life are significant mechanisms for the constitution of fairly uniform categories of collective identification that bridge different political ideologies. More precisely, as the news media use these taken-for-granted narrative choices they are producing discursive platforms from which individuals and groups can

launch similar identity politics independently from the ideological orientations of the respective news outlets and formulate collective subjectivities that are meaningful and rational for different audiences. To account for these patterns and fragmented reproduction of social hierarchies that I discuss in this dissertation, it is essential that scholars identify articulations of dominant social macropropositions in different news media and in the online interactions between different audiences. Most important, this attentiveness allows for development of a complex map of dominant identity politics in Serbia that surpasses rigid categorization of news media and public voices as pro- or anti-European, liberal or conservative, and nationalistic or cosmopolitan.

Limitations and Future Research

In this study, I map instances in which articulations of meanings and identities become possible and preferred under the premise that news media are sites in which national imagination is produced, circulated, and expressed in the form of news stories. Once translated into an analytical strategy, this theoretical orientation places the researcher at the risk of looking for the manifestation of already existing national discourses in these stories, and therefore imposing particular interpretations on the text. Other research on trends in post-2000 Serbian journalism indicate that news coverage of ICTY trials, conflict in Kosovo, or the country's integration into the EU perpetuate nationalistic ideologies, and that media outlets often support either civic or national conceptions of collective identity thus reinforcing the gap and tension between two orientations (Džihana & Volčić, 2011; Matić, 2004; Veljanovski, 2006). However, news media, and more specifically online news media, are also systems of regulation, newsroom practices, professional roles, and epistemologies that are produced through contextually specific political, cultural, and economic discourses,

which tend to blur lines between civic and national orientations in news coverage.

Consequently, to fully illuminate the dispersed production of the national community and identities, it is essential to account for the subtle ways that national imagination enters the news stories through the complex interaction between multiple agents, institutions, and social forces (Mihelj, 2006). In the case of Serbian media, this includes attention to the coupling of political propaganda and capital that enables various groups and powerful individuals to exert direct and indirect control over content production in major news outlets (Veljanovski, 2006).

Although I offer a brief overview of the implications of media monopolization and censorship in Serbia, I also limit my analysis to textual characteristics of the news discourse on 2009 visa liberalization. As a result, my emphasis on journalistic (linguistic and rhetorical) strategies, and activation of interpretative repertoires suggests that these are conscious and intentional choices. To more clearly establish these choices as both the products of the discourse and mechanisms through which those discourses are reproduced, future studies about institutional narration of national belonging need to integrate textual analysis, analysis of the production of news reports, and examination of social practices.

Another relevant factor that limits my analysis of co-constructions of meanings on news media websites is the scarcity of information and research on news audiences, and more specifically those who engage in news commentary. Despite an effort to reach editors of the online editions of *B92*, *Blic*, and *Politika* during my stay in Belgrade in 2012, I was not able to gather information about demographic characteristics of the participants who most often comment on available news stories. Although the purpose of this study is to explain how identities are produced, articulated, and disarticulated in online interactions, having

more information about participants' economic status, age, and habits in regard to news commenting would lead to more nuanced conclusion in two respective areas.

First, news media produce news stories with imaginary interlocutors in mind and with an expectation of a response, which in turn affect the selection of events that are covered, and style and form of narration (Sumpeter, 2000). Therefore, knowing how journalists of three analyzed news outlets define their audiences can give better insight into the type of interpretative repertoires they use to make sense of social reality for particular group of people. Second, even though individuals do not enter online interactions with pre-constituted identities, they bring in the knowledge of personal orders or repositories of organized and repeated self-making practices that enables these individuals to respond to positions created by news media and other participants in the ongoing interaction (Davies & Harre, 1990; Potter & Edwards, 1999; Wetherell, 1998). The echoes of that knowledge can be decoded with an analysis of the linguistic and thematic features of individual utterances. However, having knowledge about the general characteristics of news commentators allows for identification of connections between these features across argumentative threads; mapping of the negotiation strategies individuals use to untrouble their identities; and better account of variability and patterns in the ways people construct their versions of events, Self, and others individuals and groups.

Finally, I advance a discussion about post-Milošević national imagination in Serbia and related social practices based on a case study of news media representation of the 2009 visa liberalization between May 2009 and May 2011. In order to establish CDA as a critique of social relations, institutions, and processes, proponents of CDA stress the importance of sufficient historization of the context in which discourses under examination are produced

and consumed (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Wodak, 2001). Furthermore, paralleling and intersecting discursive patterns inscribed in the social context and the text are the major means for deciphering interpretative repertoires and their ideological work (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In that regard, my focus on specific event in Serbia's recent history and macro analysis of interpretative repertoires and negotiation strategies cannot fully capture the spectrum of discursive practices that produce national imagination in response to the tensions and power dynamics embedded in ongoing European unification.

The discourse on visa liberalization became a relevant framework for constructing views about what it means to be Serbian since the 1990s when the visa regime was put in place. Today, it continues to be a topic that colors public discussions about cultural borders, asylum seekers, and undesirable immigrants coming to Serbia as a new South-East administrative border that separates the EU from the East. During more than two decades of referencing visa liberalization as one of the major means for explaining the relationship between Serbia and Europe, people in Serbia have faced many issues that changed how this particular event signified their national belonging. I do not fully discuss many of those turning points, such as NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, proclamation of Kosovo's independence, assassination of the Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić in 2003, the and creation of the music festival EXIT, even though these events profoundly affected narratives about future, escape, isolation, and degradation that in various ways influence utterances I analyze in this study.

Critical attentiveness to the history of EU integration and social climate in Serbia before 2009 certainly exceed the scope of my project; however, several existing studies

indicate that these kinds of analysis provide important insights in the formation of national belonging and repertoires about Europe (see Jansen, 2005; Kostovicova, 2004; Živković, 2011). In addition, they highlight the value of archival work and comprehensive analysis of other types of texts such as literary work, speeches, movies and TV shows, and media representations of other important events related to Serbia's EU integration, all of which reveal complexity and diversity of Serbian national topoi, or what Živković (2011) called, a "dreambook."

In sum, as this discussion suggests, the analysis I present in this dissertation research could be expanded with a multi-level analysis of all aspects of the discourse. While I recognize that these possibilities reveal important limitations of my methodological choices and subsequent analysis of data, I also see them as opportunities to further develop inquiries raised in this dissertation project. This particularly applies to the question about the role online news media have in promoting public debate in which common sense truths can be contested, diverse voices heard, and alternative viewpoints formulated and positioned as legitimate accounts of social reality. The existing literature on online news media responds to this question by focusing on the types of measures news media use to control user-generated contents, and by interpreting instances of disagreements between news and audience's narratives as the signs of diminishing power of the news media to establish interpretative equivalence between encoding and decoding phases.

In contrast, this study calls for creation of theoretical and methodological frameworks that identify elements of resistance, irony, and play of meanings in readers' reproduction of news narratives as well as for frameworks that illuminate reproduction of social hierarchies in contents that seem to critique such narratives. By focusing on the active construction of

meaning in communicative chains and mapping echoes of existing voices in each new utterance, it is possible to shift discussion about democratic character of online news media. Instead of limiting the discussions about democratization of news media to the evaluations of the efforts different outlets are making to empower the voices of their audiences, it is important to re-focus attention to their dialogic and mutually constitutive relationships. The ongoing social struggle for the expansion of civil and human rights in Serbia highlights the need for such orientation.

In the 2010 Helsinki Committee for Human Rights report on Serbia, Biserko (2011) noted that public apathy toward social change, decreased engagement in political life, and growing appeal of national conservatism are closely related with people's inability to connect increasingly distant and mystified government's representations of Serbia's integration into the EU with their everyday lives. Serbian news media also contribute to the widening of this gap with rather negative consequences for promotion tolerance and social inclusiveness. Communicating the ideals of civic life and state citizenship through institutional national imagination that does not respond to individuals' intimate experience of daily hardships makes those ideals inaccessible for the audience. Incapable of producing collective identification in vernacular discourses, these ideals become reasoning tools that enable articulation of other forms of exclusion. Consequently, if democratic forms of citizenship are still the means for articulating other forms of social belonging, then the question is how Serbian news media can channel this struggle toward democratic outcomes and activate readers' cultural intimacy in a way that would foster collective solidarity across all social strata.

Endnotes

Chapter 5

The Making of Proper Serbian Citizens: News Repertoires of the Visa Liberalization

¹ Министар унутрашњих послова Ивица Дачић најавио је данас оштрију контролу грађана Србије који одлазе у земље Европске уније, рекавши да се проверава да ли путници имају довољно новчаних средстава, повратне карте и путно осигурање [...] Као једну од могућих мера, министар је поменуо одузимање пасоша или забрану изласка из Србије за оне који се злоупотребили право на азил.

² Srbija bez viza od 1. januara 2010?

Srbija je ispunila gotovo sve kriterijume iz "mape puta" za liberalizaciju viznog režima, a namera vodećih zvaničnika Evropske unije za pitanja proširenja je da do kraja sledećeg meseca Evropska komisija predloži ukidanje viza. [...] "Komisija je zadovoljna postignutim rezultatima, zadovoljna je učinkom celokupne srpske administracije. To je zaista bio veliki zadatak za sve nas", navodi Delevićeva. [...] Izveštaj Evropske komisije o ispunjenosti kriterijuma iz Mape puta za liberalizaciju viznog režima za Srbiju podrazumeva ocenu 42 kriterijuma. Odnosi se na napredak Srbije u oblasti bezbednosti dokumenata, kontrole ilegalnih migracija uključujući i readmisiju, javnog reda i bezbednosti, spoljnih odnosa i osnovnih prava. Na osnovu ovog izveštaja Evropska komisija trebalo bi da u narednom periodu donese predlog odluke o liberalizaciji viznog režima za našu zemlju. [...] "Mi smo danas napravili još jedan veliki korak ka belom šengenu. To je proces koji smo pokrenuli pre skoro dve godine i sada vidimo da smo veoma blizu srećnom završetku tog procesa", izjavio je Đelić agenciji Tanjug.

³ Zamenik šefa češke diplomatije Jan Pojar rekao je da su to "stotine stranica izveštaja" i da će "biti potrebno vreme da se na temelju njih dođe do konačnih ocena i odluka". On navodi da su, prema prvim utiscima, rezultati u sprovođenju mapa puta pojedinačnih zemalja zapadnog Balkana nejednaki, da su neke zemlje manje, a neke više napredovale.

⁴ Činjenica da je prošlo godinu dana otkako je EU sa Srbijom potpisala SSP, a zatim ga blokirala negativno utiče na naše približavanje EU uprkos stalnom povećavanju procenta usvajanja evropskih zakona. Ovo je posebno problematično s obzirom na to da smo od svih zemalja u regionu sada ostali na začelju [...].

⁵ [...] Можда ни убудуће нећу ићи чешће, али добар је осећај да могу да идем у Европску унију када пожелим – каже Леринц Сабо

⁶ "Nadam se da ćemo uskoro moći da vas dočekamo ne samo kao slobodne putnike, već i kao građane EU", rekao je Bilstrom [...] "Suština integracije u EU je prijateljska zajednica u kojoj jedni druge tretiramo kao ravnopravne partnere. Ovo je dom u kojem bismo želeli da vidimo i predstavnike Srbije, da radimo zajedno", izjavila je Silvana Koh-Merin, izrazivši nadu da će uskoro početi konkretni pregovori Srbije o pridruživanju EU.

⁷ Он је истакао да је либерализација визног режима корак којим се отварају врата за развој грађанског друштва у тим земљама, на њиховом путу ка чланству у ЕУ. Подсетивши да је с председником Тадићем још 2004. године почео разговоре о миру и стабилности на Балкану и визном режиму, он је нагласио да је данас постигнут значајан циљ за грађане наше земље.

⁸ "Evrointegracije strategijski su prioritet Srbije, uprkos tome što su okolnosti i u Srbiji i u Evropskoj uniji nepovoljne i to usled ekonomske krize. Pravac Srbije ka Evropskoj uniji nije stvar trenutka, već racionalni izbor prioriteta i pravca kojim Srbija želi da ide", каже Delevićeva

⁹ Биће нам боље када уђемо у ЕУ, то је неминовност. Ми морамо да будемо део Европе не само са територијом, већ и што се тиче свега осталог, каже овај полицајац.

¹⁰ "Niko nije očekivao da će države biti sposobne da sprovedu sve ove reforme u roku od godinu i po dana, ali one su to uradile i sada će biti nagrađene. Najvažnije je da je ovaj proces pokazao da kada postoje jasni uslovi i jasan cilj i nagrada, u ovom slučaju veoma sočna šargarepa, sistem uslovljavanja od strane EU sasvim dobro funkcioniše", ocenjuje Štiglmajerova.

¹¹ Он је оценио да су европски парламентарци својим гласањем показали да више нема "dvoumica" о европској будућности западног Балкана.

¹² Šef delegacije Evropske komisije u Beogradu Vensan Dežer kazao je nedavno da poverenje EU prema zemljama zapadnog Balkana postepeno raste, ali da postoje dodatni izazovi [...].

¹³ Podsetili smo da nije pošteno da te dve zemlje budu izuzete iz procesa, jer bi to moglo da doprinese novim podelama na Balkanu

¹⁴ Stara pravila

Vizna liberalizacija ne podrazumeva ukidanje граничних контрола због опасности од илегалних имиграната, а неким ситуацијама службеници на карини понашаће се као и до сада. Дакле, у сваком тренутку могу да траже податке о новцу који путник носи или објашњење сврхе путовања. Могуће је да затраже и ваучер хотела у ком ће неко бити смештен, али исто тако могу само да погледају пасош и пропусте вас даље. Такође, на основу слободне процене гранична полиција може да забрани улаз у земљу шенгенског простора особи која представља опасност по јавни ред и мир, или јој је из неких разлога већ забранjen улаз у Унију.

¹⁵ Србији прети „црни шенген“?

Због наглог повећања захтева за азил у државама ЕУ, Србији и Македонији у јуну прети суспензија безвизног режима [...] Белгија је упозорила ЕУ на „погубне последице визне либерализације“, а српске власти су позване да реагују и спрече ову појаву што је резултирало драстичним смањењем броја захтева у другом кварталу 2010. Године [...] “Реч је о Албанцима с југа Србије и Македоније [...]” – рекао је Дачић.

¹⁶ Osim političkih jedan od bitnih razloga za podršku kosovskoj nezavisnosti bila je upravo činjenica da bi se time rešio problem migracija kosovskog stanovništva. Tome u prilog govornice su i razne ankete među stanovništvom rađene pre proglašenja nezavisnosti. Tada su kosovski Albanci navodili da im je status potreban upravo jer žele da ostanu u „svojoj državi“. Međutim, realnost je drugačija i prema poslednjim istraživanjima i do 70 odsto mladih Albanaca žele u inostranstvo.

¹⁷ „Naša je odgovornost da mi na samom startu sasečemo te kanale, kaznimo one koji ih organizuju i iskorišćavaju bedu i problem određenih kategorija naših građana i da na taj način izbegnemo problem koji neke zemlje, poput Rumunije, imaju sa nekim drugim članicama Evropske unije”, kaže Đelić.

¹⁸ Beli šengen deli Србе

Jedni smatraju da bi usvajanje takvog rešenja značilo da Beograd „izdaje Srbe” jer bi tako priznao nezavisnu državu Kosovo, dok drugi veruju da je to „prava stvar jer međunarodna zajednica vidi da je Kosovo kriminogena zona”.

¹⁹ Prema saznanjima „Blica“, na osnovu dojave nemačke policije srpska policija je tokom vikenda sa granice vratila putnike iz Makedonije koji su nameravali da u Nemačkoj zatraže azil. Da borba protiv zloupotrebe vizne liberalizacije nije nimalo laka svedoče događaji koji su potom usledili, jer su putnici protestovali ispred srpske ambasade u Skoplju s optužbom da im Srbija krši ljudska prava.

²⁰ Belgijanci su se odlučili na ovaj korak jer je ta zemlja, uz Švedsku, Nemačku i Luksemburg, preplavljena talasom lažnih azilanata. [...] Azilanti su se u zahtevima, kako navodi belgijski sekretar žalili na ugrožavanje osnovnih ljudskih prava, na diskriminaciju po osnovu etničke pripadnosti i na nedostatak volje nadležnih organa da im osiguraju zaštitu i obezbede bolju poziciju.

²¹ „,Нећемо дозволити да неколико хиљада људи који злоупотребљавају безвизни режим угрозе слободу кретања целе нације”, изјавио је Божидар Ђелић, потпредседник владе за европске интеграције.. [...] “Тренутно се разматра могућност увођења одређених санкција за оне који су покушали да злоупотребе бели шенген”, навео је вицепремијер. [...] „Не постоји разлог за тражење азила, јер у Србији нема политичке репресије. Србија је слободна земља”, истакао је Ивица Дачић, заменик председника владе и министар унутрашњих послова Србије [...]

²² Azilanti s juga Srbije i Makedonije odlaze najčešće u Belgiju jer ta država pruža najbolje uslove, između ostalog poput hotelskog smeštaja.

²³ И Роземон сматра да је реч о „грађанима Србије и Македоније који говоре албански језик” који су лоше обавештени о могућностима коришћења права визне либерализације. “Очигледно је да је ове људе неко слагао да ће овде добити азил, новац и смештај. Ми знамо да је њихов проблем економске, а не политичке природе,

па су изгледи да ће неко од њих добити азил веома слаби. Требало би их упознати с тим пре него што дођу овде”, казао је Роземон.

²⁴ Већина њих су Роми. Они таже политички азил из економских и социјалних разлога. Да будем прецизнији, они траже бољи живот. Ови људи имају погрешне информације, можда они не прате Интернет.

²⁵ “Највећи део њих јесу заправо они који су са Косова, а нису успели да се integriшу”

²⁶ Ђелић је рекао да се мора одредити више средстава за бољи живот ромске заједнице, али истовремено постоји одговорност ромске националности да кроз чинjenje или нечинjenje доведе у опасност достигнуће свих грађана Србије.

Chapter 6

Yearning for Mobile and Stateless Serbian Identities: Vernacular re-interpretations of visa liberalization

²⁷ Коначно могу као нормалан човек да седнем на воз и посетим своју родјену сестру без чекања, администрација, потврда и докумената и планирања месецима unapred... За мене је ово велики дан. (pravosudni, 30 Novembar, 2009 15:35)

²⁸ [...] u medjuvremenu je bilo perioda kada sam imala para za putovanja, ali dostojanstvo (pa i inat) mi nije dalo da stanem u redove [...] ali sada, ovako blesavo srećna zbog ove vesti, prosto ne znam gde cu otici na januarske rasprodaje! :) i nije to samo zbog shoppinga, nego opet zbog dostojanstva (i inata), muka mi je sto nas nasi deru ove silne godine... miskovic i kompanija - dovidjenja, vise nisam ni silom prilika vasa ovca. a omladini toplo savetujem da putuju, putuju, putuju i putuju, mnogo je dobro i mnogo se nauci i mnogo cemo se svi vise osecati ljudskim bicima.sretan put svima! (Gradjanka '67, 30 November, 2009 @ 17:08)

²⁹ Al' ajde, da si ne kvarimo veselje i ovakvu divnu vest likovima. Koначно mozemo iz kaveza. Videce mladi ljudi kako se zivi van granica Srbije, nece vise moci da ih farbaju Zarama i Marama, jer ce se u H&M-u super & komplet obuci za 100eu, a ostatak novca ce trositi na lepse i pametnije stvari, mozda ce se nauciti i nekoj kulturi, suzivotu, toleranciji i postovanju zakona i zajednice u kojoj zivis [...] (tralala, 30 Novembar, 2009 19:16)

³⁰ [...] posto zivim u inostranstvu sada ce roditelji moci da mi dolaze kad im odgovara a ne sa gomilom dokumeneta da cuce ispred ambasade kako bi dobili vizu.Raduje me sto ce ove mlade generacije imati mogucnost da putuju,uce jezike upoznaju druge kulture.Posle toliko godina izolovanosti koначно nesto dobro i pozitivno za zemlju Srbiju. (nata, 18 Decembar, 2009 @ 12:54h)

³¹ [...] Svi govorite kao da ste za put uvek imali spremnih par stotina Evra, jedino ta viza i onih par taksi za uverenja su bili stice se utisak nepremostiv problem. Govorite o redovima, pa nije da nisam prosao kroz to, ali nisam to sa toliko gorcine doziveo, ko je putovo do sada to ce ciniti i nadalje nista se tu ovom olaksicom ne dobija puno, a oni sto nisu do sada "zbog viza" mogli putovati, a "imali su mogucnosti" misljenja sam da nece zakrciti granicne prelaze

sta god ovde pisali. A svima vama evropskim putnicima zelim vam sve najlepse pa svakako otputujete u vasu zemlju snova, ako mozete i da se u njoj snadjete, pa da konacno mi koji ostanemo ovde vidim sta cemo da radimo, jer imamo malo vise problema u Srbiji od tog izvikanog viznog rezima. (Dule971, 18 Decembar, 2009 @ 13:51)

³² [...] Za Hrvatsku jos od 1994.godine vazi bezvizni sistem pa sam mogao svuda da putujem bez vize. To je velika stvar. Vlasnik sam firme i cesto sam u Austriji, Nemackoj, Slovackoj i Italiji i znam koliko je meni bilo lakse da radim nego mojim golegama koji su imali pasos Srbije. Ovo ce olaksati poslovanje mnogima u Srbiji. I, naravno, najvaznije je da smo najzad otvoreni, nismo vise u zatvoru i deo smo normalne Evrope. Ta psiholoska olaksica je i najvaznija! (petar andric, zrenjanin, 18 Decembar, 2009 @ 19:18h)

³³ Naravno, ovo je lepa vest, i savrseno je normalno da se krecemo kao slobodni ljudi. Povratismo dozu dostojanstva. Ali ukoliko ne popravimo stanje u drzavi, ovo ce ostati samo sibolican uspeh. Jer rdjav udes kod nas je sto su nam politicari korumpirani i sto se privreda raspada usled raznoraznih mahinacija i pronevera, i sto mafijasi i parasi drmaju Srbijom kako zele, i sto ljudi nisu svesni sta znaci uopste pojam institucija, i sto smo moralno i kulturno degradirali... Najbolje od svega, cini mi se, je sto cemo moci da se distanciramo od sebe kako bi se bolje shvatili. Kad vidimo kako to ide kod njih, u ozbiljnim drzavama i kad shvatimo da ovo sve ne mora biti ovako, i pre svega da ne sme biti ovako. Mozda tad pocnemo da menjamo stvari. (toka, 19 Decembar, 2009 11:55)

³⁴ iako nemam sad pare da bi putovao negde ali skupicu malo, i oticicu negde u Madjarsku, Sloveniju, Italiju ili Austriju ... Cestitam svim mojim sugradjanima za oslobodjenje!!! (boro, 30 Novembar 2009 17:26)

³⁵ Ama ljudi kakve vize i kakvi bagraci? Pa i kada ukinu vizu sta cemo? kao da mozemo da proputujemo svet sa 20 000 mesecnom platom? A decu ko treba da nahrani? a struja? a benzin koji je extra skup? telefon? voda? komunalije? To se treba prvo resiti a posle ove vize. Zemlja nam je u jadnom stanju nemaju ljudi para da iz Juzne Srbije posete decu svoju u Beogradu sto su pogledi da traze novac a oni mi pricaju da cemo sada lakse putovati po evropi.... (Silja, 12 Jun, 2009 @ 19:37).

³⁶ pa sta ako ce nam ukinuti vize ??? ko da je to pa nesto, i ovako skupis nesto evrica sa kojima agencija podmiti u ambasadi i eto tebe u zapadnoj evropi ili gde hoces. i sta onda kada si otisao??? kad tamo mozes biti turista ili ilegalni radnik kog ce proterati za dva meseca i udariti mu zabranu za ulazak u evropsku uniju!!! u cemu je poenta imati ili nemati vize??? i kada putujem idem po srbiji, grckoj... nikada u zivotu ovo malo bede sto zaradim ne bih trosio po zapadu kao turista. (kako da ne, 15 Jul, 2009 14:19)

³⁷ Dojite da gledate i da ne mozete nista da kupite. (Evropljanin, 15 Jul, 2009 23:35)

³⁸ @Evropljanin odgovor Kod nas su vec mnogi artikli sa istim cenama kao i u EU cak su mnogi artikli i skuplji u Srbiji. Nije rec o gledanju i kupovini vec o subjektivnom osecanju slobode kretanja za ljude ove zemlje posle skoro 20 godina bez skupljana gomile

documentacije i cekanja u redovim za vize. Bogu hvala. (Igy69 Igy69, 6 Novembar, 2009, 11:22)

³⁹ Poslednji koji izađe iz ove „nazovi države“ nek ugasi svetlo za sobom! [...] (katica, 19 Octobar, 2010 @ 00:55)

⁴⁰ nisu krivi ti ljudi koji odlaze odavde za mrvu sreće koju ovde nikad neće imati... otišao bi svako ko može... ..jadnici jadni, ako nam i ovo uzmete, JEDINI PLUS KOJI STE IMALI ZA PROTEKLIH 10 GODINA, odosmo svi, kako-tako, nađe se način... (da da, 5 Maj, 2011@ 13:31)

⁴¹ Da sam mladja ne bih sastavila ni 5 minuta više u ovoj državi. Zato mladi, ako imate ikakve mogućnosti brišite odavde, sunce tudjeg neba će vas pre ogrejati nego ovo ovde... To vam govori žena od 57 godina sa dobrim iskustvom u Srbiji. (Brankica, 5 Maj, 2011 @ 14:06)

⁴² [...] Neko ce da napise sta ce sad Srbija kad svi odu? Nek radi sta god hoce, pravo je svakog coveka da ide gde god hoce i da zivi gde hoce. Nikakvu odgovornost nema prema naciji, drzavi i oistalim glupostima. Putujte , sretno vam bilo!! (Milos, 30 Novembar, 2009 13:31)

Chapter 7

Damages of the Past: Readers' Negotiation of Stigmatized Collective Identities

⁴³ Kako bi bilo da ja uzmem neciji auto i da mu ga vratim za 19 godina ? Da li bi mi zahvalio i platio pivo (The_Great_R&R_Swindle, 30 Novembar 2009 14:59)

⁴⁴ [...] lepa vest sa gorkom uspomenom da se svi secamo golgote koje nam je priustila EU. kaznu smo izdrali kao narod zato svima cestitke na istrajnosti [...] (Vesa, 30/11/2009 15:29)

⁴⁵ Lepa vest za sve nas, zaista. Ipak, imam neki ukus gorcine. Valjda su nas dvadeset godina toliko ponizili, da vise ne mogu ni da se radujem iz srca. (Ljiki, 30/11/2009 15:48)

⁴⁶ После дугогодишњег незаконитог држања целог народа у кућном притвору (логору), решили су да нас пусте да, уз одређене услове и уступке наравно, излазимо и улазимо у своју земљу, тј. да се КРЕЋЕМО... Страшно! (банана шаргарепић | 30/11/2009 17:33)

⁴⁷ Za ovo smo se borili dve decenije! Ispaštali su samo normalni ljudi, a iz Srbije su putovali po Evropi bez problema samo političari i kriminalci i lopovi sa falsifikovanim "šarama"! [...] (Ivan, 30. novembar 2009 13:55)

⁴⁸ [...] Hvala Bogu da opet imam, valjda je ovo ona prva mala sveća na kraju mračnog tunela kojim se krećem od 1989.-te i čuvenog gazimestanskog govora. U međuvremenu je prošlo 20 godina, najboljih u jednom ljudskom veku, ali neka, ja sam barem doživio ovaj dan. Mnogi na žalost nisu i zato im se sada ponizno klanjam i plaćem za njima. (Tibor, 30. novembar 2009 17:51)

⁴⁹ [...] Neka nam Bog pomogne da ovo bude samo pocetak povratka Srbije u veliku evropsku porodicu naroda, gde je oduvek i spadala; [...] Molim i da se ne zaborave ni krivci za to sto nam je omladina, bez mogucnosti da vidi sveta, pomalo postala "slepa kod ociju". (Vlasta, 18 Decembar, 2009 @ 06:39)

⁵⁰ [...] Pokazimo u daljini da smo ipak jedna od kolevki kulture u Evropi i da nam miloseviceva politika to nije mogla uzeti! Mnogi ce se vratiti brzo kuci i ljubiti svoju ipak dragu zemljicu.. (savche, Dcemeber 18, 2009 @ 12:38)

⁵¹ Raduje me sto smo ponovo deo Evrope kao i do 1992 godine. Osecao sam se ponizen kada su nam drzali lekcije i govorili narodi iz istocnog bloka poput Slovacke i Madjarske o EU i nekakvoj Evropi koju su do devedesetih godina oni videli samo na mapi sveta i nikako drugacije !!!! Evropo ponovo smo deo tebe kao i pre 1992 godine!!!! (Branislav, 19 Decembar, 2009 @ 07:02)

⁵² Gospodo Belgijanci, otkud sad da su to grajani Srbije ako uzmemo u obzir da ste vi priiznali Kosovo? To oni samo dolaze da vam se zahvale,kako ne razumete? Nije u redu da su cas gradjani Srbije a cas Kosova,onako kako vama u trenutku odgovara...Odlucite se... (Beogradjanin, 3 Mart, 2010 @ 8:35)

⁵³ Dragi gospodine Đeliću, Vi pojma nemate šta znači biti siromašan građanin u Srbiji pa zato ne dozvoljavate da odemo u okolne države da prosimo. Ali ako Vam nekada budu sudili za sva Vaša kriminalna dela i Vi ćete se naći u istom položaju kao 99 % stanovnika Srbije. (financijer, 18 Maj, 2011 15:18)

⁵⁴ [...] Mada,iskreno,u sveopstoj neizvesnosti,siromastvu i jadu ne znam kako i resiti pitanje ljudi koji beze glavom bez obzira. [...]Trece u jednom komentaru procitah tvrdnju da nema laznihi азиланата - ima. To su ljudi koji podnesu zahtev za azil i neko vreme (zavisi od drzave)uzivaju benefite tog statusa a pred sam kraj procedure povuku zahtev za azil. Pare naravno ne vracaju. [...] (BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, 21 Maj, 2011 @ 22:42)

⁵⁵ I sta sad? Ja zivim u Danskoj a mojoj majci, pre nego sto krene kod mene, moram da saljem i novac i povratnu kartu???? Gluposti..... [...] Ne zanima me kako ce drzava da se izbori sa problemom "nelegalnih azilanata". Sigurno se to ne radi preko ledja normalnih gradjana Srbije!!!!...!! Srbija je ruglo od drzave!!!! (Alex Danska, 18 Maj, 2011 @ 22:33)

⁵⁶ Ej Danac, Ne talasaj, sreće ti. Neće NIJEDAN azilant da krene u Dansku avionom. Sirotinja ovde nema kintu za autobusku kartu do Mladenovca a ne za avionsku do Kob'nav'na [...]. I još nešto. Nemoj kintu mami slati namenski nego to ustali kao praksu. Mesečno, recimo pola milke, šta je to za tebe. [...] (zoran, 19 Maj, 2011 @ 00:25)

⁵⁷ ...jer kada dodjem u srbiju i vidim bedu medju ljudima a nemogu svima da pomognem i podelim ovo malo crkavice sto ovde zaradim za mamu i tatu,tesko mi je... (andjela, 19 Decembar, 2009 @ 07:22)

⁵⁸ ... Zivim u EU..i moj radni dan traje od 10-12 sati dnevno,nikad nitisam, niti cu sramotiti moj narod, jer pokusavam bas svojim ponasanjem da popravljam negativan imidz Srba u Svetu... (anja, 20 Decembar, 2009 @ 12:51)

⁵⁹ Ceo slucaj je ekonomske prirode,sve nas jadnike koji smo pobegli iz Balkanskih zabiti prati ista prica.Gorak je hleb pecalbara [...] (Rovcanin-Ranko , 2 Mart, 2010 @ 16:28).

⁶⁰ Ma pametni ljudi, svi koji traze azil. Sta ce ovde, kad je bog reko laku noc. Da se ne lazemo, svud je tesko, al ovo ovde, dno dna. I ja bih trazio ali ne znam kako se to radi. (sasha, 19 Maj, 2011 @ 02:06)

⁶¹ ...u jednom komentaru procitah tvrdnju da nema lazniх азиланата - ima. To su ljudi koji podnesu zahtev za azil i neko vreme (zavisi od drzave)uzivaju benefite tog statusa a pred sam kraj procedure povuku zahtev za azil. Pare naravno ne vracaju. [...] (BegIzKukavicijegGnezda, 2 Maj, 2011 @ 22:42)

⁶² [...] Ko je avanturista od mladih, eto mu mogućnosti da sa još jednom osobom prođu Evropu stopom npr, kao 3. Poljaka što dođoše letos. Postoje sajtovi poput couchsurfing.com gde se može naći smeštaj za dž kod nekog ko je voljan da primi putnike namernike, proverite malo :). Znam da će većina reći pare fale isl. ali preko omladinskiх задруга ima i istovaranje kamiona za 1000-1200 dinara; sve u svemu, mogao bih ja da pričam do sutra ali to neće promeniti stavove nekih ljudi koji stalno kukaju oko nečega, a često ništa ne rade... (MarkoBGD, 30 Novembar, 2009 @ 19:47h)

⁶³ Iz mog iskustva, svaki Belgijanac zasluзуje medalju zbog svih "azilanata" koje su u protekliх deceniju-dve primili i koje trpe i finansiraju iako se mali broj njih zaista integrisao u tamosnje drustvo. Sto se njihove drzavne politike tice, ona je u najvecoj meri doprinela nastaloj situaciji, posebno u vezi Siptara jer su oni bili tretirani kao jadni, ugnjetavani od Srba, politicke izbeglice, posebno od kraja 90-tih godina. E sad, kad je ispalo da se oni uglavnom bave drogom (rade kao "obezbedjenje" po diskotekama sto je jako zgodno za dilovanje) a imali su i tada srpske pasose, vlastima je bilo zgodno da kazu "srpski drzavljanin", posto su Srbi vec bili promovisani kao zli. (evita zivkovic, 3 Mart, 2010 @ 20:09)

⁶⁴ Zasto kazete gradjani Srbije,recite albanci. Ima ih sve vise u svim zemljama,dobijaju prvo pomoc,a onda dovode svoju bracu i zene, polako ih je sve vise i vise zene ostaju odmah trudne,tako da zbog deteta dobija boravak,pa posle i svoja prava itd. ZALOSNO! (ana kefala, 12 Mart, 2010 @ 11:02)

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