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**Losing and Gaining Kosovo: How the Serbian Government
Re-articulated its Claim to Kosovo within the Brussels
Dialogue (2012–2018)**

Marina Vulović

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Doctoral thesis supervisors:

Dr. Jouni Järvinen

Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber

Dr. Emilia Palonen

Thesis pre-examiners:

Prof. Dr. Eric Gordy

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andreja Vezovnik

Opponent:

Prof. Dr. Eric Gordy

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Abstract

This thesis examines Serbia's changing approach to dealing with the Kosovo question since 2012. The claim of Serbia that Kosovo is an indivisible part of its territory has been anchored in the institutional framework of the country ever since the Kosovo war (1998-1999). Serbia's attachment to Kosovo is not only an institutional matter, but is also woven into the cultural fabric of the Serbian political collective. It resonates with the Kosovo myth, the main element of which is the physical and symbolic claim to Kosovo. Since Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, countering Serbia's claim to Kosovo, the Serbian Government has struggled to accommodate this state of affairs with its EU integration process guided by the incentive of the Brussels dialogue for normalizing relations between the two entities.

I study the Brussels dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo as a dynamic process of contestation of meaning. It is conceptualized as a contact zone that both enables and constrains the re-articulations of the constitutive Other, either as an enemy (through antagonism) or as an adversary (through agonism). The thesis particularly inquires how the Serbian Government led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) since 2012 has re-articulated Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue. It locates two central moments in this process: adopting the Brussels agreement in 2013, and re-introducing the idea of partitioning Kosovo along ethnic lines as a solution to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute in 2018, both of which are understood as myths.

The theoretical and methodological contribution of the thesis lies in the re-conceptualization of "myth". While existing studies of myth in the context of Kosovo-Serbia relations have been focusing on the Kosovo myth, this thesis considers the Kosovo myth as a sedimented discourse, guided by a discourse theoretical lens. This discourse has turned into a social imaginary in Serbia, a horizon of meaning that defines and constrains what is said, felt, and otherwise practiced concerning Kosovo. The social imaginary structures the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse based on Serbia's physical and symbolic claim to Kosovo, which is deeply rooted in the political and cultural life in Serbia. In 2018, it was re-articulated into the idea of partition for Serbia to retain its claim to Kosovo. Making a claim to only a portion of the territory, Northern Kosovo, the partition leaves outside of contestation the "mythologically" laden central and Southern Kosovo where the sites that embody the Kosovo myth, the Serbian medieval monasteries, are located. A deconstructive reading of the Kosovo myth developed in this thesis reveals that the main discursive element that connects the Kosovo myth, the Kosovo social imaginary, and the idea of partition is territoriality.

The thesis argues for a distinction between an ontological and empirical dimension of myths. As an ontological concept, myth specifically relates to an attempt to repair a dislocated discourse and potentially

embodies an alternative political project that promises to fix what is broken. As such, myths do not only relate to past events, such as most of the scholarship on national myths would conceptualize it, but also to anchoring future but not yet realized political projects. Hence, the category of myth in this thesis is reserved for the Brussels agreement, and the idea of partition, since both emerged from dislocations as means to repair them. Developing a novel approach, the thesis highlights specifically temporal, material and affective dimensions of myth for discourse-theoretically inspired scholarly discussions to stress the necessity of myths for meaning-making. Myths are generated whenever we attempt to escape the constraints of a dislocated discourse by imagining alternative orders. Empirically, the thesis examines how the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse becomes dislocated through Kosovo’s declaration of independence and is “repaired” by the two myths that resulted from the Brussels dialogue. Hence, this thesis also makes an empirical contribution to the field of Southeast European studies, by introducing a discourse-theoretical, performative/material, and affective dimension in mythmaking.

Apart from operationalizing the elaborate theoretical framework I developed, the empirical aim of the thesis was to demonstrate that even the most entrenched discourses, such as the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, are not resistant to change under the right circumstances. In the empirical analysis, the thesis focuses on the various representations of Kosovo in Serbian political discourse and draws attention to the re-articulation of political frontiers. It argues that the main transformation relates to the question of who constitutes the political “us” and “them”, recognizing a clear shift from the agonistic discourse in 2013 (which emphasizes the “sharing” of Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians) to an antagonistic discourse in 2018 (which emphasizes a total separation between the two ethnic groups as the only solution). In this analysis, two central nodal points emerge: “territory” and “the people”. The thesis demonstrates how these elements have been reconstituted over time and how this process enabled the deepening of the divide between Serbia and Kosovo, which could have implications for the Brussels dialogue and for Serbia-Kosovo relations more broadly.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations	ix
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Short Historical Overview: Kosovo in Serbia’s Political Discourse since 2008	1
1.2 Rationale of Research: Questions, Aims and Main Contributions.....	3
1.3 Theoretical Framework	15
1.4 Methodological Premises	19
1.5 Ethics and Researcher’s Position.....	23
1.6 Structure of the Dissertation	24
2 Theoretical Framework.....	28
2.1 From National Myths to Discourse Theory: Building Community through Antagonistic and Agonistic Articulations.....	28
2.2 Structure and Change in Discourse Theory: Repetition, Re-articulation, Performativity	36
2.3 Spatiality and Temporality in Discourse Theory: Dislocation, Antagonism and Political Moments	44
2.4 Myths as “New Objectivity”.....	50
2.5 Myths as “Empty Signifiers”	53
2.6 The Logic of Myths: Fantasy, Enjoyment (<i>Jouissance</i>), Desire, <i>Objet petit a</i>	56
3 Methodological Framework	60
3.1 Discourse-theoretical Analysis (DTA).....	62
3.2 Material Analysis.....	72
3.3 Affective Analysis.....	75
3.4 Methodological Premises of Discourse Theory and Research Procedure.....	79
3.5 Data Collection and Approach to Data.....	82
4 The Kosovo Imaginary in Serbia and its Re-articulation within the Brussels Dialogue as a Political Contact Zone	86
4.1 The Nodal Points of the Kosovo Imaginary in Serbia and its Intersecting Discourses.....	86
4.2 From a “Technical” to a “Political” Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina	91
4.3 The Brussels Dialogue and Serbia’s EU Integration Process.....	93
4.4 Ownership of and Claim to Kosovo in Serbia’s Official Discourse.....	95
4.5 The Brussels Dialogue as a Political Contact Zone.....	99
4.6 Hegemonic Subjects in the Brussels Dialogue	104
5 Community Discourse	109
5.1 Nodal Points of the “Kosovo is Serbia” Discourse Prior to the Political Dialogue and Transition towards the Brussels Agreement	110
5.2 Community Discourse: From Territory to People	115
5.3 Accommodating the Dislocatory Moment of Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence through the Brussels Agreement.....	118
5.4 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through Institutional Integration: A/CSM.....	123

5.5 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through the Serbian Institutional Framework	128
5.6 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through Members of the Serb Community.....	132
5.7 Drawing Political Frontiers through Affective Articulations	141
5.8 Positionalities of Hegemonic Subjects.....	150
6 Partition Discourse	154
6.1 Main Elements of Re-constituting Serbia’s Claim to Kosovo	156
6.2 Destabilizing Political Moments: On the Train Tracks of Antagonism.....	160
6.3 Articulations of the Conflict.....	167
6.4 Articulations of the Antagonistic “Others”	180
6.5 Articulations of the Political “Us”	187
6.6 Re-articulating Serbia’s Hegemonic Claim to Kosovo: From Symbolic to Physical Ownership	197
7 Conclusion	220
7.1 Main Contributions and Reliability of Results.....	222
7.2 Significance and Limitations of Research.....	225
7.3 Avenues for Future Research.....	227
8 References	230

List of Tables

Table 1: Methodological Framework of Discursive-material-affective Analysis	62
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List of Abbreviations

- A/CSM – Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities
- CDA – Critical discourse analysis
- CEFTA – Central European Free Trade Agreement
- DPA – *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, German Press Agency
- DS – *Demokratska stranka*, Democratic Party
- DSS – *Demokratska stranka Srbije*, Democratic Party of Serbia
- DTA – Discourse-theoretical analysis
- EEAS – European External Action Service
- EU – European Union
- FAC – Foreign Affairs Council
- FAZ – *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*
- GA – General Assembly
- ICJ – International Court of Justice
- ICTY – International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
- IR – International Relations
- KFOR – The Kosovo Force
- KiM – Kosovo and Metohija
- KLA – Kosovo Liberation Army
- LAPMB – Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac
- LDP – *Liberalno demokratska partija*, Liberal Democratic Party
- LSV – *Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine*, League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina
- MP – Member of Parliament
- NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NGO – Non-governmental organization
- PDA – Post-foundational discourse analysis
- PISG – Provisional Institutions of Self-Government
- PM – Prime Minister
- PS – *Pokret socijalista*, Movement of Socialists
- ROSU – Regional Operational Support Unit

RS – *Radikalna stranka*, Radical Party
RTS – *Radio-televizija Srbije*, Radio Television of Serbia
SAA – Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SANU – *Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti*, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
SC – Security Council
SLS – *Samostalna liberalna stranka*, Independent Liberal Party
SNS – *Srpska napredna stranka*, Serbian Progressive Party
SOC – Serbian Orthodox Church
SPS – *Socijalistička partija Srbije*, Socialist Party of Serbia
UN – United Nations
UNESCO – The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNMIK – United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
WWI – First World War
WWII – Second World War

1 Introduction

1.1 Short Historical Overview: Kosovo in Serbia's Political Discourse since 2008

“We had already lost Kosovo in 2008 when they declared independence.” (President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in an interview with *Dnevnik 2*, 27.12.2018)¹

The relations between Serbia and Kosovo have been complicated throughout history, particularly in terms of ownership of the territory of Kosovo. The statement above made by the President of Serbia only illustrates this complexity, particularly since 2017, because many political figures have voiced a conflicting array of statements about the position of Kosovo within a wider political discourse in Serbia. On the one hand, Kosovo forms the bedrock of Serbia's nationalist discourses and can be seen as a signifier that grounds articulations of Serbian identity itself. Particularly as of the nineteenth century, as Čolović (2017) argues, the Kosovo myth – i.e., the narratives surrounding the Battle of Kosovo from 1389 between Christian forces led by Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and Ottoman forces led by the Sultan Murad I – has been developed into a particular discourse that has served the interests of nationalist ideologists until today. Čolović (2017, 20) understands the Kosovo myth as a “sacralized story of the Battle of Kosovo formed in the nineteenth century in the framework of nationalist discourses, that is, nationalism as a political religion.” This means that the Kosovo myth and Serbian nationalism are intrinsically tied (see Bieber 2002), as well as that Kosovo as a place is raised to a sacralized position in the Serbian political collective (Ejdus and Subotić 2014). This has resulted in the myth's re-articulation into other discursive constellations, such as the claim that “Kosovo is Serbia”, which has marked Serbian politics since Slobodan Milošević and is still present, embedded in political decision-making, not the least its inscription in the Constitution of Serbia.

On the other hand, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, an event that has created a dislocatory² effect on the unity of the abovementioned claim that Kosovo is Serbia. This is evident in Serbia's engagement in the so-called Brussels dialogue, which was initiated after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) deemed Kosovo's declaration of independence as not being contrary to international law (International Court of Justice 2010). After the ICJ decision was announced, Serbia, under EU pressure, called for new negotiations on Kosovo in the UN General Assembly (GA), and on 9 September 2010, the GA adopted Resolution 64/298 (United Nations General Assembly 2010) that welcomed “the readiness of the European Union to facilitate a

¹ All translations of quotes throughout this thesis were made by the author.

² In simple terms, dislocation can be explained as a moment of crisis, a certain event that changes the way we view and talk about a certain issue. For an explanation of the concept of dislocation anchored in discourse theory, see the subchapter 1.3 Theoretical Framework.

process of dialogue between the parties [Serbia and Kosovo].” The dialogue was supposed to be “a factor for peace, security and stability in the region” and “promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people” (ibid.). This was the dialogue’s mandate, and the official EU-mediated talks began in March 2011 and came to be known as the Brussels dialogue.

At first glance, it seems that the Brussels dialogue, the purpose of which was to solve the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo – the former claiming that Kosovo is part of it, and the latter claiming it is an independent state – stands in direct opposition to the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim. This is evident in the fact that the international community does not accept either of those two options as the norm, meaning that one smaller part of the world recognizes the first claim by Serbia, and the other larger part the second claim by Kosovo as legitimate. The Brussels dialogue was aimed at solving this deadlock, pointing to a solution that would be found either somewhere in the middle (both Serbia and Kosovo make concessions to their claims), or in an attempt to make Serbia recognize Kosovo as independent, which the majority of countries in the world have done. The second option would be more likely, since the balance of power is tipped in favor of recognizing Kosovo’s independence in the international arena, with all major Western powers (USA, UK, Germany, France etc.) supporting it, while a few (Russia, China etc.) opposing it.

When the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Serbia and Kosovo was reached on 19 April 2013 – the so-called Brussels agreement – it was hailed by the EU as a historic agreement, while at the same time being hailed as a reinforcement of Serbia’s ownership of Kosovo, and a reinforcement of Kosovo’s independence by the two parties, respectively. For Serbia, led by a majority government of the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, abbreviated as SNS), the Brussels agreement was an attempt to accommodate the dislocatory effect of Kosovo’s proclamation of independence. By adopting it, Serbia would not recognize Kosovo and would be able to maintain some form of control and practice statehood there through the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities (A/CSM), which was one of the agreement’s main components. However, as the implementation of the A/CSM has been stalled for years, being blocked by the Kosovo Constitutional Court in 2015, it became evident that the Brussels agreement did not yield the desired effects and Serbia began to seek an alternative resolution. This alternative resolution came to be articulated as the idea of partition, which was also termed as an exchange of territories between Serbia and Kosovo, or land swap. As part of it, Serbia would get Northern Kosovo³, a predominantly Serb-populated area that most of the Brussels agreement addresses, in exchange for Kosovo receiving the Presevo

³ Northern Kosovo consists of four municipalities under the Kosovo framework: North Mitrovica, Leposavić, Zvečan and Zubin Potok, all of which have both Serbia-sponsored and Kosovo-sponsored institutions and leadership in place.

valley, a majority Albanian-populated area in the Southeastern part of Serbia. While in 2012 and 2013, the dominant idea of the Brussels dialogue for solving or at least mitigating the conflict, was the Brussels agreement, particularly its A/CSM component, the dominant idea in 2017 and 2018 was partition, or to some extent delineating Northern Kosovo from the rest and a re-bordering of the region.

In light of the previously mentioned Kosovo myth and its re-articulation into the claim that Kosovo is Serbia, it seems that particularly the idea of partitioning Kosovo along ethnic lines stands in opposition to a meta-discourse that has for so long dominated Serbia's approach to dealing with Kosovo. However, what is intriguing about partition is the fact that Serbia does not simply want to give up Kosovo, but rather metonymically transposes its claim to entire territory onto only a portion of it, namely Northern Kosovo. This is significant for the way we can discuss the Kosovo myth, in its various re-articulations, as not only pertaining to a distinct discourse that originated in the 19th century, as Čolović (2017), and many others have argued (Atanasovski 2019; Bakić-Hayden 2004; Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016), but as a discourse whose elements get woven into other articulations, such as the claim that Kosovo is Serbia, or Serbia's claim to Northern Kosovo. I will unpack these distinctions in the next subchapter.

1.2 Rationale of Research: Questions, Aims and Main Contributions

In this thesis I have asked how Serbia's claim to Kosovo, which is the key element of the Kosovo myth, has been re-articulated by the Serbian Government when the SNS first came to power in 2012 and started engaging in a political dialogue with Kosovo in Brussels. This main, broadly conceived research question can be broken down into subquestions. For instance, I have asked how the political frontiers between "us" and "them" have been re-articulated within this process and how the Brussels dialogue has both constrained and enabled this re-articulation. I have asked how material articulations, such as Serbia's institutional framework in Serbia and Kosovo, have grounded Serbia's claims, and how affective structures that underpin Serbia's political practice toward Kosovo have changed. Mainly, I have focused on illuminating the discursive, material and affective transformations of Serbia's claim to Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue. I argue that this has occurred against the background of the dislocatory effect of Kosovo's declaration of independence on the unity of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, which is anchored by a strong claim to the territory of Kosovo, inscribed in Serbia's Constitution. Furthermore, the Brussels dialogue has served as a political contact zone to contest and renegotiate this claim (as an arena for dealing with dislocation), which has led the SNS to come up with different "solutions" that would mend the dislocated "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse (what I refer to as "myths" in this thesis): The Brussels agreement and the idea of partitioning Kosovo (territorially claiming Northern Kosovo).

Starting from the above, the aim with this thesis is to contribute to current scholarship in three ways. I will introduce the contributions briefly after which I will devote three separate sections to a more detailed literature review within this subchapter (1.2). Firstly, my research offers another perspective to the way the Kosovo myth has been studied so far. Research in this area typically treats the Kosovo myth as a narrative with certain fixed boundaries and reference points in the past (Atanasovski 2019; Bakić-Hayden 2004; Čolović 2017; Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016). Most works treat it as a story with political implications that has its origins in the tales of the Kosovo Battle (Bakić-Hayden 2004; Čolović 2017; Judah 2000; Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016), in which Prince Lazar, by deliberately losing the Battle against the Ottomans, ensures an eternal place for all Serbs in Heaven. This is where the term “Heavenly people” (*nebeski narod* in Serbian) comes from, which is often heard in Serbian nationalist rhetoric to designate the special status of Serbs as a chosen people (Anzulović 1999). Connecting to the tales of the Battle of Kosovo, the Kosovo myth has been discussed in relation to Serbian nationalism, particularly to the Milošević regime (see Bazić 2012; Bieber 2002, Čolović 2017), to describe how Milošević managed to mobilize Serbian nationalist sentiments in the wake of Yugoslav disintegration. There is also a strand of literature that offers a more historical perspective on the myth, applying a critical approach that sees the myth as contingent, sometimes more and sometimes less important for Serbian elites and state politics throughout history (see Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016; Pešić 2019). Less scholarship has been produced on the topic of the Kosovo myth and how it features in contemporary politics of Serbia (see Ejdus 2020; Vranić 2019), since it is often discarded as an “issue of the past”. It is entirely absent from discussions on the subversion of dominant hegemonic orders, characterizing the Kosovo myth and its re-articulations as a hegemonic order *par excellence*. This is a gap I aim to fill with my thesis. Additionally, by contrast to the named scholarship, I question the understanding of the Kosovo myth as a narrative and highlight the relationality and iterability of the Kosovo myth, focusing on the rearticulation of its elements into other discursive constellations and how they are performed. I do so by relying on a discourse-theoretical ontological framework and a deconstructive reading of the Kosovo myth and will address it in the introduction, since it plays a significant role in my thesis, grounding my further claims.

Secondly, I aim to contribute to the study of national myths (Abizadeh 2004; Bouchard 2013; Michael 2010; Miller 1997; Morden 2016; Smith 1999) through a performative, discourse-theoretical approach which questions the narrativized conception of national myths that mainly sees myths in terms of fictionalized accounts of factual events that are important as stories of origins for certain nations. Subchapter 2.1 will be devoted to a more elaborate discussion of this issue. In the rest of Chapter 2, I have given a systematic exploration of myth as both an ontological

and ontic category, something that current literature on discourse theory has not addressed and that scholarship on national myths neglects to pay attention to. Ontologically, I examined the concept of myth through the lens of temporality, by combining theories of performativity (Butler 1988; Butler 1990; Butler 1993), psychoanalysis (Evans 1999; Lacan 1962; 1977; Stavrakakis 1999; 2007; 2017) and post-structuralist discourse theory (Laclau 2005; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Palonen 2020). Myth also functions as an ontic category, the articulations of which I will also empirically demonstrate in my case-study material. The ontic understanding of myth has been more prevalent in discourse theory, using it as an analytical category (Montesano Montessori 2011), a particular logic/process (Marttila 2015), or a narrative with a particular form (Casullo 2020). An ontological understanding of myth can also be recognized but mainly related to its ideological function in discourse, as a type of concealment (Freeden, Sargent and Stears 2013; Ryan 2006; Torfing 1999). By contrast, I start from one of Laclau's (1990) seminal works in which he elaborates on myths and social imaginaries and connect these notions with his later work on empty signifiers (Laclau 1996b; 2005), recognizing similarities. This ontological reconceptualization allowed me to address in my analysis not only the discourses the claim to Kosovo is embedded in, but also to focus on affectivity, fantasy and materiality (as dimensions of a discourse), by combining previously uncombined post-Laclaudian methodological frameworks (see subchapter 1.4). Specifically, I have focused on two re-articulations of the claim to Kosovo in two distinct moments by the Serbian Government, aimed at mending the dislocated discourse of Kosovo being Serbia, namely the Brussels agreement from 2013 and the idea of partition/ exchange of territories from 2018 (as explained below). The former is part of what I have termed the community discourse, and the latter is part of the partition discourse, both of which form wider discursive-affective-material constellations within which the re-articulations of the claim are positioned. To simplify, they can be understood as contextual discourses. I refer to "discourses" instead of "discursive-material-affective constellations", since the post-structuralist notion of discourse refers to both the *form* and the *force* of discourse, encompassing discursive, material and affective practices at once, as already recognized by Laclau (2005, 101).

Thirdly, I aim to make a contribution to current discussions in the field of Southeast European political studies and provide an analysis of how mythmaking in Serbia and the Brussels dialogue converge. Namely, mythmaking in Serbia, specifically related to Kosovo, and EU integration have so far been examined mainly as separate and distinct practices. The former has been examined mainly in connection to nationalism and/or religion in Serbia (Bazić 2012; Bieber 2002; Čolović 2002; 2017; Ejodus and Subotić 2014; Listhaug, Ramet and Dulić 2011; Pešić 2019), while the latter forms its own strand of literature connected to Europeanization and EU integration (Anastasakis, Caplan and Economides 2013; Bieber 2013; Börzel 2011; Džankić, Keil, and Kmezić 2019;

Mladenov and Stahl 2015; Pickering 2011). I intend to bridge this gap and examine how elements of the Kosovo myth, specifically Serbia's claim to Kosovo, get re-articulated as part of the Brussels dialogue in an effort to both advance Serbia's EU integration and preserve Kosovo within Serbia. In terms of scholarship on the Brussels dialogue, most of the works examine the process as an EU-led mediation effort and from the perspective of international relations (Baracani 2020; Beysoylu 2018; Bieber 2015; Ejodus 2014; Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017; Guzina and Marijan 2014; Troncota 2018; Yabanci 2016), sidelining discourse-theoretical and cultural perspectives. These perspectives are important because they both pay attention to how governments negotiate with each other in an effort to gain something in return, and illuminate how some sedimented⁴ practices, can still prevail such as Serbia's claim to Kosovo, even though they might seem irrational. They also pay attention to individual actors and how they re-produce these sedimented practices. My thesis offers a unique insight into this dynamic, since no scholarship has provided a discourse-theoretical and cultural studies examination or analysis of the Brussels dialogue. It puts forward a conceptualization of the Brussels dialogue as a political contact zone and illuminates how different social imaginaries of both maintaining Kosovo as Serbian and finally joining the European Union entangle as part of the Brussels dialogue, which serves as a larger context/arena for negotiation of meaning, encounter with the "other" and their potential re-articulation. On the one hand, a political contact zone serves the purpose of extending the possible horizons of meaning to include previously unnamed political options as a means to solve the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, a goal that it partially fulfills at different moments. On the other, it should also serve the purpose of stabilizing these resulting meanings around common nodal points for all parties involved, a goal which it fails to fulfill. I argue that this is one of the main reasons the dialogue has stalled since 2018 and even after nine years of talks, no sensible solution has yet been found and fully implemented. Hence, the Brussels dialogue is marked by both opportunities and constraints for contestation.

In the following segments, I will elaborate on the main three contributions named above and discuss the previous literature in greater detail and how my thesis contributes to further production of knowledge in these three areas. Some contributions, such as the second one, will also be devoted greater attention in Chapter 2, because they constitute the basis of my theoretical argument.

The Kosovo Myth Re-articulated

The first step towards elaborating a deconstructive reading of the Kosovo myth is to problematize the notions of performativity and articulation. This thesis has been guided by the assumption that

⁴ The notion of sedimentation in discourse theory refers to a partial fixation and naturalization of discourse. When things are taken for granted (or when discourses have become hegemonic), we can refer to them as being "sedimented" or stabilized.

there is no discourse that precedes articulation or performative acts, but that discourses emerge in a constitutive interplay between performative practices and articulation. I utilize the theory of performativity and discourse theory to demonstrate this. Performativity refers to the notion that discourses produce the effects that they name (see Butler 1988; 1990; 1993), meaning that there is no identity of subjects per se, no essence, but that which we might call identity (gender or otherwise) is constituted through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1988, 519) that make the abstraction of normative discourses appear natural. Butler has demonstrated this claim in her conception of gender as a performative practice, one which needs to be re-constituted time and again and which through this repetition creates a type of sedimentation which we then call gender (Butler 1993). This sedimentation is a fixation of meaning which has the appearance of being “natural”, or unchangeable, but in fact, it is merely a repetition (or re-articulation) of a normative discourse on gender. In my thesis, I have not solely referred to performativity as a bodily practice, but as a material one, since the body is also considered to be material (see Carpentier 2018a). Butler’s theory of performativity has been used in contexts other than gender studies, such as performative statehood (Koskenniemi and Grzybowski 2015; Vulović 2020; Weber 1998), or banal (Billig 1995) and everyday nationalism (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008) to explain the constitutiveness of discursive practices and sedimentation, bodily or otherwise material.

There is no discourse that *precedes* performative acts, but discourse and performative practice are constitutive of each other (Palonen 2018b), meaning that there cannot be one without the other and that they do not appear in some sort of sequence. In a nutshell, this indicates that meaning is not a given, and it does not follow from any type of inherent property of the signifier, but that it is constituted as an interplay between discourse and practice in a contingent manner, always subject to change and internal reconstitution. This way of understanding the relation between discourse and performative practice places the notion of *articulation* at its center, as DeLuca has recognized. He claims that “in a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily” (DeLuca 1999, 334). There are no discourses “out there” that are waiting to be re-produced, but articulatory practices (re-)produce connections between so-called “elements” (as possible units of meaning in a field of discursivity) and “moments” (as discursive units with a particular meaning) fixed and materialized as part of a discourse (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985). *Articulation* is therefore a practice that is central to any meaning-making process. For instance, performing gender time and again can be understood as a type of articulation that aims to sediment or fix the meaning of gender that is constitutive of a particular discourse. In other words, *performing discourses through practices of articulation that simultaneously constitute these discourses* is key. It is also important to stress that precisely the repetitive nature of performative acts is what opens

up the possibility of subjects to dis-articulate from certain discourses and (re-)articulate into new ones through acts of subversion (Butler 1993), however, always constrained by the discourses they already inhabit and perform. This is what Butler has called “performative agency”, explaining that failure is constitutive of performativity, i.e., failure to produce its desired effects: “performativity never fully achieves its effect, and so in this sense ‘fails’ all the time; its failure is what necessitates its *re*iterative temporality, and we cannot think iterability without failure” (Butler 2010, 153, italics in the original). If this were not the case, we would forever live in a world which would be impossible to change, always performatively re-producing given discourses and re-subjectivating into them. However, this is not the case, since all discourses are contingent sets of articulations, some of which sometimes appear more sedimented, naturalized, or fixed than others (see Butler 1994; Laclau 1990; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Marchart 2007).

Having established the importance of articulation for meaning-making and performativity, I can now problematize the re-articulation of the Kosovo myth, which has informed the meaning of the signifier “Kosovo” in Serbia, laden with affective investment, anchored in conceptions of Serbian statehood and nationhood, and sedimented in the material practices of the Serbian Government. Current scholarship sees the Kosovo myth as a distinct and relatively fixed narrative, with its origins in the tales of the Kosovo Battle of 1389, an epic oral and literary canon that focuses on re-telling the story of how Prince Lazar ensured an eternal place in Heaven for the Serbs by losing the Battle. It is conceived as a narrative that has certain boundaries and references (Bakić-Hayden 2004; Čolović 2017; Judah 2000; Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016), the references always being to the Kosovo Battle and Prince Lazar losing it for the sake of his people. Even though there is nothing wrong per se in conceptualizing the myth in this manner, it does neglect the relationality of the myth and how its elements can be re-articulated into other discursive constellations that have little to do with the Battle itself. Thus, my thesis focuses on the *iterability* of the Kosovo myth, its *re-articulations* and how certain elements of it can be woven into other discursive constellations – a strategy that follows a deconstructive impetus as I have elaborated below.

Additionally, the Kosovo myth has been discussed in connection to Serbian nationalism, particularly in relation to the Milošević regime and how the narratives surrounding the Battle of Kosovo from 1389 have been appropriated for these political discourses (see Bazić 2012; Bieber 2002; Čolović 2017). Particularly Bieber (2002) focus on different dimensions of the relation between the Kosovo myth and Serbian nationalism, such as: the myth’s incorporation into the “commemorative calendar of the nation” (ibid., 96) by remembering the Kosovo battle once a year on 28 June, St Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*); the symbolic and physical claim to Kosovo as a territory; and the myth’s establishment of a “historical continuity between the contemporary Serbian nation and the ‘Serbs’ of the Middle Ages, suggesting a perennial nation” (ibid.). Similarly, Čolović (2017)

discusses the Kosovo myth as a narrative that has been used and abused by many political figures in Serbia throughout modern history, offering a specifically cultural account of its genesis and pointing to the fact that the Kosovo myth, albeit being an important national myth, is not an omnipotent political tool. There is also a strand of scholarship dealing with the historical origins and reproduction of the myth, applying a critical approach to demonstrate the historic contingency of the claim to Kosovo (see Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016; Pešić 2019). Particularly Pešić (2019) illuminates the relationship between “contemporary notions of discourse” which she anchors in Fairclough and Wodak’s and Foucault’s understanding of discourse as a social practice, and myths as “narratives related to historical events” that can problematize the relationship between (true) historical events and (fictional) stories, having an “explanatory, didactic intention, inherent in every myth” (ibid., 359). Less scholarship has been produced on the topic of the Kosovo myth and how it features in contemporary politics of Serbia since 2008 (see Ejdus 2020; Vranić 2019), since it is often discarded as an “issue of the past”. It is entirely absent from discussions on the subversion of dominant hegemonic orders, since the sedimented Kosovo myth is considered to be a hegemonic order *par excellence*. By paying attention to the re-articulations of the Kosovo myth, my thesis offers an insight into how Kosovo can be articulated in a counter-hegemonic manner by the Serbian Government.

As indicated earlier, I scrutinized the assumption of the Kosovo myth as a fixed narrative which has certain boundaries and references and focus rather on the Kosovo myth in its *re-articulations*, with a distinct presupposition guiding the post-foundational theoretical framework of this thesis, namely that there is no discourse that precedes articulation. Post-foundational theory encompasses an understanding of the world in terms of contingency, recognizing that any foundation in the social is only contingently grounded (Marchart 2007). I employ the terms post-foundational theory and discourse theory interchangeably, the former primarily when I talk about contingency and contingent foundations, and the latter when I refer to discourse as an ontological category which is prevalent in post-structuralist theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). It is important to stress that discourse theory is post-foundational, which is why the terms can be used interchangeably. For the purposes of this thesis, performativity through repetition and its constitutive failure is key. This is based on a Derridean deconstructive reading of the “Kosovo myth”, by which the very repetition of a discourse creates a dissonance between the “originary” statement and what is repeated (*citationality*), carrying traces of the original message into the practice of repetition (Derrida 1988). The very act of articulation establishes the Kosovo myth anew each time it is brought about, leaving room for constitutive gaps of possibility for disarticulating and re-articulating it in a new light. Therefore, performativity is a central framework of this thesis, since it explains how the Kosovo myth can be conceptualized as both a *sedimented* narrative, and how its meaning can be re-

constituted in various re-articulations. It should be emphasized that deconstruction has not been used as a method in this thesis, but I merely rely on a deconstructive *reading* of the Kosovo myth as an entry point into the discussion on originality and repetition.

The “Kosovo myth” as a sedimented narrative can be conceived of as a **social imaginary** (as a discourse-theoretical concept) that structures the field of intelligibility and represents a horizon of inscription of various social demands (Laclau 1990). In other words, the “Kosovo myth” as it has been predominantly discussed is not a “myth” per se in the discourse theoretical vocabulary, but is a specific, sedimented discourse with its distinct elements. I argue that this discourse has turned into a social imaginary, i.e., a horizon of possible meanings for political practice in Serbia, delineating what can be practiced or felt in relation to Kosovo. The main element of the Kosovo imaginary is its territorial claim to Kosovo and up until very recently, it was almost unimaginable to articulate Kosovo as not Serbian nor Serbia’s, with political actors from the entire spectrum subscribing to this demand (see Spasojević 2016; Vranić 2019). This only became a question of debate with the introduction of the idea of partition in 2017 and 2018. What I regard as “myth” on an ontic level in this thesis refers to specific articulations that are aimed at mending dislocated discourses (Laclau 1990), while at the ontological level, myths are necessary meaning-making operations that help us imaginize alternative discourses to the hegemonic ones. Therefore, I see the Brussels agreement and the idea of partition as myths, which I elaborate on during the course of the thesis.

Since the “Kosovo myth” as a distinct narrative has been already addressed in current scholarship (Bazić 2012; Bakić-Hayden 2004; Bieber 2002; Čolović 2017; Pavlović 2019; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016; Pešić 2019), my aim has been to focus on the re-articulations of this narrative in its two forms: the social imaginary which situates the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim, and the counter-hegemonic discourse of partition, aiming to institute an alternative imaginary. What follows is my analytical understanding of the “original” Kosovo myth and the following two re-articulations:

- 1) The Kosovo myth as a **sedimented discourse**, or a specific **narrative**, in which the tales surrounding the Battle of Kosovo are articulated as a “*founding moment*” (Bull 2016; Savage 2012) of Serbian statehood and nationhood. In this respect, it is a sedimented discourse because its meaning is relatively fixed and uncontested.
- 2) The re-articulation of the specific sedimented discourse into a **social imaginary** that **structures** the claim that “**Kosovo is Serbia**” (what I will call the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse throughout this thesis). This articulation acts as a “founding moment” of Serbian nationalist politics since Slobodan Milošević, precisely because the territoriality of Kosovo is its nodal point. In this sense, it is also a sedimented discourse, inscribed into the

institutional framework of Serbia. Within this discourse, Kosovo is part of contestations on Serbia's sovereignty over and statehood in Kosovo. I identify this discourse as dislocated because of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, and it is sutured⁵ with the myth of the Brussels agreement that forms a new objectivity on the basis of the dislocated discourse. This new objectivity that the Brussels agreement is part of, is a new discourse on "community" and sharing Kosovo with the Albanians, and it dominated in 2013.

- 3) The re-articulation of the "Kosovo is Serbia" claim into a counter-hegemonic discourse on partitioning Kosovo along ethnic lines and transposing the territorial claim to Northern Kosovo. The Kosovo social imaginary is substituted with an **alternative vision of the future**, in which European integration takes precedence. This move can be recognized as a synecdoche, a tropological replacement of a totalizing claim to Kosovo with a particular one that takes its place of universality (*pars pro toto*). As part of this political project, Northern Kosovo (as *part* of Kosovo) stands to counter-hegemonically displace the previous claim and embody the fantasy of "restoring" what is lost about Kosovo, at least in some shape or form. This articulation dominated the discursive field in 2017 with the so-called "internal dialogue on Kosovo" and primarily 2018, with a heightened focus on the idea of partition.

More broadly, one could argue that all these re-articulations could be analytically grouped under discourses *on* Kosovo, since this particular signifier is what they all have in common, although their discursive structures and affective implications are different. In summary, if it is always possible to re-articulate something anew, then why do I focus on these three specific articulations listed above? They are dominant re-articulations which I have recognized in my analysis and have drawn from the material. I have recognized them as "founding moments" of various dominant discourses and political projects that re-appear in different instances and entangle with each other.

Myth from the Perspective of Discourse Theory

Building on Laclau's (1990) definition and distinction between myths and imaginaries, discourse theoretical scholarship has predominantly addressed myth as the ideological function of hegemony (see Freedden, Sargent and Stears 2013; Ryan 2006; Torfing 1999). The discourse-theoretical conception of myth differs from the more "canonical" conception of Barthes, in that it represents an "alternative to the logical form of the dominant structural discourse" (Montesano Montessori 2011, 172). Barthes, on the other hand sees myths as "secondary representation[s] which

⁵ In the discourse-theoretical vocabulary, to suture a dislocation means to "repair" it. If a dislocation is perceived as a crisis, then handling that crisis is suturing it. For instance, one could cover over a dislocation with an alternative discourse that may or may not be feasible.

transform[s] a meaning into form, often with the function to mystify ideologies” (ibid). Barthes argues that myths are forms of ideological distortions of reality (Barthes 1972), the aim of which is to hide the contingency of the narrative they address and present it as natural. But as Bottici (2007, 207) notes, it is problematic to rely on the notion of “distortion of reality” since even “[n]arrative history is [...] intrinsically distorting in this sense because it presents as ‘facts’ that which is instead the constructed spectacle of a narrative.” This can be related to the psychoanalytic understanding of reality in Lacanian terms⁶, in which the “Real” cannot ever fully be captured, since it lies beyond and is irreducible to the symbolic order of human communication (Evans 1996).

Since the vagueness of the definition of the concept of myth in discourse theory has been identified before (Montesano Montessori 2011; Norval 2000), the aim of this thesis is also to bring more clarity into this concept from a discourse-theoretical point of view. There are three notable examples trying to do just that. For instance, Casullo (2020) has explored myths as populist narratives with a particular logic and narrative structure glorifying the leader as the hero. Marttila (2015, 37) has discussed “mythification” as “a general logic of stabilization and justification that attaches a particular discourse to the imaginary of its objective necessity.” Mythification conceals, at least partially, the contingent nature of social reality, which is similar to Barthes’ conception. However, I will argue that concealment is not the ultimate goal of mythification, but that the production of myths is necessary for meaning-making per se, since I also conceive of myths as empty signifiers, driving any political project or discourse further and potentially accommodating a range of demands (see Chapter 2). Lastly, Montesano Montessori (2011, 172) has operationalized myths as analytical concepts in discourse analysis, whereby myths can be identified as representations of “an alternative to the status quo.”

Given all this, more clarity in terms of defining this concept is needed, specifically in regard to how myth relates to temporality, which none of the works above address – that is, how it relates to past events, hegemonic interventions in the present and how it helps future hegemonic projects be driven further politically. The connection between myths from national pasts and their function for the politics of the present and future has been problematized extensively in literature on nationalism (Abizadeh 2004; Bouchard 2013; Michael 2010; Miller 1997; Morden 2016; Smith 1999). However, this strand of the literature does not go beyond the notion of myths as specific narratives that get taken up by certain actors and imbued with specific meanings deemed important for the nation. This thesis asks whether myths should be understood only as narratives and offers an alternative reading inspired by discourse theory, supported with psychoanalysis and –

⁶ For a more detailed discussion on the three Lacanian orders, the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, see subchapter 2.2

sporadically – performativity. It argues for the constitutiveness of myths for meaning-making as such. Even though discourse theory is the starting point of this argument, the notion of myth loses its importance in discourse theoretical work after one of Laclau's seminal works, the 1990 book *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, which is also evident in the sporadic discussions of myth by the discourse theorists mentioned above. Hence, as mentioned previously, this thesis makes another contribution to literature in that it illuminates the aspect of temporality specifically, contrasts it to spatiality, and opens a broader dialogue between discourse theory and psychoanalysis in bringing in concepts such as empty signifiers, fantasy and enjoyment to discuss the temporal dimension of myths. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on my theoretical framework and pay particular attention to myth as an ontological category.

The Nexus between Mythmaking, Kosovo and EU Integration in Serbia

Mythmaking in Serbia and EU integration have so far mainly been examined as separate and distinct fields. The former is examined mainly in connection to nationalism in Serbia (Bazić 2012; Bieber 2002; Čolović 2002; 2017; Ejdus and Subotić 2014; Listhaug, Ramet and Dulić 2011; Pešić 2019), while the latter forms its own strand of the literature. It focuses on the Europeanization paradigm and/or the transformative power of Europe (Anastasakis, Caplan and Economides 2013; Börzel 2011; Mladenov and Stahl 2015) which also connects to EU conditionality in the Western Balkans (Bieber 2013; Džankić, Keil, and Kmezić 2019; Pickering 2011), to state-building and reform in the Western Balkans (Biermann 2013; Börzel 2013) and international relations studies which problematize the influence of EU and non-EU countries in the Western Balkans (Bechev 2017; Bieber and Tzifakis 2020; Janez 2019). In terms of scholarship on the Brussels dialogue, most works examine the nexus between EU integration of Serbia and its dealing with the Kosovo question as part of it (Beysoylu 2018; Bieber 2015; Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Ejdus 2014; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017; Guzina and Marijan 2014; Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik 2012; Troncota 2018) or focus on local Kosovo perspectives (Visoka 2017; Yabancı 2020). Some pay more attention to the Serbian perspective on the Kosovo issue instead of the dialogue itself (Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik 2012), and some more attention to EU actorness and its mediation efforts between Serbia and Kosovo (Baracani 2020; Bergmann 2019; Gashi 2020; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017; Visoka and Doyle 2016). Some works give a distinctly narrativized perspective of the dialogue (Troncota 2018), examining how counter-EU narratives and local resistance allows actors in Kosovo to shape the dialogue process. However, no scholarship has provided a discourse-theoretical examination or analysis of the Brussels dialogue. While there are works that employ critical discourse analysis to analyze the case of Kosovo-Serbia relations and the Brussels dialogue (Gashi 2020; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017),

they nonetheless focus on the EU's role in the entire process and how the EU discursively asserts power in the dialogue.

In addition, some recent works have focused on how Kosovo has been articulated within the Serbian public discourse since it declared independence in 2008, providing an ontological security perspective on Serbia's anxiety over losing Kosovo (Ejdus 2020) and how Kosovo is used in populist discourses in Serbia (Vranić 2019). Vranić (2019), Spasojević (2016) and Dragojlov (2020) have examined how specific political parties in Serbia have articulated Kosovo in the last few years, with Dragojlov (2020) paying particular attention to the SNS. One recent piece of work has focused on a cognitive linguistic analysis of metaphors and metonymy that Serbian politicians use to refer to Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue (Rasulić 2020) and by doing so paid particular attention to the changes in the way Kosovo has been articulated since the Brussels dialogue. However, none of these works problematize the Kosovo myth in its re-articulations, and how it is discussed and practiced within the Brussels dialogue, illuminating the connection between the myth and Serbia's EU integration process. Thus, this thesis fills the gap in the literature that has been left by relying on conventional critical discourse analysis methods (Gashi 2020; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017; Rasulić 2020) that see discourse as purely linguistic and one of many social practices. In turn, my work relies on an understanding of discourse as a practice that not only encompasses language, but also materiality and affectivity as well. Discourse can thus mean both a structure, a *system* of meanings (discourse in the traditional post-structuralist understanding, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985)), and a *practive*, an articulation that establishes relations between elements (linguistic or otherwise) and creates meaning. A post-structuralist, Essex school understanding of discourse has only been marginally applied to the context of Southeast European studies, in studies of populism (Brentin and Pavasović Trošt 2016), media studies (Trivundža and Vezovnik 2020), or migration (Vezovnik 2012), but none related to Kosovo-Serbia relations. This discourse-theoretical perspective is important because it allows us to deconstruct the false dichotomy between language and action in the political sphere. Additionally, this lens allows us to give a holistic view of material, linguistic as well as affective changes that have happened in the re-articulation of the Kosovo myth since the Brussels dialogue began. This way, we can shed light onto seemingly "irrational" political practices that are constantly challenged by material circumstances, such as Serbia's claim to Kosovo as part of its territory in the wake of Kosovo's declaration of independence, and map out how they are sustained. It also allows us to conceptualize some of the elements of the myth, such as the claim to Kosovo, as sedimented discourses and map out under which conditions sedimentations can be re-activated. The Brussels dialogue is thus understood as a wide political contact zone (Pratt 2008; Yüsek and Carpentier 2018) within which a re-articulation of sedimented discourses can occur, as

will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. I will pay particular attention to this conceptualization in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Before I begin, I will firstly attempt to bring some conceptual clarity to my work, since myth is both an ontological category (based on a discourse-theoretical and psychoanalytic framework) and an ontic one, which I have also used in my analysis. As already indicated, on an ontic level I distinguish between two specific myths, one of the Brussels agreement, and one of partitioning Northern Kosovo, both of which are aimed at suturing the dislocated “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse – a discourse that is structured by the Kosovo imaginary in Serbia. Hence, what has been traditionally conceptualized as the “Kosovo myth” in a narrative sense (see Bieber 2002; Čolović 2017; Daskalovski 2003; Ejodus and Subotić 2014; Pavlović 2009; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016), this thesis sees as a distinct discourse, a discourse that forms a social imaginary in Serbia which structures the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim as its first re-articulation. Finally, this claim is re-articulated into the idea of partition, which forms its second re-articulation. In my analysis I particularly focus on these two re-articulations, as elaborated earlier, since this is the novel part of my research, as the “Kosovo myth” as a narrative has already been extensively discussed.

On the other hand, myth is an ontological category that is tied both to the sedimentation of social orders, as well as to driving (yet unrealized) political projects further, because it allows us, through fantasy, to transpose our desires onto a space of inscription (in the future) that promises to fulfill them. Crucial to the ontological understanding of myth is the concept of dislocation. As Torfing explains, dislocation can be defined as “the emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be represented, symbolized, or in other ways domesticated by the discursive structure – which is therefore disrupted” (Torfing 1999, 148). Carpentier insists that this dislocatory event is (also) material, not only discursive, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 2. For now, it suffices to say that in Laclau’s (1990) reading, a myth emerges when a structure is dislocated to make sense of the dislocation (as an alternative reading of the emerged situation), by incorporating it into the given structure. Alternatively, when the myth fails in suturing the dislocation, the structure falls apart and needs to be articulated anew.

Following from this, in a discourse-theoretical sense, myth represents a “plane of inscription”, which “involves forming a new objectivity by means of the re-articulation of the dislocated elements” (Laclau 1990, 61). This “new objectivity” can be a (re-)interpretation of past events that have been central to the self-articulation of a community, or a re-articulation of a dislocation and/or its incorporation into the dominant structure, or the forming of a new (counter-)hegemonic project that promises to “repair” any discursive or material dislocation and constitute

the full closure of a community's self-identity. I will explain that since dislocations are constitutive of any discursive formation, myths are also constitutive of meaning-making. A myth can hence act as a "bridge" between discursivity and material spatiality, in that it constitutes a "principle of reading" or interpretation of potentially dislocated discursive and material structures into a meaningful whole again. I will expand on this in Chapter 2, but at this point, it is necessary to distinguish between two concepts: *imaginary* as in social imaginary (Laclau 1990) already explained above, and *imaginization* (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008) as an intrinsic operation of mythmaking that is constitutive of driving political projects forward. I will further elaborate on this in Chapter 2, as well as provide a detailed account of my theoretical framework situated in post-foundational discourse theory and psychoanalysis.

A social imaginary, as Laclau explains, emerges because myths are essentially always incomplete. The "mythical space is constituted as a critique of the lack of structuration accompanying the dominant order" (Laclau 1990, 62), which is aimed at suturing the dislocation that reveals this lack of structuration. For this case study, the dislocation that revealed the lack of structuration of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse was Kosovo's proclamation of independence. This prompted the creation of new mythical spaces of representation aimed to suture this dislocation, namely the myth of the Brussels agreement in 2013 and the myth of partition/exchange of territories in 2018, as promises (critiques of the dominant order) that would solve the issue of two mutually opposing claims to Kosovo. Since the full constitution of any order is impossible and society can only be contingently grounded (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Marchart 2007), the attempt of a myth to fulfill what it promises is always going to remain impossible. It is in this moment that social imaginaries emerge since any particular myth will have its content constantly reconstituted due to the failure to fulfill its promise of suturing the dislocated order. As Laclau mentions, the "incomplete character of the mythical surfaces of inscription is the condition of possibility for the constitution of social imaginaries" (Laclau 1990, 63), which act as horizons that represent "the very form of fullness" (*ibid.*, 64) of a social order that is dislocated, onto which subjects can inscribe any demand or any dislocation. The Kosovo-myth-turned-social-imaginary represents this form of fullness and structures the Kosovo is Serbia claim, since this claim is the one thing that should not be disputed and forms an imperative practice of Serbian politics to date, evident in its sedimentation in the Serbian institutional framework, not the least the Constitution. What is evident in my analysis is that subjects, particularly the SNS, start to destabilize the mythical promise of fullness of the social imaginary that Kosovo is Serbia, meaning that a logic of its dissolution is recognizable in the attempts to generate two new myths mentioned above: the Brussels agreement and the subsequent idea of partition/ exchange of territories. This is why the new government practices can be termed counter-hegemonic, since they aim to institute a new discourse that

counters a hegemonic one. Generally, the Kosovo imaginary is supplemented with an imaginary of EU membership, which starts to structure the “field of intelligibility” (Laclau 1990, 64) promising to solve all of Serbia’s problems in terms of the dislocation generated by Kosovo’s proclamation of independence. In this sense, social imaginaries can be conceived of as relatively undisputed meta-discourses or overarching discursive concepts that partly form and are present in other discourses, motivating and constraining different practices of social subjects. Put simply, they form horizons of meaning and practice.

At this point it is important to mention that the distinction between myths and imaginaries can never be entirely clear-cut, since our social reality constantly moves between acts of sedimentation (aiming to maintain a social order) and acts of politicization (aiming to uproot it and institute an alternative order). However, what this thesis aims to emphasize is the political aspect of mythmaking, focusing on practices that destabilize orders in an attempt to re-institute something alternative. To this end, having discussed social imaginaries as meta-discourses, I can move on to discuss *imaginization* as a political operation constitutive of mythmaking, which enables social subjects to drive yet unrealized political projects further. I will do this with the help of psychoanalytic theory.

A concept that is essential for understanding imaginization is fantasy. Based on a Lacanian reading, fantasy does not merely refer to imagination, but represents an image that is always part of a signifying structure (Evans 1996, 61-62). This means that fantasy is not opposed to reality (as imagination would be in other psychoanalytic theory, such as Melanie Klein⁷), but is situated within reality itself (Daly 1999). For Lacan, the subject is constituted by a lack introduced by the symbolic order we are born (and thrown) into: the symbolic order emerges because it is impossible for us to represent “the Real”. Our experience of the symbolic is always “out of joint”, whereby we are always attempting to reconstitute this lost fullness but eventually fail to do so (which is the constitutive lack of subjectivity). This is where fantasy comes into play. As Daly (1999, 223) argues, fantasy “functions as a basic structuring principle which enables, in the first place, the formulation of desire within the symbolic order and the establishment of some kind of identification within the ‘empirical’ world of infinite possibilities.” Referring to Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of the “impossibility of society”, meaning that any hegemonic formation can only be contingently realized and that the full closure of social identity is impossible, a fantasy is precisely a promise of fulfillment of all desires or the overcoming of an obstacle that stands between the fulfillment of these desires (see Chapter 2). Without this false promise of a solution to our issues, political

⁷ For a discussion on how Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic theory can be applied in political science, specifically how projection and introjection relate to shaping of collective identities, see for instance: Gallager, Julie. 2017. *Zimbabwe’s International Relations: Fantasy, Reality and the Making of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

projects would not be conceivable, that is, nobody would “buy into” them. Additionally, were the final closure of social identity possible, we would not need political projects at all but would live in a utopian society resolved of all conflict. Daly (1999, 224) argues that

at the level of fantasy, society [its full closure] is regarded as possible; as something which is ultimately achievable through a certain overcoming of specified impedances. In this way, ideology subsists in the fantasy of establishing a final consistency, of suturing the unsuturable, by providing straw enemies—‘fictional’ embodiments of a transcendental lack/impossibility—which ‘if only they could be eliminated’ would enable the realization of harmonious reconciliation. It is at the level of fantasy that the loss of social harmony is experienced, in terms of theft and/or sabotage.

Hence, a central practice of generating myths as part of expanding (counter-)hegemonic projects that promise the resolution of a conflict in terms of suturing a lost unity of identity is fantasy or *imaginarizing* that a particular symbolic object can take the place of representing the solution to the named problems identified and opposed by the said (counter-)hegemonic order. It is here that I will introduce the notion of the empty signifier (Laclaudian vocabulary) and the *objet petit a* (Lacanian vocabulary) as incarnations of an absent fullness, an absence that is the cause of our desire and enables a political project to proceed, offering promises that subjects want to invest themselves in (see Chapter 2). As mentioned before, in 2013, this symbolic object (or myth) was the Brussels agreement, and in 2018, it was the idea of re-bordering Kosovo and Serbia along ethnic lines. Hence, myths emerge in moments of trying to accommodate a dislocation, they do not originate in the past, although they might draw from past events and discourses, such as the case of partition will demonstrate. What these myths differ in is the way they establish and re-articulate political frontiers between Serbs and Albanians, as well as frontiers within the Serbian political collective. Whereas part of imagining that the Brussels agreement would solve the dispute was the notion that Serbs and Albanians would “share” Kosovo and live next to each other in peace, if not *with* each other (evident in the idea of the A/CSM), the myth of partition was constituted through separation. Namely, an essential part of this mythmaking was imagining a future in which Serbs and Albanians would be territorially and ethnically separated from each other. A historic and unsolvable antagonism between the two groups was identified as the main source of conflict and the only way to resolve it would be to entirely separate them. The myth of partition also introduced a simplification of political space in terms of public support of or opposition to partition, in which only those elements of Serbian society who supported it were considered legitimate, casting out any opposition. I will demonstrate this in greater detail in the empirical Chapters 5 and 6.

1.4 Methodological Premises

The methodological premises of this thesis rely on the discourse-theoretical assumption that there is no “distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 107) and that they all form what the post-structuralist approach of Laclau and Mouffe has termed discourse: “a totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic” (Laclau and Mouffe 1990, 100). That means that materiality can also be analytically considered to be part of discourse (Carpentier 2018a) as well as affectivity (Stavrakakis 2007). All social practices are discursive, because there is no meaning outside of discourse. Additionally, discourses do not have a transcendental center of fixity, but are always (momentarily) anchored around specific articulations or nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This is what has been referred to as contingency or contingent foundations of our social reality. As DeLuca (1999, 334) recognizes, “in a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily” (DeLuca 1999, 334, emphasis added). For Palonen (2018b, 182), following DeLuca and Laclau and Mouffe, “articulation is a practice, and hence, [. . .] speech and writing also have a meaning-conveying or transforming function” – ergo, discourse is not only a totality but also an articulatory practice. This assumption defines the way I approach my material in this thesis. Additionally, I draw from Butler’s performativity theory to explain how discourses are sustained: if articulation is central to meaning-making, performativity explains the way discourses produce the effects that they name (see e.g., Butler 1993). Discursive practices need to be continuously performed for meaning to exist at all. Hence, performativity explains how discourses are sustained through repetition and embodiment, as well as sedimentation in the material world, but it also points towards the constitutive gaps left by practices of repetition, making discursive and material change possible. Given all this, I methodologically combine aspects of three post-Laclaudian approaches to analysis: the psychoanalytically inspired discourse analysis of the *force* of discourse focusing on *jouissance* (enjoyment), fantasy (Stavrakakis 2007; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006), and fantasmatic logic (Glynos and Howarth 2007) and drawing from studies of affect (Ahmed 2004; Sjöstedt Landén 2011); the “Brussels school” that utilizes discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA) and also focuses on the relation between discursivity and materiality (Carpentier 2017; 2018a; Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019); and the “Helsinki school” which focuses on rhetoric and performativity, understanding meaning-making as tropological by relying on Laclau’s later work on rhetoric (Palonen 2018b). DTA makes use of sensitizing concepts, that is, concepts that support the interpretation of social phenomena when doing qualitative research (Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019). The primary sensitizing concept is discourse, and the secondary concepts are “articulation, nodal point, floating signifier, and subject position, but also contingency

and overdetermination, chain of equivalence (and difference), antagonism, agonism, hegemony, and social imaginary” (ibid., 13). Since sensitizing concepts are not there to foreclose the analysis, but rather to guide the researcher to look at phenomena through particular lenses, I have brought additional sensitizing concepts into the analysis, drawing from the works of Marttila (2015; 2018) and his post-structuralist discourse analysis (PDA), or from cultural studies of affect (Ahmed 2004; Williams 2015). Introducing these concepts helps to flesh out how discursivity, materiality, and affectivity work together in social analysis. Therefore, I find this combination particularly suitable, since it allows me to pay attention to the *nexus* between them, considering both the spatial aspect of discourse (and mapping out its elements), and the temporal aspect of it (by looking into what affectively and materially sustains counter-hegemonic articulations and projects and how dominant structures can be changed).

In light of this decision, it is important to mention why I have not relied on more established approaches to discourse analysis, such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), and the discourse-mythological approach based on CDA developed by Kelsey (2017). As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) and Glynos et al. (2009) argue, the main difference between discourse theoretical analysis *à la* Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and critical discourse analysis (which also relates to discourse historical analysis) *à la* Fairclough and Wodak (1997) is in their perception of discursive practices. Critical discourse analysis relies on a distinction between discursive and social practices, understanding discourse as only one among many social practices. By contrast, discourse theoretical analysis sees all social practices as discursive (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 7) and understands discourse as constitutive of social reality (ibid., 20) instead of just one dimension of it. Discourse theoretical analysis is particularly suitable for analyzing discourse on a macro-level, illuminating how structures enable and constrain our field of action. As Carpentier and De Cleen (2007, 277) argue, following Van Dijk’s (1997, 3) definition of discourse studies as “talk and text in context”, discourse theoretical analysis examines a macro-context of analysis and understands text in the broadest possible meaning of the word, encompassing linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Although it does not conflate materiality and discourse, discourse theory does argue that we can only understand and grasp the material through discourse – relying on the idea that meaning is only created within discourse, making it an ontological as well as ontic category (Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019). As I have already mentioned, by conducting a macro-analysis of discursive, material and affective structures and practices, I am able to focus on the moments they intersect, instead of doing a much more micro-level inspired analysis like CDA would provide the tools for, focusing on linguistic elements. Additionally, as I ontologically adapt the position of discourse theory that discourse is both linguistic and non-linguistic (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Marttila 2018), this approach allows me to analyze discursivity, materiality and affectivity as a cohesive whole, and

how they all relate to my central theoretical and analytical concept – myth. Since Kelsey’s (2017) approach sees myth only as an ideological concept and treats it as an ontic category, the framework does not fit my agenda.

Data Collection

In my analysis, I relied on official EU, UN and government documents that are relevant to the Brussels dialogue, Serbia’s EU integration process and Serbia’s position towards Kosovo. These range from the official EU membership negotiation framework, such as Chapter 35, EU progress reports on Serbia, the so-called Brussels agreement (First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations) and all subsequent agreements reached in Brussels, such as the agreement on the Mitrovica bridge etc. (59 documents in the corpus). I also rely on a range of documents from Serbia’s institutional framework, such as the Constitution, different parliamentary declarations on Kosovo being Serbia, as well as government decisions and platforms (26 documents in the corpus). Most of this material is available online, with few exceptions that I gathered during my visit to the Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija in November 2017. The documents only provide information on the matters that were agreed on in the dialogue (relatively stabilized meanings), but they do not provide insight into the process of meaning-making (contestation). I have therefore relied on media sources to grasp this dynamic. To map out the contestations around Kosovo and bring forward all of the relevant actors in the public discourse, I mainly relied on two media sources: one is the most watched news TV program in Serbia, the second *Dnevnik* (Dnevnik 2) airing on the public broadcaster every day at 19:30; the other is the online news outlet *Danas*. Both outlets have publicly available archives online, which I went through to collect the material manually. The final corpus consists of 844 transcripts of individual TV programs from Dnevnik 2, and 4842 collected written news stories from *Danas*, from July 2012 to December 2018, all mentioning or discussing Kosovo. Additionally, for more context, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with subjects involved in the dialogue on Kosovo, namely the former directors of the Serbian team Borko Stefanović and Marko Đurić, as well as the head of the parliamentary group on Kosovo Milovan Drecun and one former representative of the Serbian community in Kosovo gathered around Lista Srpska, Ljubomir Marić. These interviews are only used in a contextual manner. I have also in my researcher’s capacity visited Northern Kosovo in June 2017 and July 2019 to map out the field and get a better sense of the political climate there.

Emerging Discourses

Analytically, I have mapped out two distinct discourses that have emerged from the data. I have termed them the community discourse and the partition discourse respectively, and the empirical part of the thesis is also structured around them (Chapters 5 and 6). There are also other discourses

that I have identified, such as the discourse on self-victimization in Serbia and the discourse on a historic animosity between Serbs and Albanians that the community and partition discourse intersect with, but they are used contextually and can be found in Chapter 4. The community discourse dominated the discursive field of the Brussels dialogue in late 2012 and in 2013, anchored by the Brussels agreement seeking to transform antagonistic relations between Serbs and Albanians into agonistic (what is understood by the A/CSM and the idea of sharing Kosovo). The partition discourse dominated the Brussels dialogue in the second half of 2017 and in 2018, when President Aleksandar Vučić initiated the so-called “internal dialogue on Kosovo” which, arguably, sought to find an alternative solution to the Brussels agreement whose implementation stalled.

Following the sensitizing concepts approach laid out above, I focused on specific articulations by different hegemonic actors whose function it is to uphold or destabilize a certain order in specific moments. As already explained in the theoretical premises above, myths are aimed at both suturing dislocations (stabilizing orders) or generating momentum for imagining alternative (counter-)hegemonic orders that would replace existing ones. Specific articulations act as myths and provide a viable analytic lens to grasp this dynamic. These articulations can be material as well, especially if they are aimed at stabilizing the given order (or suturing a dislocation). In my analysis, institutions of the Republic of Serbia can be perceived as articulations of such a material kind, specifically when they are aimed at upholding the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim. But also, specific communities, such as the Serb community in Kosovo, can act as (relatively stable) material articulations that uphold this claim, especially within the framework of the envisioned A/CSM in Kosovo. In turn, in the partition discourse, the territory of Northern Kosovo acts as a material articulation that aims to destabilize the status quo and institute an alternative reading of Kosovo for Serbia, one that is anchored in physical ownership and the re-bordering of a piece of land, rather than the symbolic ownership of the entire territory of Kosovo). Important for this is the notion of performativity, especially in light of performing Serbia’s claim to statehood in Kosovo through these institutions, communities, and territories, a concept I will devote more attention to in Chapter 2.⁸

Rhetorical tropes such as metaphor and metonymy (via synecdoche) are brought into the analysis to explain on a macro-level how the two myths mentioned here relate to the dislocated discourse of Kosovo is Serbia, and how they aim to mend the dislocation. The Brussels agreement from 2013 aims to conceal the dislocated structure metaphorically, maintaining the unity of the Kosovo is Serbia discourse, while the idea of partition as a counter-hegemonic project aims to displace the dislocated structure entirely and institute a new order.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of Serbia’s performative statehood in Kosovo in 2017 and 2018 in light of the partition talks, see Vulović (2020).

Apart from focusing on different discursive and material articulations, I also focus on hegemonic subjects, particularly the Serbian Government attempting to accommodate the previously mentioned dislocation within the framework of the Brussels dialogue. In different moments in time, those hegemonic subjects (or “protagonists” in Marttila’s (2015) vocabulary of post-foundational discourse analysis) are linked to other subjects who are either their “helpers” (subjects supporting the attainment/maintenance of ethical ideals) or “opponents” (subjects within the same discourse opposing/endangering the attainment of ethical ideals). Additionally, opponents who lie outside the given discourse constituting it are called “antagonistic others” and represent threats or dangers to the attainment/sustainment of certain ethical ideals. In my analysis, these can also be agonistic others, as will be explained later. I will demonstrate in my analysis how the political frontiers between who lies within and outside the discourse can shift quickly, especially since 2017 when the SNS started tightening its grip on the institutional framework in Serbia, gaining absolute parliamentary majority and Aleksandar Vučić winning the presidency.

As a thread running through my analysis, apart from discursive/symbolic analysis (the *form* of discourses), I also explore the issue of affects, that is, the *force* behind sustaining or challenging different discourses (*affective investment* in Laclaudian terms). The Lacanian notion of *jouissance* will be problematized here, as well as the political implications of articulated emotions aimed at sustaining or challenging antagonistic boundaries (politics of emotions, see Ahmed (2004)), and lastly, the attempts to change the “structures of feeling” (Williams 2015) that constitute the Kosovo discourse.

1.5 Ethics and Researcher’s Position

As my data consists of publicly available sources (from EU, UN and other government documents, in addition to online news articles and a daily news show), the data collection itself has no significant ethical implications. The four interviews I conducted with high-level officials are meant as supportive material, because I conducted them to improve my understanding of the political context of my study. As the interviews do not constitute public discourse, they are only used consultatively, if anything is missing from the general context. All respondents I interviewed were public figures and have given me their statements in their official public capacity, for which I have obtained verbal informed consent.

In this thesis, an additional aim was to provide a subjectivity statement on my personal ties to the Serb community in Northern Kosovo. Namely, I was born in Mitrovica when it was still part of Yugoslavia and even though I left Kosovo to pursue my education in 2009, I still maintain regular contact with my closest family and friends still living there. Additionally, my father was mayor of Zubin Potok (one of the four North Kosovo municipalities) between 2013 and 2019, which helped

me to gain access to the four interviewees I mentioned above and might have helped in enhancing the interviewer-interviewee relationship. I have not used additional information provided (if any *was* provided) to me by my father or close family in my analysis, which is based on publicly available sources and my own contextual knowledge of the area. However, I acknowledge that this relationship has helped me gain access where other researchers might have encountered difficulties, since the Serb community in the North is quite a closed one. I also acknowledge that my coming from this region could have influenced the way I see and understand certain political contestations. After all, the Brussels dialogue is a complex negotiations framework and the relations between Serbia and Kosovo are still fairly complicated, with many issues still contested between the two parties. Serbia's policies towards Kosovo and any resulting agreements might have a tangible impact on the lives of my family members who still live there. Therefore, as a researcher, I cannot escape the context I was born in, but what I can do is diligently follow the highest standards of scholarly practice and conduct thorough discourse analysis. Since I have not lived in Kosovo since 2009 and have been educated in Germany and am pursuing my doctoral program in Finland, I maintain a critical distance to the topic of my research. The final judgement on my impartiality and objectivity is left to the reader.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1, the introduction, has problematized my research question and the main arguments of the thesis and offered a literature review to situate these arguments in three areas: research on the Kosovo myth, research on myth from a discourse-theoretical point of view and research in Southeast European studies on the nexus of EU integration and mythmaking around Kosovo in Serbia. It provided a concise overview of the field, explained my rationale of research as well as introduced some main theoretical and methodological concepts, which will be elaborated further throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 is devoted to theoretical discussions in which I delve deeper into the meanings of particular key concepts used in this thesis. I open with an overview of the body of literature on national myths and elaborate on how myths can ground different communities through drawing political frontiers, which this thesis sees as a populist logic of us-building. This is followed by further elaborations on how myth is related to questions of structure and change, performativity, temporality and psychoanalytic concepts of *jouissance* and fantasy. Here I attempt to provide a thorough examination of the central concept of myth from the perspective of post-foundational discourse theory and psychoanalysis, through utilizing Lacanian concepts of fantasy, *jouissance* (enjoyment) and desire, and connecting them to Laclau's notion of the empty signifier.

Chapter 3 is devoted to an overview of my methodology, which follows a discourse-theoretical and performative approach to data, by discussing materiality and affectivity as well. This methodological triangulation of discourse, materiality and affect is a novel framework that can be applied to other contexts as well. Here, I explain in greater detail what issues I focus on in the analysis and how I proceeded with data collection and analysis. The central analytical concepts (sensitizing concepts) that I use are, first and foremost, discourse (which is also an ontological concept in discourse theory), discursive materiality, articulation, myths, empty and floating signifiers, nodal points, politics of emotion, structures of feeling, *jouissance* and fantasy, hegemonic actors (also termed protagonists), antagonistic and agonistic others, and similar. These sensitizing concepts can be viewed as heuristic devices that help me to grasp the dynamics of meaning-making in the context of my analysis (Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019).

Chapter 4 is both a contextual and an analytical chapter, in which I provide an overview of Kosovo and its position within the wider field of Serbian politics specifically since 2008, when Kosovo declared independence. Here, the Kosovo imaginary is explained in greater detail, particularly how it intersects with other discourses, such as the discourse of self-victimization in Serbia or the discourse of a historic animosity between Serbs and Albanians. Next, I provide an overview of the Brussels dialogue and through an analytical lens, explain its function as a political contact zone bringing a range of subjects together who are engaged in hegemonic contestation about fixing the meaning of Kosovo not only in their respective domestic political fields, but also transnationally. Here I attempt to demonstrate how these two levels of national and transnational entangle in the contact zone of the Brussels dialogue and how various subjects subscribe into these discourses and attain particular subject positions. The contact zone not only enables the contestation of a given issue in order to expand the horizon of possible meanings, but it also constraints the contestation in certain respects. A particular solution to the Kosovo issue would have potential implications for the territorial integrity of many non-recognizing states, which is why a potential solution needs to be adaptable to a range of discursive contexts.

Chapter 5 is an analytical chapter in which I discuss how the community discourse is held together, anchored by the nodal point of the people, particularly the Serb community in Kosovo (via the A/CSM) and defined by an agonistic relation to Kosovo Albanians. I explain how the Brussels agreement from 2013 was adopted as a means to accommodate the dislocation of Kosovo's declaration of independence while still holding the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse together. I examine how Serbia's claim to Kosovo is performed in various aspects, namely through institutional integration into the Kosovo framework (A/CSM), through Serbia's own institutional framework, and through an array of subjects, such as the Srpska lista (the dominant Serb-led party in Kosovo, supported by Belgrade) and other members of the Serb community in Kosovo. I also

devote a part of this chapter to the politics of emotions pursued by the Serbian Government in their effort to re-articulate the Serbian-Albanian relationship and finalize the chapter with an analysis of the various subjects' positionalities and how they are constituted within this discourse as "leaders" and "brave" political actors.

Chapter 6 is the final analytical chapter in which I explain how the partition discourse emerged as a response to the lack of implementation of A/CSM. This chapter outlines two main hegemonic interventions of the Serbian Government in light of re-articulating its claim to Kosovo in 2017 and 2018: 1) transforming Serbian-Albanian relations from agonism (which was characteristic of the community discourse) to antagonism and articulating them as relations between two peoples across territories, not just between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians; 2) abandoning the fantasmatic claim to ownership of entire Kosovo as a means of holding the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse together and instead focusing on claims to physical ownership, material ownership of a territory through the possibility of exerting governance (substituting one fantasy with another). To unpack the first transformation, aiming to politicize the question of territory in Northern Kosovo, the chapter addresses, firstly, how the conflict itself is articulated, secondly, how the many antagonistic Others are articulated, followed by, thirdly, how the political "us" is articulated. These articulations follow a populist logic (Laclau 2005) and polarize Serbia's political field. To unpack the second transformation, I focus on two issues: firstly, I address the internal dialogue on Kosovo from 2017 as a destabilizing moment aiming to politicize previously sedimented meanings, that is "de-mythologize" and "de-emotionalize/rationalize" Serbian politics towards Kosovo; secondly, I address how this de-mythologization and rationalization of the Kosovo question was tied to a new vision of Serbia's future, a future in which Serbia is economically prosperous and part of the EU, for the realization of which the "mythological approach" to Kosovo poses an obstacle. This vision is guided by the generation of a new myth as an empty signifier – a "compromise" solution that would ensure that both Serbia and Kosovo are equally satisfied and dissatisfied, that would lift all the obstacles in Serbia's path towards joining the EU, and that would ensure an economically viable future for Serbia and the coming generations. The idea of partition takes the place of representing this compromise, with the body of President Vučić acting also as an empty signifier embodying a potential compromise solution.

Chapter 7 provides the conclusion of the thesis, attempting to bring together these conflicting claims in different moments in time, while also exploring what these contestations might mean for the future of Serbia's politics under the leadership of the SNS. Even though the analysis focuses mainly on the period from 2012 to 2018 (after which the Brussels dialogue was put on hold), discussions on the issue of Kosovo in Serbia continued, although they remained fairly uncontested

outside the contact zone of the dialogue, turning them into a “monologue” of sorts.⁹ This is why they are not included in the analysis, but it becomes evident that the issue of Kosovo turns into a defining subject of contestation for the leadership of the SNS during their rule. Kosovo still has major mobilizing potential in Serbia that is generated (and performed) at different defining moments – it is not a constant. As a social imaginary, it remains uncontested until it is destabilized or questioned by certain practices. This is evident in the recent violent protests before the Serbian Parliament in 2020, in which some protestors from the opposition sang the famous song “Oh Kosovo, Kosovo!” (*Oj Kosovo, Kosovo!*) and shouted “Arrest Vučić!” and “Traitor!” as a sign of Vučić treacherously “handing over” Kosovo against the people’s will (Danas 2020, 8 July). Even though the protests were not directly aimed at Vučić’s politics towards Kosovo, but came about as a reaction to the coronavirus lockdown measures and increasingly authoritarian governance, Kosovo was articulated in a chain of equivalence as a demand against defining issues of Vučić’s rule. The conclusion also provides a problematization of what the thesis has succeeded to achieve, and what it could not address. I also provide avenues for future research.

⁹ The Brussels dialogue officially continued in mid-2020, but without contestations on territory, returning it more to the previous discussions on A/CSM. Apart from that, the so-called “economic normalization” of Serbian-Kosovar relations was driven as a parallel process by the USA, with one agreement signed in the White House between Belgrade and Pristina in September 2020. Since this is an ongoing process, I have not included it in the analysis, which instead will conclude with the stalemate of December of 2018. Including the current contestations would bring nothing new to the analysis, since no solution has yet been found and no new myths have been articulated.

2 Theoretical Framework

My thesis has implications for the understanding of myth as a theoretical concept, by problematizing the notion of temporality. I have relied on discourse theory and psychoanalysis to do that. Myth not only relates to past events, which is how it is examined in the literature on national myths but can indeed be part of political projects aimed at becoming hegemonic (in the future). It is here that the link between dislocation and fantasy becomes important, since for any myth to be successful at suturing dislocation, it has to offer a promise of fulfilling fantasies and closing lacks in the order that the dislocation might have revealed. I argue that myths in the form of empty signifiers act as those promises, promises embodied by a specific signifier that points to an absence. It anchors a larger discursive-affective structure (what I have called “new objectivity” relying on Laclau (1990)) aiming to replace the dislocated one. Its fulfillment is projected onto a future state of affairs. As such, myths are not only ideological (covering over a lack) but are necessary for meaning-making in general. I will problematize this argument throughout this chapter, which will be structured as follows: firstly, I will situate my argument within the national myth strand of literature, and take a look at political myths as well, which helps open up the discussion on temporality. Secondly, I will illuminate the important aspects of structure and change, and how the institution of “new objectivities” is even possible and under what conditions. After that, I will move on to discuss spatiality and temporality, which also relates to structuration and change, and tie it more closely to my conception of myth anchored in a Laclaudian and psychoanalytic understanding. Subsequently, I devote significant attention to the two modalities of myth that I understand as dialectical, namely myths as a new objectivity (inverted imaginization of the dislocated order) and myths as empty signifiers (incarnating the promise of suturing a lack in the order). I conclude with a deeper analysis of psychoanalytic concepts such as desire, fantasy and enjoyment, which all help me explain the logic of how myths operate and how they remain convincing to the subjects performing them and subscribing to their promises.

2.1 From National Myths to Discourse Theory: Building Community through Antagonistic and Agonistic Articulations

As I have already indicated in the introduction, the dominant strand of scholarship on myth relates to studies of nationalism, in which we speak of national myths. The role of national myths in constituting collective identities such as nations is undeniable. One only needs to turn to the “classics” of this body of literature, such as Anthony Smith (1999) and his notion of myths of ethnic descent as building blocks of articulating a sense of shared nationhood, a common “place of origin”. Hylland Eriksen (2004) wrote about myths of common descent as well, and their

institution as founding moments of nations, as well as ethnic groups beyond the national level. Michael (2010) addresses ideological uses of history for nationalist purposes, while Alonso (1994) focuses on representations of the past marked by myths that structure present and future nationalist politics. Morden (2016) addresses the emotional architecture of national myths and introduces narratives and their emotional dimension to explain the potency of national myths. Bouchard (2013), also touching on the emotional aspect of myth, provides four characteristics of national myths: myths are constituted by both truth and fiction; myths speak to specific histories but also assume universal forms; myths have emotional power through which they obtain a sacred position; and myths produce energy that compels individuals and collectives to act, either towards maintaining a status quo or advocating change. Bouchard (ibid.) also refers to myths as anchors, based on specific events that can act as founding moments of nations. Firstly, the conception of myths as anchors, and all the above-mentioned conceptions of myth, are closely connected to Jan Assmann's understanding of myths as specific readings of history, namely that "[m]yth is past that has been condensed into founding story" (Assmann 1990, 10). This story anchors a political collective into either a specific territory, or a specific historical moment. Secondly, what nationalism studies' elaborations on myths also share is that they conceptualize myths as narratives, or readings of certain factual or imagined events, which are then brought about as the founding moments of different collectivities, such as nations and ethnic groups. These narratives have specific boundaries and can be related to different political practices, much as the previously mentioned traditional understanding of the "Kosovo myth". Thirdly, they often distinguish between "factual" events and "fictional" ones, assuming a distinction between factual reality, and our representations of it.

However, this is not the manner in which discourse theory in my reading would conceptualize myths, as indicated in the introduction. To start with the last point above, discourse theory assumes that we can never grasp the "factual" reality behind our representations, but that this reality is inevitably structured by the discursive dimension of the social. This means that the "truth" does not simply exist "out there", but that we are born and socialized into the symbolic order of discourse which we can never escape. This assumption already problematizes the question of what a myth might be, often understood as "hybrid" fictional-factual elaborations of the past that serve a political purpose. If we can never actually go beyond discourse and grasp what we might call "reality", we can only rely on this discursive order to make sense of the world. We can contrast this with the previously mentioned understanding of myth by Barthes (1972), who defines myths as "secondary representation[s] which transform[s] a meaning into form, often with the function to mystify ideologies" (ibid), arguing that myths are forms of ideological distortions of reality which aim to hide the contingency of the narrative they address and present it as natural. While this might be one aspect of myth, Bottici (2007, 207) rightfully notes that it is problematic to rely on the

notion of “distortion of reality” since even “[n]arrative history is also intrinsically distorting [...] because it presents as ‘facts’ that which is instead the constructed spectacle of a narrative.” This not only relates to history and readings of the past, but is also constitutive of the way we understand the world and offers a distinct ontological position. To utilize the Lacanian distinction between the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary order (see below), the Real cannot ever fully be captured, since it lies beyond and is irreducible to the symbolic order of human communication, i.e. discourse (Evans 1996).

Myths, then, are not simply a hybrid fictional-factual narrative, but they emerge in situations in which our discursive order is confronted with something it cannot fully make sense of and represent cohesively. That is, when discursive structures are decentered by dislocations, alternative representations emerge that attempt to re-introduce sense into the decentered structures. These alternative representations might of course be anchored in already-established narratives of past events, but they can also be something new, or a re-activation of previously available options that did not quite succeed in instituting themselves into the dominant discursive order. Hence, the boundary between what is “real” and what is discursive is blurred by discourse theory and only reinforced by bringing in psychoanalytic theory to support it. Myths as articulations are simultaneously projected into a future state of being, one in which the dislocation would be solved, i.e., a situation in which a particular difficulty can be overcome has to be imaginized. Since no discourse is ever fully centered but it can only appear as contingently centered through nodal points and the establishment of hegemony (commonly known as the “structural undecidability” of the social) and, consequently, since dislocation is constitutive of social orders (Laclau 1990), the production of myths is inevitable for meaning-making. Myths constitute a dimension of meaning-making per se, since each hegemonic order will inevitably encounter a moment of destabilization, i.e., a dislocatory event – nothing can ever stay the same, which is the main point about contingency. This is a dimension of myth that has not been investigated in discourse theory so far.

The conception above already indicates a temporal understanding of myth, since for any articulation aimed at mending a dislocated order to be effective, it has to offer something that the current order cannot. This temporal dimension of myth is already present in the strand of literature dealing with political myths, including Bottici (2007) Bottici and Challand (2014) and Bell (2003). Studies focusing on political myths emphasize that myths are used to project the existence of a certain community into the future. For instance, Tudor (1972, 91) claims that political myths can be divided into foundation myths and eschatological myths. The former myths explain “the present in terms of a creative act that took place in the past. This act is sometimes sufficiently remote to be little more than a legend, but, in most cases, it is an actual and often quite recent historical event which has been dramatized for the purposes of political argument.” Such myths “lend themselves

especially to arguments justifying a *status quo*” (ibid., italics in the original), which can also be applied to the Kosovo myth as the founding moment of Serbian statehood and nationhood (the first analytical articulation I mention), as well as its re-articulation into the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is aimed at preserving Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo in terms of territory (the second analytical articulation). On the other hand, eschatological myths tell a story of a new order as projected into the future, sometimes “being the complete reversal of a certain state of affairs within the world. The old order is abolished and the new order comes into being, but the world as such remains” (ibid., 92). This can be applied in the context of the third analytical articulation I mentioned, the counter-hegemonic project of partitioning Kosovo as part of a new vision of Serbia’s prosperous future without a conflict with Kosovo.

Similarly, Bottici (2007, 179), building up on Tudor’s work on political myths, claims that political myth

can be defined as the work on a common narrative by which the members of a social group (or society) make significance of their political experiences and deeds. Consequently, what makes a political myth out of a simple narrative is not its content or its claim to truth [...] but the fact that this narrative creates significance, that it is shared by a group and that it affects the specifically political conditions in which this group operates.

By political conditions Bottici means “provisionally the conditions concerning the struggle for the distribution of power and resources which can, as a last resort, have recourse to physical force” (ibid., 180). Contrary to Tudor, who claims that what makes myths specifically political is their subject matter, namely that they deal with politics (Tudor 1972, 17), Bottici and Challand (2013, 92) claim that what makes them political is their orientation towards action, as “invitation[s] to act here and now”, “precisely because they address the specifically political conditions of a social group.” I want to add that the *political* should not only concern itself with the struggle for the distribution of resources and power, as the previous authors argue, but with struggles over fixing meaning, as will be elaborated throughout this thesis.

A specifically temporal as well as spatial dimension of myth can be found in Bell’s (2003, 75) conception of national mythscapes, which he defines as a “discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly.” The spatial dimension “tends to be rooted in particular constructions of an often-idealized bounded territory, for example a romanticized national landscape” (ibid., 76), which can also be found in the articulation of the Kosovo myth as the founding moment of Serbian statehood, since Kosovo is considered to be the origin of the medieval Serbian state. However, it can also be recognized in the construction of Northern Kosovo during 2017 and 2018 as an idealized bounded territory, the (re-)incorporation of which into

Serbian state borders would act as the founding moment of an alternative political future for Serbia marked by prosperity and the resolution of the Kosovo issue. Bell argues that the temporal dimension of the mythscape denotes “a historical span, a narrative of the passing of years, [...] a narrative that is most likely to include *inter alia* a story of the origins of the nation and of subsequent momentous events and heroic figures” (ibid., 75). Bell adds that myths “subsume all of the various events, personalities, traditions, artefacts and social practices that (self) define the nation and its relation to the past, present and future” (ibid.), which hints at the notion that myths do not only pertain to past events, but that they constitute the given collective’s relation to the present and future, i.e., that they have a temporal dimension.

Two things can be concluded at this point. Firstly, conceptions of myths as temporal categories as outlined above still “narrativize” them, i.e., they focus on myths as discourses with specific nodal points, which this thesis understands as the ontic dimension of myth. As mentioned before, I take issue with understanding myths as narratives, because as I have argued, myths are constitutive of meaning-making and are not merely nodal-points that anchor discourses. This is the ontological dimension of myth I have mentioned in the introduction and which I elaborate on later in this chapter. Secondly, myths, when they act as nodal points or anchors of specific collectivities, not only do so for national collectives, but also for any other type of political collective. They also simultaneously constitute these collectives through their anchoring effect. I want to argue that these collectives in the form of nations, as Bell (2003) mentions, are not pre-existing entities that can *post factum* articulate their relationship to the past, present or future, but that they are formed in the very act of naming. Laclau (2005) has referred to the unity of a collective as the retroactive effect of naming. Apart from Laclau, it is also useful to consider Brubaker’s understanding of nationhood as an event here, whereby he claims that “instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on ‘nation’ as [...] contingent event” (Brubaker 1996, 7). He articulates nationness as “an event, as something that suddenly crystallizes rather than gradually develops, as a contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity, or culture” (ibid., 19). It is evident that Brubaker also places an emphasis on articulation and naming as constitutive of building communities – even though he only speaks of nations – and renounces an essentialist understanding of this category. Hence, myth, or the “work on myth”, highlighting its processual character (Blumenberg 1985), can be conceptualized as constitutive of the “making” of nationness and other collectives. Even the most sedimented discourse needs to be performed, i.e., re-constituted time and again, its “borders” re-articulated and shifted time and again to have meaning. This performativity that is intrinsically tied to meaning-making opens up the possibility for the re-constitution of elements of a

sedimented discourse. Performativity can best be grasped through analyzing moments that constitute discursive collectives such as nations. As Palonen (2018a, 396) argues, “[m]oments enable us to grasp the significant processes of identification and disidentification as well as challenges to and establishment of new structures of meaning.” This thesis argues that myth can be constitutive not only of the making (or better yet, naming) of a national community, which is predominantly how the Kosovo myth has been explored so far, but of the naming of political communities gathered around the support for a particular party’s vision, that is, the SNS and President Vučić as a leader more specifically (see Chapter 6).

What performatively constituting a community involves is the operation of boundary-drawing, that is, articulating who lies within and who is outside the given discourse. This is also crucial for the ontic understanding of myth, since myths as concrete articulations and solutions to dislocations (myths as signifiers) also aim to (re-)draw political frontiers and problematize who lies within the particular solution and who lies outside it. The political frontier between the inside and the outside of the discourse is an antagonistic one (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), which Mouffe (2005) later extended by incorporating an agonistic view of it. That is, a community is built by extending the logic of equivalence between signifiers in the same chain under the empty banner of the people (Laclau 2005) or the nation, for instance – this way sedimenting the political frontier between the signifiers of the chain and what gets excluded from it, simplifying the political space. On the other hand, the logic of difference counteracts the logic of equivalence by diversifying the political space and expanding it to include a greater degree of complexity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The two logics often operate simultaneously.

Building on discourse theory, having done extensive research on inter-community building in the Cypriot context, Carpentier summarizes the nodal points of antagonism and agonism into the following: antagonism is defined by a radical difference between the in-group and the out-group, the homogenization of the self, and by enemy destruction, whereas agonism is defined by “conflictual togetherness”, pluralization of the self, and peaceful and non-violent interaction (Carpentier 2018b, 155). Put simply, while antagonisms rest on an articulation of the Other as enemy, as somebody who “prevents me from being totally myself” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 122), agonism rests on an articulation of the Other as an adversary, a legitimate opponent whose ability to speak and be heard is recognized, and is prevalent in democratic discourses (Mouffe 2005). The antagonistic articulation of the Other simplifies the political space into “us” and “them”, relying on a homogenization of the us (Carpentier 2018b), while the agonistic articulation of the Other allows for a more heterogeneous understanding of political activity, in which the “us” is not

exclusively defined by the opposition to the Other and where the “us” is more pluralized.¹⁰ However, these political boundaries are never entirely fixed and Carpentier calls for an analytical incorporation of a structural and temporal coexistence of agonism and antagonism (ibid.), bearing in mind that sedimented political frontiers can get re-articulated as well. For the context of my study, this means that “[e]ven relatively stable identity formations, [such as national identifications] when encountering a dislocatory event, entering a state of crisis or a ‘critical juncture’, often lose the appearance of stability and fullness” (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006, 150). In these situations, “they can only attempt to retain their hegemonic status by blaming someone else, even a previously friendly outgroup. This is why scapegoating, the sinister type of difference as exclusion and demonization, always remains a real possibility inscribed at the core of any identity claim” (ibid.).

Relying on the elaborations of agonism and antagonism, I will now problematize how mythmaking is necessary for community building through illuminating the relation between antagonism, agonism and a populist logic of community building. I follow Laclau’s (2005) argument of populism as a political logic of articulation that unifies disperse claims under the empty banner of the people. This conception was later elaborated on by Palonen (2020) as a logic of us-building that is constitutive of politics as such, that has a distinct form but not a content, and that constitutes an us through drawing political frontiers amplified by affects to what lies beyond the frontier. Conceptualized in this manner, a populist logic governs any form of community-building, be it nationalist or otherwise democratic, since a group can only attain an identity in a relational manner, which in discourse theory is understood as the relational ontology of meaning (see Marttila 2015). This is a very de-essentialized reading of populism, which enables us to discuss how group identity is built under the banner of a nation, a democratic society, or – when the social space is simplified and polarized to the extreme – under the banner of a leader (Laclau 2005). In this sense, populism should not be understood as “the goal of politics, but as the way in which political meanings are made, constituted and grounded”, as “a process where foundations are challenged, where new dichotomies and divisions are introduced, and where the contingent and ultimately ungroundable figure of the people is performed” (Palonen 2020, 56).

In agonistic articulations of the Other in society, the social space is pluralized, that is, the “us” is not solely built around the opposition to a “them” that entirely constitutes their identity, but the group’s identity is constituted in a heterogeneous manner (Carpentier 2018b). Many different social

¹⁰ There is also the concept of heterogeneity that Laclau (2005) introduces to discuss the social as not only comprised of antagonistic or agonistic relations. For things to be meaningful in discourse, which occurs through establishing *relations* between elements, some things need to be left meaningless. Since the field of discursivity is comprised of an infinite number of discourses, not all discourses can be meaningful for certain constellations at once. For a greater discussion on the topic of heterogeneity and how it relates to myth, see Chapter 2.3.

actors are recognized as having a legitimate claim to represent their political demands and claim to represent the group as such. This is typical of democratic discourses, in which the polarization of society is not too pronounced. While the community discourse of 2013 cannot be identified as entirely democratic, the myth of the Brussels agreement was able to unify diverse demands in Serbian society, as well as in Kosovo, since the provisions of the agreement were articulated in an ambiguous manner. The Brussels agreement as a myth was thus also able to unify the Serbian nation in a heterogeneous manner, seeking “national consensus” on the Kosovo question, since many parties from the entire political spectrum seemed to support its implementation in the beginning. The report on the agreement was adopted with a large majority in the Serbian Parliament (see Chapter 5). Simultaneously, it allowed critical voices from the opposition to emerge and sought not to abolish differences between them, but to unify them under the same politics towards Kosovo among many other differences, be it economic policy, or EU integration. This was possible because the Brussels agreement was able to cover over the dislocating effects of Kosovo’s independence on the sedimented discourse that Kosovo is Serbia, which seemingly remained untouched, since the Brussels agreement did not problematize Kosovo’s status as an independent state. Thus, myths are powerful tools for articulating a sense of unity in society, such as the Kosovo myth as a national myth has done for unifying the Serbian national political collective since Milošević. However, there are degrees to its polarizing logic, with the Brussels agreement managing to unify the political collective in a pluralistic, heterogeneous manner, while the idea of partition unified it in a homogeneous manner.

In antagonistic articulations of the Other in society, the social space is inevitably simplified, reduced to an opposition between us and them that comes to define the group’s identity. This is where the logic of populism as a frontier-drawing principle becomes more visible, since it has an effect on the simplification of political difference and often polarization of society. Governed by the logic of equivalence, diverse claims are brought together under the umbrella of one signifier, united by a common issue, disregarding the differences between them. This can occur when a leader assumes the sole right of representing the entire chain of demands, and thus constitutes the in-group as only those who subscribe to this logic of representation. In Chapter 6, I discuss how in 2017 and 2018 the social space for debating the Kosovo issue became increasingly polarized in Serbia, governed by a simplified populist logic of us-building around the support for the leader, President Aleksandar Vučić. By offering a Laclaudian account of populist logic in Serbia, I contribute to a growing literature on populism in Serbia, which has so far mainly been examined from a historical point of view (Berend 2020; Grdešić 2019; Stojarová and Vykoupilová 2008), with the exception of Vranić (2019) offering a more contemporary account.

In such situations of extreme polarization and incarnation of ideals by one person, the production of myths is deemed legitimate and can carry support only if it is articulated by the leader themselves, which is the case with the myth of partition discussed in Chapter 6. The myth of partition constituted the articulation of the Albanian Other as antagonistic and allowed for Serbs to be constituted as “true” or “proper” members of the nation if they supported the leader’s politics. The “us” was built around support for Vučić and his ideas (such as partition), while all others, be it domestic opposition parties, some members of the civil society, or even Serbs in Kosovo, were articulated as the antagonistic Others. Thus, in the partition discourse, community is not built around heterogeneous affiliations with the nation or the state, but around affiliation with one person, which resembles authoritarian regimes (Bieber 2020).

Having explained my main theoretical argument and contextualized it with theory on national myths and political myths, I am now able to move on to the problematization of my main argument on myth as an ontological category. I will do so by, firstly, outlaying a basic understanding of structure and change in discourse theory, where I will elaborate on performativity theory and how it allows us to think of discursivity and materiality as constitutive of one another. After that, I move on to my elaboration of myth as new objectivity and empty signifier, by bringing in psychoanalytic concepts of *jouissance* and affectivity, fantasy and desire. This will allow me to move on to my methodological framework, which explicitly emphasizes the nexus between discursivity, materiality and affectivity.

2.2 Structure and Change in Discourse Theory: Repetition, Re-articulation, Performativity

As indicated in the introduction, this thesis will look at how new structures are articulated as a result of dislocations, such as the Brussels agreement, and how existing structures are re-articulated into something different, that is, how counter-hegemonic projects are formed. The latter of these will specifically pay attention to the processuality of such a project, that is, its making in relation to already existing structures. This attempt inevitably leads us to a discussion of structures and their change, specifically when we look at sedimented structures such as the Kosovo imaginary in Serbia.

Post-structuralist discourse theory presumes that we as social subjects inhabit structures and are determined by them, although not *fully* determined. A central concept here is discourse, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985) define as a structured “totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic” (Laclau and Mouffe 1990, 100), rejecting “the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 107). As mentioned in the introduction, the term discourse denotes a structure as well as a practice. While discourse theory acknowledges that the material and the discursive are structurally different (see Carpentier 2018a), it implies that

all meaning is constituted *within* discourse, hence all social practices only become meaningful to us through discourse. This is why it is such a central category. To explain this notion in psychoanalytic terms, it is useful to think of the discursive in terms of the symbolic order as defined by Lacan (see Evans 1996). Namely, Lacan distinguishes between the order of the Symbolic, which is the order of language, or the order of discourse, which we need to talk about the order of the Real, which is ultimately ungraspable. As Stavrakakis (2017, 83) explains, “every human [being] becomes a subject in language” since it agrees to be “represented by the signifier”. Even though the signifier offers a relatively stable representation of subjectivity, when subjects enter this symbolic realm of discourse as children, they sacrifice a real “‘singularity’ of the subject” which can never be returned (ibid.) – though our lives will be about an attempt to re-capture this lost enjoyment in the Real (*jouissance*, as will be explained later).

The Real in Lacanian theory is what lies beyond the Symbolic, something we cannot grasp directly, and which resists symbolization. In Evans’ words (1996, 163), “[t]he real is ‘the impossible’ (S11, 167) because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way.” The Real can be opposed to “*reality*”, as our attempt to speak of or *represent the Real*. As Stavrakakis (2017, 83) argues, “the emergence of the subject in the socio-symbolic terrain [...] presupposes a division between reality (which denotes social construction and representation) and the real (a concept designating whatever escapes such representation).” Furthermore, “[r]eality is dynamic and meaningful, but ultimately, limited and alienating; the real, however, denotes what insists beyond – but also within – this reality by lacking nothing. Reality, the psychosocially overdetermined materiality of the signifier always attempts to symbolise the real of human and physical nature” (ibid.). In other words, what we might call reality is in a Lacanian sense only an attempt to represent and symbolize the Real, but the Real is un-representable and un-symbolizable – our attempts will always fail. Thus, we need to satisfy ourselves with reality (our construction), instead of the Real, the Unknowable.

The Real is thus also connected to the material, and hence to the body. Since the Real cannot be symbolized, symbolization introduces “‘a cut in the real’ in the process of signification: ‘it is the world of words that creates the world of things’” (Lacan 1977, 65). This resonates with Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) idea that the material can only be grasped through language, that is, that social practices only have meaning within discourse (i.e., the symbolic in Lacanian terms). Apart from the real and the symbolic, Lacan also introduces the order of the imaginary, which Evans (1996, 84) defines as “the realm of image and imagination, deception and lure. The principal illusions of the imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and, above all, similarity. The imaginary is thus the order of surface appearances which are deceptive, observable phenomena which hide underlying structure; the affects are such phenomena.” The imaginary is related to the

concept of the mirror stage in psychoanalysis, when a child recognizes its image in the mirror for the first time. This practice forms the ego of a subject by them “identifying with the counterpart or specular image” (ibid.) they recognize in the mirror. This means that identification is a central aspect of the imaginary order, prompting us to identify with different discourses throughout our lives seeking to bridge this initial split resulting from the process of ego formation in the mirror stage. Hence, the mirror stage as a political concept is not about children or childhood, but about explaining our need to identify with a range of hegemonic formations/projects (such as nationalism, for instance) that make it seem as if our identity is “whole”. The imaginary order serves us to uphold the illusion or fantasy of “wholeness” of identity, camouflaging the never-ending endeavor of identification that will inevitably fail to constitute our identity fully (see also subchapter 3.1 on “split subject” and “subject as lack”). This means that fantasy is part of the imaginary order, as a constitutive practice of identification which is driven by a false promise of suturing the constitutive lack of identity, of providing us with a missing part that would restore it and make us whole again. As Copjec (1989, 242) explains, the “missing part [...] is the absence around which the subject weaves its fantasies, its self-image, not in imitation of any ideal vision but in response to the very impossibility of ever making visible this missing part.”

The imaginary is also structured by the symbolic, whereby Lacan is implying that language has both a symbolic and an imaginary dimension: the signifier is part of the symbolic order whereas the signified, or better yet, the process of signification, is part of the imaginary order (Evans 1996). This is important to remember when discussing the process of imaginization I mentioned in the introduction, which can also be related to what Benedict Anderson (2006) has called “imagined communities” in a nationalism studies context. However, Anderson does not unpack this process or ontologically problematize it, which is what my aim is with psychoanalysis. The process of imagining, of signifying, of trying to constitute a community’s full identity (which is never given due to the constitutive lack of subjectivity) is necessary for driving any political project further. Without imagining a better alternative (future) reality to the one already given, change would not be possible at all.

Having explained the three orders introduced by Lacan and how they relate to discourse theory, I can now move on to discuss how discursive (i.e., Symbolic) orders are being upheld by subjects and why certain discourses have such a sedimented grip on the subjects constituting them. Here it is useful to turn to Butler’s theory of performativity, and specifically the concept of mimicry or mimesis. Performativity refers to the notion that discourses produce the effects that they name (see Butler 1988; Butler 1990; Butler 1993), meaning that there is no identity of subjects per se, no essence, but that what we might call identity (gender or otherwise) is constituted through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1988, 519) that make the abstraction of normative discourses appear

natural. Butler has demonstrated this claim in her conception of gender as a performative practice, one which needs to be re-constituted time and again and which through this repetition, creates a type of sedimentation which we then call gender (Butler 1993). This sedimentation is a fixation of meaning which has the appearance of being “natural”, or unchangeable. I have used performativity here not only to denote practices of the body, and discourses producing the effects that they name in bodies, but to expand it to include materiality (which the body is part of). Butler’s theory of performativity explains how “regulatory norms” (hegemonic discourses) “work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies” (Butler 1993, 2), which in my view can be expanded onto any other type of materiality, since the materialization of norms has to do with power and hegemony. It is here that Butler’s thinking is informed by Foucault and his idea that discourses have material effects, producing “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972, 49). This means that discourses do not simply represent the objects of which they speak through signs, but they *constitute* them, which was also emphasized by Palonen (2018b) and her account of Butler’s performativity theory in connection to Laclau and Mouffe. As Butler argues, matter is not a surface upon which we can act, but a “*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*” (Butler 1993, 9, italics in the original), which has to do with Foucault’s notion of the “materializing effects of regulatory power” (ibid., 9-10).

Overall, performativity is here to help us understand how discourses are sustained in sedimentation, material or otherwise. This has also been done in, for instance, performative statehood theory (see Koskenniemi and Grzybowski 2015; Visoka 2018; Vulović 2020; Weber 1998), in which performativity has been used to explain how dominant discourses on statehood are used to performatively constitute statehood itself, through bodies, institutions, legal texts etc. It emphasizes that what we call the “state” does not exist independently of our discourses about it – ergo, our claims have material effects. The same notion of performativity can be found in Billig’s (1995) idea of banal nationalism, which he explains as routinized practices that sustain national identification, or in the study of everyday performative practices that constitute the sedimented discourses of nationhood (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008).

Furthermore, there is no discourse that *precedes* performative acts, but discourse and performative practice are constitutive of each other (Palonen 2018b), meaning that there cannot be one without the other and that they do not appear in some sort of sequence. In a nutshell, this indicates that meaning is not a given, and it does not follow from any type of inherent property of the signifier, but that it is constituted as an interplay between discourse and practice in a contingent manner, always subject to change and internal reconstitution. This way of understanding the relation between discourse and performative practice places the notion of *articulation* at its center, as DeLuca

has recognized. He claims that “in a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily” (DeLuca 1999, 334). There are no discourses “out there” that are waiting to be re-produced, but articulatory practices (re-)produce connections between so-called “elements” (as possible units of meaning in a field of discursivity) and “moments” (as discursive units with a particular meaning) fixed and materialized as part of a discourse (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In other words, articulation refers to the idea “that people give meaning to the world around them by combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas, and concepts in specific ways when they speak or act. When such combinations are repeated [...], the patterns they constitute start forming a stable structure, which we eventually recognize as the social world” (Jacobs 2018, 298). *Articulation* is therefore a practice that is central to any meaning-making process. For instance, performing gender time and again can be understood as a type of articulation that aims to sediment or fix the meaning of gender that is constitutive of a particular discourse. The same can be said for performing statehood or nationhood, as an articulation of an ideal of statehood or nationhood in any particular cultural context that aims to stabilize its meaning through re-iteration, sedimentation in the material world, as well as materialization of bodies, constituting national communities that in turn perform these discourses. It is after all people that perform discourses and constitute what we call the social world, within which materiality acquires meaning. In other words, *performing discourses through practices of articulation that simultaneously constitute these discourses* is key.

If we conceptualize our social reality in this manner, then this leads us to the following questions: if everything is a performative practice of something already given, how does change happen in such circumstances? This also relates to the re-iteration of the Kosovo myth. Here it is important to stress that precisely the repetitive nature of performative acts is what makes it possible for subjects to dis-articulate from certain discourses and (re-)articulate into new ones through acts of subversion (Butler 1993), however always constrained by the discourses they already inhabit and perform. This is what Butler (2010) has called “performative agency”, explaining that failure is constitutive of performativity, i.e., failure to produce its desired effects: “performativity never fully achieves its effect, and so in this sense ‘fails’ all the time; its failure is what necessitates its *re*iterative temporality, and we cannot think iterability without failure” (Butler 2010, 153, italics in the original). Iterability is crucial for understanding how naturalized discourses are cited (and performed through the body and the material) by subjects. It can be understood as *re-articulation* of something familiar (i.e., taking naturalized discourses as the basis), into something else, something *different* from what is already familiar, whose meaning both *differs* and *defers* from the already familiar. This is commonly understood as *différance* (see Derrida 1982; Derrida 1988, Hollywood 2002), a Derridean concept

Butler heavily relies on. It can be summarized as the repetition of the same, but always different: “to be repeated, the mark must always also differ and defer from that which it cites” (Hollywood 2002, 106). I have mentioned the Kosovo myth as one articulation that gets re-articulated into *different* other structures, such as the Kosovo is Serbia claim and the counter-hegemonic project of partitioning Northern Kosovo – all of which can be understood as re-iterations (re-articulations) of the normative, sedimented discourse I have mentioned. Even the Kosovo myth as a narrative is a re-articulation of something prior, namely a historic event – the Battle of Kosovo – that gets embedded into the nationalizing political projects of the Serbian elites and later the Serbian state throughout history (see Pavlović 2009; Pavlović and Atanasovski 2016). This prompts us to think about the notion of originality, which leads us to a discussion of mimesis.

Apart from performativity as a meta-practice, central to understanding how subjects maintain the structures they inhabit is mimesis, or mimicry, which refers to repetition. Derrida’s take on mimesis, which Butler relies on, is particularly important, by which he explains the relation between “originality” and “copy.” In his work, the notion of the original, or the original story, and its copy, is deconstructed and put into question. By referring to his notion of *différance*, every imitation (mimesis) is a supplement (Derrida 1997, 144) which is something different or dissimilar from the notion being imitated. Derrida goes even a step beyond in ‘The Double Session’ claiming that imitation, or mimesis, is something unique in itself: it should not be reduced to or defined as anything particular, because “[w]e are faced [...] with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double” (Derrida 1981, 206). Further, every text (defined in the broadest, Derridian sense, which includes speech and writing) is in a mimetic relationship with other texts, meaning that there is no initial or original writing. There is no reference of mimesis outside of itself, which makes it a logic that defies the very idea of an origin and a subsequent copy.

By deconstructing the notion of the original (and its copy), it is no wonder that Butler relies on Derrida and his notion of *différance*. The theory of performativity, after all, clearly points out that naturalized discourses and performative practices constituting them are intrinsically tied together, and do not occur in a sequence but are constitutive of one another. Hence, when Butler speaks of re-iteration, or performativity of such discourses, she presupposes that *citing* these discourses simultaneously constitutes them and in doing so, the bodies of subjects citing them. The practice of citation also refers to *imitation*, or *miming*, as Bell (1999) points out in her reading of Butler’s notion of mimesis. As she elaborates (ibid., 137), “[g]ender is an embodied performativity that attempts to mime the impossible ideals of the public and social discourse, the historically sedimented conventions that demand one displays a gendered subjectivity.” This not only refers to subversions of the gendered norms, but also to performativity of hegemonic heterosexual norms,

in which “the ideals that are being mimed are *impossible* to mime completely” (ibid., italics in the original), pointing to the idea that imitating these norms is always an approximation, the full constitution of which is never finally possible. This is what Butler means when she claims that performativity always ultimately fails to achieve its effects (see above, Butler 2010). Hence, the subject positions that are being offered by these gendered discourses, through the performativity of which our gendered bodies are constituted, are taken up through “miming” the ideals that they are supposed to represent (Bell 1999). Miming in this sense would not necessarily have to be conscious (like performing one’s gender is not always a conscious act), but would involve the repetition of sedimented norms, and sedimentation implies that we forget the “origin” of the norms being mimed.

Mimicry as embodied repetition (performativity of normative discourses) can explain why the Kosovo is Serbia discourse is so entrenched and upheld (taken up) by the Serbian national community. As Butler argues, performing hegemonic ideals of heterosexuality is policed, as it constitutes a hegemonic norm whose boundaries are controlled. This performativity of heterosexuality constitutes the subjects as part of the (gendered) communities they aim to maintain. Likewise, those who traverse these boundaries are judged or even punished (Butler 1997), as Butler elaborates on her example of homosexuality. Questioning sedimented norms, above all those that have bodily effects on the subjects constituting them “brings with it ostracism, punishment and violence” (Butler 1991, 24). Repetition and miming have the effect of further consolidation of normative discourses, and the Kosovo is Serbia discourse can be deemed to be one of them. The re-iteration of this discourse is consolidated by structures of feeling (Williams 2015) about Kosovo, which include love for Kosovo as the origin of Serbian statehood and nationhood, pride in fighting for and defending Kosovo from internal and external threats throughout history, as well as spite and disdain for anybody who tries to take Kosovo away (see also Chapter 3). Through miming and ritualizing a certain response to threats decentering the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, subjects are constituted as members of the Serbian national community, ergo their nationhood as Serbs is reinforced. Questioning these norms and responses would be ostracizing and even dangerous, as Butler (1991) argues.

However, there are certain practices that do put in question the unity of sedimented discourses, for instance the Brussels agreement from 2013 itself, in which Serbia has recognized the institutional and legal authority of Kosovo’s state institutions. At the same time, Serbia has also claimed that Kosovo is a province of Serbia, due to the sedimentation of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is hard to escape. In post-foundational discourse theory, this particular “contradiction” has often been characterized as the issue of self-transgression (see Glynos 2003; Glynos 2008b), in which subjects seem to simultaneously affirm an ideal (for instance that Kosovo

is Serbia) and at the same time transgress it (for instance that Serbia recognizes Kosovo's authority and subjectivity). This issue is explained with the Lacanian notion of enjoyment (*jouissance*), which Glynos (2008b) terms "self-transgressive enjoyment" by which subjects seem to (unconsciously) enjoy the self-transgressive activity. This is because the practice of transgression can bind a community closer: "what sustains a community may be not simply a shared identification with an official ideal [...], but also an identification with a common form of *transgression* (from which we procure enjoyment)" (Glynos 2003, 9, italics in the original). This means that even though it might be an obvious fact that Kosovo has its own state institutions in place and aims to consolidate its statehood nationally and transnationally, the common practice of transgressing this fact by the Serbian political community by virtue of adhering to and performing the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, further consolidates that same discourse and the community's sense of cohesion. Transgression can in this sense also be conceived as a practice of miming, namely imitating a common form of transgression of and by an entire community, which serves to further consolidate their sense of identity.

Having discussed how dominant discourses are upheld, and how the subjects upholding them are simultaneously being constituted as members of that given order/community, I can now move on to the re-articulation of these norms, or substitution of hegemonic projects. As Butler (2010) mentions, failure is a necessary part of performativity and each hegemonic project is inevitably going to be faced with its limits of signification (Laclau 1990). When such a situation occurs, it is for two reasons, as Marchart (2014) argues: either because of the (re-)emergence of antagonism that questions the integrity of the given discourse, or due to dislocation, which points to an event that cannot be symbolized or accommodated by the given structure. In this setting, counter-hegemonic projects emerge that recognize the failure of the dominant structure to constitute itself fully and offer something different in response. However, a counter-hegemonic project cannot simply radically substitute a hegemonic one, since the transformation of entrenched narratives always needs to occur gradually, against the background of these sedimentations. As Stengel and Nabers (2019, 259) rightfully point out, to be successful, any new hegemonic project, or counter-hegemonic project, needs to be credible in light of already sedimented practices that constitute a given societal order and not clash with it. For instance,

Discursive orders are usually not created from scratch but in a field partially structured by sedimented practices, that is, discursive practices that have become institutionalized to such an extent that their origin in political struggles have been forgotten. They are taken for granted as if they are, and have always been, without alternative (*ibid.*).

Such a project also needs to demonstrate that it recognizes the mistakes and failures of the previous discourses and to hold "within it the (ultimately unavoidably empty) promise to (this time!) fully repair the dislocated structure (which however is ontologically impossible). This is the mythical

element of any hegemonic project, as it functions as an incarnation of a fully constituted ‘perfect society’ that cannot really ever be reached” (ibid.).

2.3 Spatiality and Temporality in Discourse Theory: Dislocation, Antagonism and Political Moments

As already hinted, structures change when they cannot accommodate an ever-increasing amount of antagonism and dislocation that emerge. This leads us to a discussion of spatiality and temporality, specifically how these two concepts relate to structure and change. This is important for my later discussion on myth as an ontological category because I argue that myth can be conceived in terms of both structure (space) and dislocation (time). I explain the structural aspect of myth through the notion of “objectivity” and the temporal aspect through the empty signifier which is tied to fantasy. Discourse theory has an unorthodox approach to the issues of spatiality and temporality, in that it – simply put – conceptualizes space in terms of structuration and repetition (relative stability), and time in terms of dislocation and de-structuration (change). This way, space and time are articulated as two constitutive opposites (Laclau 1990), similarly to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) notion of politicization and sedimentation.¹¹ Most importantly, Laclau provides an elaborate account of spatiality and temporality in his 1990 book *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, an account that has been further elaborated on by Stavrakakis (2011) and Marchart (2014).

As indicated above, Laclau’s notion of spatiality and temporality has to do with signification, or what can be symbolically represented through discourse, and its limits, which are revealed by dislocatory events. In this sense, Laclau (1996b, 39) posits that dislocation reveals the limits of signification and places it in the order of the Real (in Lacanian ontology), which he even explicitly mentions:

we are trying to signify the limits of signification – the real, if you want, in the Lacanian sense – and there is no direct way of doing so except through the subversion of the process of signification itself. We know, through psychoanalysis, how what is not directly representable – the unconscious – can only find as a means of representation the subversion of the signifying process.

Dislocation can be described as “an encounter with the Real order”, as opposed to antagonism, which “falls on the side of the imaginary–symbolic order of reality (denoting the relation between different but already articulated discursive projects fighting for hegemony)” (Stavrakakis 2007, 74). Stavrakakis (ibid., italics in the original) described dislocation as “*an index of the negative dimension of the real as limit of discourse*” since certain events challenge the stability and presumed fixity of a

¹¹ Marchart (2014) has extensively elaborated on this parallel, pointing to space and time correlating with Laclau and Mouffe’s concepts of the social and the political.

discursive order with issues that cannot be represented within that same order – revealing its limits. The positive dimension of the real Stavrakakis describes as empty signifiers (Laclaudian vocabulary) or *objets petit a* (Lacanian vocabulary), which is something I will return to when I discuss the logic of myths (subchapter 2.6). At this point, it is also important to stress that dislocation (or disruption) is not the Real per se, as the Real is not representable: “the real-in-itself cannot be disruption or lack. Disruption is certainly one way of showing the constitutive inability of the symbolic to represent the real, of demonstrating the symbolic order’s lack of resources. But that can only mean that the real should rather be thought of as a ‘lack of lack’” (ibid.).

Considering all this and returning to Laclau’s notion of temporality, he claims that “dislocation is the very form of temporality. And temporality must be conceived as the exact opposite of space. The ‘spatialization’ of an event consists of eliminating its temporality” (Laclau 1990, 41). He defines space as “[a]ny repetition that is governed by a structural law of successions” (ibid.) which also includes physical space because it subscribes to the same logic. As Marchart (2014, 274, italics added) also mentions, “[e]very form of relationality – even the relation of successive *temporal* moments – produces space, spatializes time”, which Laclau (1990, 42) would also call a “reduction of time to space.” How these two dimensions interplay, Laclau (ibid.) describes in the following manner:

Through dislocation time is overcome by space. But while we can speak of the hegemonization of time by space (through repetition), it must be emphasized that the opposite is not possible: time cannot hegemonize anything, since it is a pure effect of dislocation. The ultimate failure of all hegemonization, then, means that the real – including physical space – is in the ultimate instance temporal.

Once again, Laclau brings in the Lacanian notion of the Real to explain how dislocation and temporality are connected: the Real is not time per se, but it is temporal, since it always finds its way into the Symbolic (into discourse) and disrupts it due to the Symbolic’s inherent inability to represent it. Every structure is already dislocated, meaning that dislocation is constitutive of our social reality. Simply put, there is always potential for change since any structure is only contingently grounded. This leads Laclau to argue that “dislocation is the very form of possibility” (ibid.), making it one of the central concepts in discourse theory and helping us to explain how change occurs on a structural level. As Laclau (ibid., 42-43) elaborates:

with dislocation there is no *telos* which governs change; possibility therefore becomes an authentic possibility, a possibility in the radical sense of the term. This means that there must be *other* possibilities, since the idea of a single possibility denies what is involved in the very concept of possibility. As we have seen, because structural dislocation is constitutive, the dislocated structure cannot provide the principle of its transformations. The dislocated structure thus opens possibilities of multiple and indeterminate rearticulations for those freed from its coercive force and who are consequently outside it.

Since dislocations open up opportunities for re-articulations of structures – “freeing” subjects from the structure’s coercive forces – Laclau subsequently argues that dislocation is “the very form of freedom”, since “freedom is the absence of determination” (Laclau 1990, 43). If every structure is already dislocated – if dislocation is *constitutive* – then we are “condemned” to be free in these particular moments when the contingency of structures is revealed by dislocatory events, when we aim to re-articulate them. Marchart (2014, 276) explains this constant need for repetition and re-articulation, for maintaining (spatial) structures and rearticulating them in political (temporal) moments through a Derridian lens:

Laclau [...] is very well aware of the fact that mere repetition of the identical is quite simply impossible (Derrida 1988). Within the field of the discursive – the order of differences – there will never be a return of exactly the same differential position, since every iteration will be characterized by aberrations and displacements of the very element iterated. Laclau aims at this idea with his concept of dislocation.

Stavrakakis (2011, 304) recognizes that Laclau conceptualizes the political through a temporal metaphor (“the political as *the moment* of the original institution of the social, as *the moment* of reactivation and antagonism, as *the event* of dislocation”) and the social through a spatial metaphor (as a “of surfaces of inscription and sedimentation”). Consequently, building on Laclau’s notion of temporality and spatiality, Marchart (2014, 272, italics in the original) argues that space and time (or the social and the political) are “both [...] different (if not *self-differencing*) aspects of one and the same phenomenon: antagonism.” Firstly, Marchart (2014, 277, emphasis added) elaborates on dislocation as “both *precondition* and *result* of the antagonistic construction of social identity”, since dislocation is constitutive of any discourse – or in Marchart’s (2014, 277) words, “there is no place without dislocation.” As Laclau (1990, 39) has argued, “every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time.” This leads Marchart to put antagonism at the center of his argument on how space and time are to be conceptualized, as different modes of it. However, one needs to point out that articulating dislocation as both a precondition and a result of antagonism points to an ontological relation between these two concepts, where we cannot think of the one without the other. Equally, they are not in a successive relationship to each other, but in a constitutive one. Antagonism is part of the Symbolic (discursive order of our social world), while dislocation is part of the Real order, of temporality, implying a constitutiveness of change for any articulated structure. It is also important to address here the critique voiced by some scholars on the confusion introduced by antagonism as delimiting all structures (Norris 2002; Norris 2006) and the fact that antagonism cannot be both causing and resolving dislocations (Thomassen 2005a; 2005b). This is not what Marchart argues. His argument is the other way around: that dislocation is a precondition as well as a result of antagonism, and I will explain this in the following way. My argument is that a

dislocation can only be a dislocation if there is an antagonistic political frontier articulated between the discourses (one that dislocates and one that is dislocated). This is not to say that our social world is comprised solely out of antagonistically articulated discourses. Laclau resolves this issue by introducing the concept of “heterogeneity” (Laclau 2005), as Jacobs (2018) also recognizes. Heterogeneity implies that there is always a multitude of discourses that are left meaningless for the discourse we are looking at, for instance a liberal and protectionist discourse on trade might be in an antagonistic relationship to each other, but they are in a heterogeneous relationship to a Marxist discourse on economic production which bears no weight for contesting the meaning of trade in these two previous discourses (see Jacobs 2018). In essence, “heterogeneity as a concept expresses the idea that meaning can only be achieved if some things are left meaningless. For a structure of moments to be meaningful, some elements have to be excluded [...]. These excluded elements can either be meaningful in another discourse, or they can be meaningless altogether” (ibid., 306). Hence, the relationship between a heterogeneous discourse and the discourse we are looking at is not political, since the discourse is meaningless to the understanding of the one we are looking at. There is no contestation of meaning going on there and the discourses are in no way opposed. For a political relationship to exist between them, they need to be opposed to each other antagonistically, i.e., a *political frontier* needs to be articulated between them. This is the only way a dislocation can be perceived as a dislocation at all to a structure in question, because it is *meaningful*, because it decenters the meanings produced by the dislocated discourse.

Both antagonism and dislocation lie outside of a discourse in question. As we have seen, the dislocated structure cannot provide principles for its own transformation, so social subjects re-articulating it must always be located outside of the structure. Meaning, they need not uphold that same structure but can subscribe to a different, alternative one that would do one of the two following things: either mend the dislocation by incorporating it into the given structure (whereby the particular dislocation would cease to be a dislocation and the subjects could again subscribe to the structure as coherent), or replace the structure with the alternative one altogether (resulting in a dissolution of that very structure). Finally, we experience dislocations in the form of events that cannot quite be “integrated into the horizon of expectations” (Marchart 2014, 277), that clash with our sedimented practices of social life. As the social and its sedimentations are conceptualized in terms of space, any such event would need to be the opposite of spatial, namely temporal. As Marchart (2014, 278) argues, “[o]nly an event which is of essentially temporal nature will dislocate the spatial arrangements of the social. The temporal aspect of the event will get eliminated to the extent to which it is inscribed into the repetitive processes of sedimentation.” As a final result of his theoretical elaboration, Marchart (2014, 278) summarizes his conception of time and space in the following: “[w]e can [...] define space à la Laclau as a relationally articulated system whose

original institution resulted from an act of radical negativity (i.e., antagonism) which later became forgotten but in any moment can be reactivated through an experience of dislocation, i.e., time.”

Both Marchart (2014) and Stavrakakis (2011) have mentioned critical geography’s critique of such a conceptualization of space and time, mainly by Massey (2005; 1992) and Kohn (2003), who criticize Laclau’s ignorance of the productive aspect of space, claiming that space is not only about repetition and maintaining the status quo, but also about transformative practice and has an emancipatory potential. However, as we have seen in Marchart’s (2014) argument above, it is more useful to conceptualize space and time as modes of the same thing, instead of two separate things, because they are both constitutive of the same practice. Similarly, Stavrakakis (2011, 318) emphasizes this relation between space and time, calling it the “irreducible constitutivity of the space-time dialectic.” By further developing the idea of a “radical act” as explained by Žižek (1998; 2002), he means to point out that a completely voluntarist act that would entirely change a social constellation is impossible. On the contrary, to understand the *act*, we need to consider the temporal dimension of event-ness, not simply events as space, as time being reduced to space in the ultimate instance. To do that, we need a “paradoxical topology of a space permitting and encouraging its reformulation through continuous re-acts, a truly democratic space. And an ethics of contingency and responsibility acknowledging that in this open-ended game there are no guarantees” (Stavrakakis 2011, 316). Stavrakakis’s re-conceptualization of the space-time dialectic leads him to the following two conclusions. On the one hand, “there can be no politicization in isolation from the field of spatial representation” (ibid., 313), meaning that temporality in the form of dislocation “can only be felt negatively through the disruption of space” and that antagonism is ultimately a spatial representation. On the other hand, every dislocation has to go through a “trial by space” (Lefebvre 1991, 416), meaning that even though change of existing hegemonic structures requires the emergence of a dislocatory event, if the event is not incorporated into, accommodated by or replacing the existing discursive structure, it remains simply a “simulacrum”. I will relate this issue below to the Imaginary order as per Lacan and explain how myths aim to be translated into spatial structures (upon which they cease to be myths) if they are not to simply remain imaginizations represented by empty signifiers.

Having defined antagonism as a spatial representation, Stavrakakis (2017) also introduces another way of thinking about dislocation and antagonism – through the lens of the three Lacanian orders, as I have mentioned above. Antagonism would be part of the Symbolic-Imaginary order already articulated and represented within the (spatial) objectivity of discourse, whereas dislocation would be part of the order of the Real, a temporality which in the last instance always dislocates contingently sedimented discourses. However, rather than thinking of antagonism and dislocation as two non-intersecting things, it is more productive to think of them as mutually constitutive, as

Marchart (2014) has already pointed out and as I have also argued. It is perhaps more fruitful to explore what *limits* these two concepts reveal, instead of what they might represent. After all, as Laclau (1990, 17, italics in original) has already pointed out, “antagonism is the *limit of all objectivity*.” Since identity cannot be expressed in positive terms but requires the “denial of forces opposed to it” (ibid., 32), Laclau describes antagonism as a negative force that “*denies* my identity in the strictest sense of the word” (ibid., 18). Furthermore, “as objectivity presupposes the positivity of all its elements, the presence of inherent negativity of a ‘constitutive outside’ means that the social never manages to fully constitute itself as an objective order. The ‘outside’ is thus a *radical* outside, without a common measure with the ‘inside’” (ibid.). Ultimately, antagonism *reveals* the contingency of any objectivity, any discursive order we might have constructed, the same as dislocation reveals the ultimate failure of the Symbolic to represent the Real (see Stavrakakis 2017). There will always be a lack that cannot be represented (symbolized) which will lead to any objective order’s ultimate re-articulation due to dislocatory events and political re-activations of antagonism. This is what Laclau means when he says that dislocation reveals the *limits* of signification. As Marchart (2014) argues, the source of a dislocation can be antagonism, since it represents the constitutive radical outside of a given order. This is something that will become very clear on the examples of my case study (see Chapters 5 and 6). The very discourse of “Kosovo is Serbia” becomes dislocated because an antagonistic force – a radically incommensurable negativity that lies outside and constitutes the identity of subjects subscribing into this discourse – decides to declare independence. The dislocatory event emerges specifically *because of* the negotiations within the Brussels dialogue (see Chapter 4): if there were no negotiations, each party would simply not interact which could leave the integrity of their own discourses intact, i.e., the discourse on Kosovo’s independence and the discourse on Kosovo being Serbia could be in a *heterogeneous* relationship. However, the need to engage with one another within the Brussels dialogue, and the material challenges caused by the non-intersecting discourses for the lives of the people in Kosovo, is what causes this structure to be destabilized and the antagonism to be reactivated. Thus, the Brussels dialogue can be understood as an arena for negotiating dislocations. The antagonism is subsequently re-articulated into an agonism, which is later reversed into antagonism because the agonistic articulation failed to produce the desired effects. As summed up by Laclau (1990, 39), dislocations “on the one hand, [...] threaten identities, [and] on the other, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted.”

The very same engagement in the Brussels dialogue and the necessity to either accommodate the dislocation into the given structure (the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse) or replace the structure altogether with something alternative, results in the production of myths (Laclau 1990). Myths are on the one hand aimed at mending the dislocation, as hegemonic articulations of a “new

objectivity” through the re-articulation (and re-positioning) of dislocated elements (Laclau 1990, 61). On the other hand, as Stavrakakis (2011) has argued, any new hegemonic articulation has to go through a trial by space to be representable in the social, so myths inevitably have a temporal aspect as they involve political re-articulation. The crystallization of myths into an objectivity, to paraphrase Laclau, and how this process is specifically driven forward by social subjects is something that Laclau has not paid particular attention to in his 1990 book *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*. It seems that Laclau rather abandons the notion of myth in favor of focusing on the notion of empty signifier (Laclau 1996b), by relating it to Lacan’s concept of *objet petit a*. This is an aspect that I am going to elaborate on in my thesis, since discourse theory and psychoanalysis do provide us with the tools to talk about this phenomenon. Apart from myths as “new objectivity”, myths can simultaneously be conceptualized as empty signifiers, since the re-articulation of dislocated elements can also be seen as a generation of a “space of inscription” that would promise to suture the lost/dislocated unity of the discourse in question. Hence, myths generated due to dislocations have the ultimate goal to mend the dislocation and be structured and sedimented within social reality (upon which they cease to be myths and simply become part of the social order). In a Lacanian sense, I argue that myths are located in a *movement between* the Imaginary and the Symbolic order, as particular representations or signifiers of imaginized discourses that involve the employment of fantasy. Once they “collapse” into the symbolic order of sedimented social reality, they cease to be myths – they are myths only as far as they are political and contested within discourse, *seeking* to be instituted within the social. This will be elaborated on in the following two subchapters. Although I discuss myths as new objectivity and myths as empty signifiers separately, these two dimensions should be conceived of as constitutive. The spatial potential of myths (their ability to be instituted as part of our social reality), and their temporal dimension (standing in place for yet unrealized political constellations) act in connection to one another, not in separation. This means that a myth is simultaneously a new objectivity and an empty signifier: an empty signifier because it incarnates in a single signifier (that we can empirically analyze) the promise of suturing the dislocation through pointing to an alternative, imaginized “objectivity”, one which is affectively – and potentially materially – underpinned.

2.4 Myths as “New Objectivity”

In my reading, Laclau’s (1990) notion of myths as forming of a “new objectivity” by re-articulating elements of the dislocated structure can be conceived of in spatial terms. This new objectivity does not only refer to an “objectivity” that people who subscribe to might deem as true, that simultaneously exists with the dislocated objectivity, ideologically covering over the dislocation (which would be in line with Barthes’ conception of myth and how Laclau’s conception has been traditionally understood). The new objectivity also relates to the promise of mending the

dislocation by offering an imaginized alternative order, a political (temporal) emphasis that has been missing from discourse-theoretical discussions of myth, which constitutes myth as an ontological category. This can occur in two ways. On the one hand, the myth incarnating a new objectivity might change the dislocated structure by repositioning some of its elements, *concealing* the dislocation (ideological aspect), but on the other hand, it could also *substitute* the dislocated order with something else, resulting in the dissolution of the dislocated order. In the first instance, the relation between the dislocated objectivity and the new objectivity offered by the myth incarnating it is metaphorical, i.e., the myth “speaks” for the dislocated objectivity and “ignores” it, so to say. In the second instance, the relation between those two is paradigmatic, since one order is being displaced by another one.

Returning to the spatiality of myths as new objectivity, I argue that they are spatial because myths are created as an inverted image of the dislocated order and are thus *ordered* as well. This new objectivity can be perceived in terms of a discourse, whose elements can be mapped out, with the empty signifier as the driving force behind it, as a nodal point incarnating a promise of suturing a lack that the dislocated order is revealed to have. In other words, myths as new objectivity are spatial as far as the imaginized discourse they are part of represents a “new objectivity”, i.e., a yet unrealized spatial configuration the elements of which can be mapped out. In turn, myths aim to become sedimented in social reality, which sometimes involves material underpinnings. Translating myths into institutions can be an example of such an underpinning, but at the moment in which myths become sedimented in the “objectivity” of the social world, in the instance in which they withstand a “trial by space”, they cease to be myths. This is why I argue that myths can be recognized in the movement between the Imaginary and the Symbolic order, since once they become sedimented and materially underpinned, they have fulfilled their function of suturing a dislocation and cannot be considered myths anymore.

Above all else, Laclau has articulated his theory of myths as new objectivity in light of spatiality, by focusing on how this new objectivity mends the dislocation by representing possible new spatial configurations in the social. As such, “the mythical space is constituted as a critique of the lack of structuration accompanying the dominant order” (Laclau 1990, 62). This lack of structuration becomes evident when a dislocation occurs, whereby structural dislocation becomes the “‘objective’ condition for the emergence of myth” (ibid., 61). As Laclau (ibid., italics added) argues, “The ‘work’ of myth is to suture that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation. Thus, the effectiveness of myth is essentially hegemonic: it involves forming a *new objectivity* by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements. Any objectivity, then, is merely a crystallized myth.” Even though Laclau lays the foundation for elaborating myths as ontological categories, when he claims that “any objectivity is merely a crystallized myth”, discourse theory

does not problematize it further and relies on the ideological function of myth. On the other hand, I argue that myths are necessary for meaning-making in general, since in the hegemonization of any order, in the establishment of an “objectivity”, of a (spatial) discursive structure, myths need to be generated. Sometimes, these myths become crystallized in the social and when they succeed, when they pass the ‘trial by space’, they become part of the spatial configuration as such (ceasing to be myths). In such cases, they have succeeded to mend the dislocation by, for instance, getting incorporated into the given order, which is consequently expanded. After all, myths as spaces of representation do not bear “a relation of continuity with the dominant ‘structural objectivity’” (ibid.), hence the moment they are absorbed into the given structure, they are no longer myths.

This can be demonstrated on the example of the Brussels agreement as a myth that would mend the dislocated “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse (see Chapter 5). The 15 points of the agreement represent practices that would enable Serbia to continue to claim formal sovereignty over Kosovo, never recognizing its independence, while at the same time acknowledging that Kosovo has a certain degree of international subjectivity and institutional control over Northern Kosovo. One of the more prominent practices of the above would be the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities (A/CSM) (points 1 to 6), which was ultimately never realized, remaining purely a myth. Other provisions of the agreement, such as the integration of the judiciary (point 10) and the agreement on telecommunications (second part of point 13) have been implemented, becoming part of the ‘structural objectivity’.

In this sense, myths can be conceived of as complex discursive-material-affective structures that work towards re-instituting a given order’s center of fixity, mending dislocations. They are discursive-material structures because they create new objectivities (*spaces* of representation) that are to be realized in response to the de-structuring effects of the hegemonic order in question (as dislocation is constitutive). In other words, the trial by space also involves material underpinnings to achieve sedimentation successfully. They are affective as subjects who generate and uphold the mythical spaces of representation do so because they promise to offer them a fulfillment of demands what the dominant order cannot or has failed to do. In this sense, “the mythical space has the dual function of expressing its concrete content and representing ‘fullness’ as such” (ibid., 66). The concrete content refers to the specific discursive-material alternatives to the given order, whereas the representation of fullness as such is what sustains them and what maintains a grip on subjects (see a discussion on “fantasmatic logic” in subchapter 2.6). This affective component will be further elaborated in the next subchapter (2.6), in which I focus on myths as empty signifiers. Laclau (1990, 65) already provides hints in this direction, by claiming that “imaginary signifiers forming a community’s horizon [broadly accepted myths] are tendentially empty and essentially ambiguous,” creating a parallel between myths and empty signifiers.

This discussion is important, as myths as objectivity inevitably have a temporal dimension, since as we have seen in Stavrakakis's (2011) account, space is in a dialectic relationship with time and dislocation is constitutive of any (spatial) order. Similarly, the relation between myths as objectivity and myths as empty signifiers is a dialectical one as well. As subjects, we cannot produce complex discursive-material structures that are affectively sustained (in response to de-centered hegemonic orders) without a particular position in the field of discursivity (among many differential positions) assuming the function of representing the universal, of promising to mend the dislocation and "restore" a once lost fullness of the community or order in question. This is where the notion of the empty signifier comes in, and what will follow is a specifically psychoanalytically inspired account of it, focusing on categories of fantasy and enjoyment (*jouissance*). What conceptualizing myths as empty signifiers brings into the discussion is an account of the *political logic* of mythmaking, focusing on moments that challenge a particular order and/or attempt to institute a different one, not simply "cover over" a dislocation. It gives us tools to talk about the particular transformations, from mending a dislocation by generating empty signifiers that drive political projects further in an aim to replace existing ones, to the moments of their crystallization into specific discursive (spatial) constellations. In the case of the former, an account of the political logic of this practice would be required, whereas in the case of the latter, describing the social logic would be necessary. As myths are created as an inverted image of the dominant order, so do empty signifiers embody that which is absent from the order, an absence or lack they promise to fill, but which they inevitably fail to accomplish. Ultimately, this discussion is about problematizing both the spatial (structural/social) and temporal (political) aspects of myth, while bearing in mind that a myth has both a spatial and a temporal dimension.

2.5 Myths as "Empty Signifiers"

As mentioned above, myths as new objectivities as discussed by Laclau (1990) are aimed at mending dislocated orders by re-articulating their elements; they are generated to uphold dislocated structures by incorporating the dislocation into the given discourse, and re-centering the discourse anew. This involves an ideological dimension of concealment, an aspect which I have aimed to broaden with a paradigmatic substitution which would point towards a political dimension of myth and imaginization. Thus, myths can also be understood as empty signifiers (in which I supplement the new objectivity angle with a political/temporal angle) and aim to replace the dislocated structure entirely, having to forego a trial by space to become hegemonic and sedimented in the social, upon which they are no longer myths. These are, I argue, the two modalities of myth. Of course, once a myth is articulated, its promise is always "restorative": it promises to restore the supposed fullness and fixity of the dislocated order, or to restore the lost fullness through instituting an alternative order, one which is the inverted image of the dislocated one. My argument is that both empty

signifiers and spatially mapped out imaginizations of new objectivities that form a dialectic relationship are needed to suture or address a dislocation. The analysis should preferably focus on the synthesis of these two dimensions and the concept of myth I elaborate in this thesis encompasses both perspectives. Myths are simultaneously empty signifiers (specific nodal points/signifiers that can be analyzed) and new objectivities, since the empty signifier incarnates an imaginized structure that is an inverted image of the dislocated order.

Consequently, one has to bear in mind precisely this relationship between the two aspects of myth, since myth as “new objectivity” (as an imaginized discourse) needs empty signifiers that would stand in place of that same discourse and drive its political project further. By promising to suture a dislocated/lacking fullness, empty signifiers act as the glue of a political project or movement. Their ultimate promise is an inverted image of the hegemonic (spatial) objectivity graspable in the social, a promise that is equally spatial and temporal, and that strives for establishing hegemony. This is how the two aspects of myth work together to institute an alternative order to the dislocated one that is in crisis, so to speak.

At this point, it is important to explain exactly what I mean by empty signifiers. Discourse theory presupposes that the social is a lacking structure (based on Lacan’s notion of the lacking subject, see Chapter 3). Namely, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that any social discourse lacks a transcendental foundation, a center of fixity, which in turn enables an infinite play of articulations and meanings to co-exist and compete for hegemony, aiming to become sedimented and offer, at least contingently, a center of fixity (anchored around nodal points). This is what in discourse theory is commonly known as the structural undecidability of the social. As Howarth (2015, 11) points out, “[t]he struggle for hegemony is [...] conceived in terms of the production of ‘empty signifiers’, which function to represent the ‘absent fullness’ of an ontologically lacking social order.” The impossibility to produce an object (a signifier) that would essentially stand for an entire system is a “positive impossibility”, an impossibility of the Real, to which the “x of the empty signifier points” (Laclau 1996b, 40). Laclau (1995, 89) has explained it in terms of presence and absence: in a situation of “generalized social disorder [...] ‘order’ becomes the name of an absent fullness, and if that fullness is constitutively unachievable it cannot have any [...] form of self-representation. ‘Order’ thus becomes autonomous vis-à-vis any particular order insofar as it is the name of an absent fullness that no concrete social order can achieve.” ‘Order’ is the x of the Real that the empty signifier points to, while simultaneously failing to represent it fully, since any *particular* order will never be able to incarnate the absent fullness – the absent fullness will always remain in the order of the Real, essentially an ideal that is un-representable in the Symbolic, thus by any particular order. Laclau further explains that the “fullness is present [...] as that which is absent and needs as a result to be represented in some way” (ibid.), which is why Laclau calls the empty signifier a

positive impossibility of signification, and Stavrakakis (2007), as mentioned above, the positive dimension of the Real. As only *particular* contents (signifiers) under certain circumstances can represent the absence of fullness, a particularity comes to represent an impossible universality implied by an equivalential chain of signification. The relation “by which a certain particular content overflows its own particularity and becomes the incarnation of the absent fullness of society” (Laclau 1995, 89), of a universality unifying the chain of signification into an equivalential order, is what Laclau calls hegemony, or a hegemonic relation (see also subchapter 3.1). Thus, the production of empty signifiers is necessary for instituting hegemonic orders, and specifically the ‘presence of an absence’ that the empty signifier embodies is what makes it so conceptually closely connected to Laclau’s elaboration on myths.

As mentioned above, the *absences* in the symbolic order are precisely what dislocations reveal, so the production of myths, as I have outlined above in Laclau’s (1990) account is what social subjects need to make sense and cover over a dislocation. Since dislocations are constitutive of any order, myths are necessary for meaning-making. Myths promise to restore and/or introduce an absent fullness from the given order into the order anew, or replace the order with an alternative that would not be lacking (a promise which is ultimately unachievable). Along this line of argument of incomplete/lacking orders we all inhabit, empty signifiers are introduced to explain how partial fixations of meaning (through nodal points) are even possible: “empty signifiers provide the symbolic means to represent these essentially incomplete orders” (Howarth 2015, 12) and incarnate or embody the absent fullness of these orders. Empty signifiers thus succeed to hold together an entire chain of diverse signifiers that embody diverse demands, by extending the equivalential logic of the chain of signification (Laclau 1996b) and striving to represent a universality through their particularity.

Hence, any hegemonic operation, be it the institution of a (counter-)hegemonic project, or the articulation and construction of a community, a people, requires the production of empty signifiers. In this sense, empty signifiers incarnate or stand for a community’s or a project’s absent fullness. In populist discourses, specifically in those ones where an “assemblage of heterogeneous elements [is] kept equivalentially together only by a name”, this equivalential logic can lead to “singularity, and singularity to identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader” (Laclau 2005, 100). The name or the body of the leader can become an empty signifier, something which will also become evident in Chapter 6 of my analysis, in which Aleksandar Vučić as a leader can be seen as an empty signifier incarnating a solution to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, whatever particular content it might take on.

In essence, my argument is that myths have the *form* of a structure, a spatial system that can be mapped out (what I have called an imaginized discourse), that can become sedimented in the social and cease to be a myth but “reality”. However, their *logic* is that of an empty signifier i.e., temporal. What helps us explain this complex notion is Lacan’s ontology of the three orders: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Myths always operate between the Imaginary and the Symbolic but are caused by the Symbolic’s encounter with the Real (dislocation). Since myths are not sedimented in the social, they are part of the psychic economy of subjects trying to make sense (and repair) a dislocated discourse they inhabit and sustain. In this sense, it is evident that they are part of the Imaginary order. As Laclau says, “the subject is only [a] subject insofar as s/he mediates between both spaces [mythical space and the space of the structural objectivity]” (1990, 61), claiming that the subject is constitutively a metaphor. By this he means that “[t]he subject (lack within the structure) only takes on its specific form of representation as a metaphor of an absent structure” (ibid., 63), a (mythical) structure the subject has created because of the lack of structuration in the dominant spatial objectivity. On the other hand, since myths operate between the Imaginary and the Symbolic order, the notion of the empty signifier helps us explain how specific signifiers (that are part of the Symbolic) attempt to take on the place of representing an absent fullness, which makes us able to talk about them, conceive of them and consequently, empirically analyze them. At the same time, we must always bear in mind the structural impossibility of the Symbolic to represent the Real, as well as the Imaginary order’s structuration by the Symbolic.

2.6 The Logic of Myths: Fantasy, Enjoyment (*Jouissance*), Desire, *Objet petit a*

As mentioned before, the logic of myths is that of an empty signifier (which has a distinctly political/temporal implication) and the form is that of a structure or space, which can also be mapped out analytically into a discourse and which the empty signifier incarnates and “condenses”. In this sense, a myth is an empty signifier, which can be recognized as part of the discourse (as a positivized absence), but which also embodies this absence and provides (with its promise to suture the absence) ways of identifying with the discourse it incarnates. Various contents can also underpin myths, which are in different performative moments brought about and embedded into discursive contestations, more or less “competing” with the dislocated structure (as its inverted image). These contents that underpin myths can be fantasies (revealed by empty signifiers as embodiments or incarnations of fantasies) yet to be sedimented in the social, fantasies that promise to suture the dislocated order and “restore”/introduce social fullness that the order was revealed to lack. They are hegemonic operations and are political in the proper sense of the word. If a fantasy fails to be accommodated by the dominant social structure, it has failed the “trial by space” (Stavrakakis 2011), thus remaining an imaginized, unrealized project. However, fantasies do not

just appear out of thin air, but are a complex invocation of the desire to restore the once lost enjoyment we as subjects had before entering social relations. To unpack these three entangled concepts – fantasy, enjoyment, desire – I will focus on psychoanalytic theory, specifically on discourse theorists such as Yannis Stavrakakis (1999; 2007; 2011; 2017).

Let me start with desire. As Stavrakakis argues (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006, 151; see also Stavrakakis 2007), desire emerges because of so-called symbolic castration, that is, the “sacrifice of a pre-symbolic *jouissance* qua fullness, which is prohibited upon entering the social world of linguistic representation. It is only by sacrificing her/his pre-symbolic enjoyment that the social subject can develop her/his desire,” which includes the desire to identify with political projects, discourses, ideologies and so forth. This pre-symbolic *jouissance* can never be re-captured, since we as subjects are constituted within discourse (i.e., the Symbolic) and cannot escape it. In this respect, *jouissance* is part of the order of the Real, forever outside our reach and means of symbolic representation. However, as social subjects we never cease to desire to re-capture it, so *jouissance* can also be understood as the “imaginary promise of recapturing our lost/impossible enjoyment which provides the fantasy support for many of our political projects and choices” (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006, 151). For instance, the politics of utopia promises just that – to deliver a state of affairs in which we no longer experience any symbolic loss, and which will restore the lost fullness of our being (see Stavrakakis 1999, 99-121). In essence, fantasy has a temporal function – be it a fantasy of a future state in which all our difficulties are overcome, or a fantasy of restoring a “lost” state from the past that fulfills the same function in the future. It is what sustains desire and enables us to project our desire onto real or imaginary structures that promise to deliver social fullness – it enables acts of identification. Myths are part of these fantasmatic operations that promise to repair a given order that is dislocated, restore social fullness. Ergo, they have a fantasmatic underpinning. Myths, as outlined before, emerge in a concrete situation when a hegemonic order becomes dislocated due to an event that cannot be accommodated by it. But fantasies are not merely myths. Fantasies provide the imaginary support for the sustainment of different hegemonic orders. In other words, all hegemonic orders are built on fantasies which form their bedrock, since “fantasy operates so as to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social relations” (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 147). Thus, following a discourse theoretical and psychoanalytical reading, fantasy and myth differ inasmuch as the former is a constitutive element of political identification, whereas the latter emerges in specific situations, that is, as a result of dislocatory events. On the one hand, as specific fantasies underpin specific hegemonic orders (such as the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse), if that order is dislocated, the fantasmatic underpinning also needs to be re-articulated accordingly. On the other hand, myths as results of dislocations are also underpinned by specific fantasies, be it that of the hegemonic order or an alternative one. It is thus

important to distinguish between myths, fantasies and imaginaries here as well. Social imaginaries, as I have mentioned earlier, structure the field of intelligibility, delimiting what can be felt or practiced around a specific issue. I have mentioned the Kosovo social imaginary that structures the political practice of the Serbian Government and the affective investment of subjects into this imaginary. It is thus more sedimented than a myth, and in Laclau's (1990) understanding, a social imaginary occurs when a myth becomes sedimented and starts to structure the field of intelligibility, able to accommodate a range of diverse demands. This has happened with the Kosovo myth that turned into a social imaginary structuring the practices of the Serbian political collective since Milošević. Fantasy thus underpins any of these structures, be it myths or imaginaries, since it is part of the affective economy of subjects. As my case study will reveal, the myth of the Brussels agreement from 2013 is underpinned by the same fantasy as that which sustains the hegemonic discourse of "Kosovo is Serbia" and thus the Kosovo social imaginary (see Chapter 5), while the myth of partitioning Northern Kosovo is underpinned by an alternative fantasy, namely the fantasy of economic and political progress as part of gaining EU membership, that would ensue only if Serbia re-articulated its claim to Kosovo to only a portion of its territory.

Apart from fantasy, "what sustains desire, what drives our identification acts, is also our ability to go through limit-experiences related to a *jouissance* of the body. Otherwise, without any such experience, our faith in fantasmatic political projects [...] which never manage to deliver the fullness they promise – would gradually vanish" (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006, 151). The crucial point is that through these limit-experiences of *jouissance* of the body, we partially experience what the political project or discourse in question might deliver if it were "fully" realized. As Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras (2006, 152) continue, "fantasy sustains desire by performing a delicate balancing act." Fantasy, on the one hand, "promises a harmonious resolution of social antagonism, a covering over of lack. Only this way it can constitute itself as a desirable object of identification" (ibid.). This is the beatific dimension of fantasy (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 147), which is always accompanied by a horrific dimension, one which "foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable." The horrific dimension is evident in the construction of the Other who has stolen our enjoyment from us, thus preventing us from re-capturing it – what Žižek has referred to as "theft of enjoyment" typical of racist discourses (see Žižek 1993). By constituting the Other as a thief of our enjoyment, fantasy (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006, 152)

preserves our faith in the existence and the possibility of recapturing our lost enjoyment – a faith enhanced by the partial enjoyment we get from our experience – but projects its full realization onto the future, when we will manage to get it back from the Other who has stolen it from us. This way enjoyment is kept at a 'healthy' distance, not too far but not too close either; close enough to support the appeal of an object of identification but far enough from letting us entertain the vision of full satisfaction as an imminent possibility, something that would kill desire, induce anxiety, and put identification processes in danger.

Thus, fantasy has a paradoxical/dual structure: it embodies on the one hand a “fantasmatic, imaginarized *jouissance*” fueling desire, but one that can only “operate as an object of desire [...] insofar as it is posited as lacking/stolen” (ibid., 153). This dialectic between presence and absence has already been thematized by Stavrakakis (2017) and mentioned previously in subchapter 2.3 in terms of dislocation being the negative dimension of the Real. Returning to that notion, Stavrakakis mentions the positive dimension of the real as being incarnated by the empty signifier (Laclau’s definition) or the *objet petit a* (Lacanian definition). Stavrakakis (2017, 90) argues that the lack of the Real – be it our incapability to fully represent the Real, or the lack of the “real”, pre-symbolic enjoyment (*jouissance*) – must be somehow positivized in order for our social world to have any consistency. He calls this positivization an *imaginarization*, articulating an indivisible link between the order of the Imaginary and our ability to represent anything in discourse, i.e., the Symbolic. The function of fantasy is precisely “to imaginise lack” and its attempt at doing that is incarnated in the *objets petit a*, the object-cause of desire: embodying “simultaneously the pure lack, the void around which the desire turns and which, as such, causes the desire, and the imaginary element which conceals this void, renders it invisible by filling it out” (Žižek 1994, 178-9). The *objet petit a* can thus be read against Laclau’s notion of the empty signifier, which also embodies the “presence of an absence” in discourse *qua* a particular signifier standing in its place via a hegemonic operation. Thus, the function of myth, it can be argued, is to *incarnate lack* – contrasting it to the notion that fantasy functions to “imaginise lack.” “[I]n fantasy the *presence of an absence* (the object-cause of desire, the empty signifier) represents and, at the same time, masks the ultimate *absence of presence* (of a pre-symbolic *jouissance* as fullness, as lack of lack)” (Stavrakakis 2007, 78). However, this is not the entire picture, since *objets petit a* carry an affective dimension. As Stavrakakis (2017, 91) argues, “through the intervention of empty signifiers *qua* *objets petit a*, linguistic articulation acquires an extra dimension, which is necessary for its sedimentation and hegemonic appeal through its affective investment. This is how *jouissance* enters the picture to interact with language. Together, they produce discourse”. Laclau also recognizes this affective dimension of discourse by referring to its *form* and *force*, the linguistic/structural dimension and the dimension of affective investment (see Chapter 3). What epitomizes the *objet petit a* in my case study is Kosovo itself, which incarnates the “lost enjoyment” of the Serbian national community, the restoration of which promises to suture a primordial lack (something that can never be achieved and was never really there in the first place – due to the impossible fullness of society). The two myths – the Brussels agreement via the A/CSM and the idea of partition via “re-gaining” Northern Kosovo – act as empty signifiers and have emerged as a result of dislocation, attempting to symbolize the impossible fullness underpinned by the fantasy of restoring in some shape or form the lost object-cause of desire promising to fulfill *jouissance* – Kosovo.

3 Methodological Framework

Broadly defined, the analysis portrayed in this thesis is based on a discourse-theoretical approach that was originally developed by Essex school theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Often, discourse-theoretical approaches refer to themselves as post-foundational analysis, basing this claim on the contingent foundations of our social reality that Laclau and Mouffe have so often emphasized (see Marchart 2007). Such analysis was further developed by Thomas Marttila (2015) into an empirical research program of post-foundational discourse analysis (PDA), employing concepts such as nodal points, floating signifiers, and discursive regimes onto concrete empirical analysis. The main starting point is the relational ontology of meaning that PDA and other discourse-theoretical approaches subscribe to, which is “based upon the assumption that an object’s conceived meaningfulness can only originate from the discourse – that is the relational arrangement of meaning-conveying objects – in which the so-called practices of articulation locate this object” (Marttila 2015, 19). Apart from Marttila’s approach, there are many other approaches that have the Essex school as their starting point (named below), some advocating for the development of a research program, such as the Marttila model, and others maintaining that post-foundational analysis should “remain open to a certain degree of theoretical and methodological anarchism” (Palonen and Sundell 2019, 77). I advocate for the latter and have chosen to combine methodologically aspects of three *post-Laclaudian* approaches to analysis. Firstly, the psychoanalytically inspired discourse analysis of the *force* of discourse focusing on *jouissance*, fantasy (Stavrakakis 2007; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006), and fantasmatic logic (Glynos and Howarth 2007) and drawing from studies on affect (Ahmed 2004; Sjöstedt Landén 2011). Secondly, the so-called “Brussels school” that calls their approach discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA) and that focuses on the relation between discursivity and materiality through a knotted model (Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019; Carpentier 2017; Carpentier 2018a). Thirdly, the “Helsinki school” which focuses on rhetoric and performativity, understanding meaning-making as tropological by relying on Laclau’s later work on rhetoric (Palonen 2018b). All those approaches are introduced against the background of already established ways of conducting post-structuralist discourse analysis, which is for instance evident in Marttila’s (2015; 2018) work, or as laid out by the Essex school relying on the works of Laclau and Mouffe (Glynos et al. 2009; Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000).

In particular, the Brussels school of DTA has emphasized a sensitizing concepts approach to data analysis, advocating for a combination of qualitative content analysis methods with the primary and secondary sensitizing concepts used in DTA, such as discourse (primary), and articulation, nodal points, empty signifiers, myths, imaginaries etc. (all secondary concepts). These

combinatorial efforts could be termed “anarchist” by some, but I find them particularly suitable for my analysis, since it allows me to pay attention to the *nexus* between discursivity, materiality and affectivity and how they relate to myths. It allows me to consider both the spatial aspect of discourse (the mapping out of its elements), and the temporal aspect of it (by looking into what sustains counter-hegemonic articulations and projects and how dominant structures can be changed).

If applying sensitizing concepts and tropological moves on the discursive field in an analysis can illuminate the *form* of discourse, then the *force* of discourse can be illuminated through an analysis of affect and fantasmatic logic. This analytical lens allows me to focus specifically on the *force* of discourse instead of just *form*, something that Laclau recognized in his later work (Laclau 2005, 110), and look at the affective dimension of discursive investment of subjects (Stavrakakis 2017) into myths and hegemonic projects. Laclau’s call for further exploration of the affective dimension of discourse is partly based on the critique of psychoanalytic scholars such as Slavoj Žižek (1989, 124-125) who claims that any study of ideology should be conducted on two levels: the discursive level, which reveals how an ideological field is structured around nodal points and floating signifiers, and the level of enjoyment, which should reveal the way an ideology grips its subjects and produces enjoyment in them – a process which is internal to the field of meaning. Similarly, my analysis will focus on the discursive level, mapping out the spatial constellation of the discourses in question, as well as focusing on sedimentation and material underpinnings, while simultaneously paying attention to the *force* of discourses. This includes a look into the fantasmatic logic (Glynos and Howarth 2007) of myths grounding hegemonic projects, as well as into sedimented “structures of feeling” (Williams 2015) that accompany the sustainment of certain discourses and the “politics of emotion” (Ahmed 2004) that reinforce, but also help re-articulate political frontiers between the insiders and the outsiders of a discourse – the re-articulations of antagonistic and agonistic Others. Instead of focusing on micro-level analysis of any particular discourses (for instance, how sentences are structured), the analytical lens outlined above allows me to pay attention to structure and change on a macro-level. For instance, the rhetoric-performative approach to analysis developed by Palonen (2018b) offers me rhetorical tools to talk about the modalities in which myths relate to dislocations.

My methodological framework is summarized below in Table 1: Methodological Framework of Discursive-material-affective Analysis.

Discursive-material-affective Analysis	
<i>Form of Discourse</i>	Brussels school: Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA): sensitizing concepts (identifying discourses, nodal points, articulations, equivalences, myths etc.). Focus on materiality: material dimension of dislocations, institutions as anchoring or challenging discourses, political/ethnic groups as objects rather than subjects (homogenization practices), symbolic places or objects, borders etc.
	Helsinki school: Tropological moves on the discursive field (metonymic, paradigmatic): how myths relate to dislocations. Focus on performativity: how discourses are performed by subjects, processuality of meaning-making.
<i>Force of Discourse</i>	Affects, fantasmatic logic, psychoanalysis (Essex school): Additional sensitizing concepts brought into analysis: politics of emotion (Ahmed 2004), structures of feeling (Williams 2015), fantasy.

Table 1: Methodological Framework of Discursive-material-affective Analysis

In the next subchapters, I focus on each of these three elements, namely discourse-theoretical, material, and affective analysis as separate dimensions of the social phenomena I am looking at. DTA mostly features the work of the Brussels and the Helsinki schools, material analysis features the Brussels school with elements of Marttila’s PDA, and affective analysis features the Essex school’s work on fantasmatic logic and fantasy, with additional sensitizing concepts borrowed from cultural studies.

3.1 Discourse-theoretical Analysis (DTA)

DTA as elaborated by the Brussels school is an attempt to translate the ontological framework of discourse theory into a methodological framework by relying on Blumer’s original conception of sensitizing concepts (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007). As they explain, sensitizing concepts “are not intended to dominate and foreclose the analysis, but are kept in the back of the mind of the analyst and provide support when interpreting particular social realities and applying the categorization logics of qualitative analysis” (Carpentier, De Cleen and Van Brussel 2019, 13). The primary sensitizing concept is discourse, since it is a crucial ontological and ontic category in this framework. Discourse theory offers a range of secondary sensitizing concepts, such as “articulation, nodal point, floating signifier, and subject position, but also contingency and overdetermination, chain of equivalence (and difference), antagonism, agonism, hegemony, and social imaginary” (ibid.), and these concepts can be read as heuristic devices that help the analyst

interpret the social phenomena at hand. I particularly focus on the following concepts and devices: myths, dislocations, imaginaries, articulation, nodal points, discursive relations (equivalence and difference), floating signifiers, political reactivation/institution, empty signifiers, hegemony, performative practice, catachresis, naming, metonymy (synecdoche), metaphor and paradigmatic substitution, hegemonic subjects, fantasmatic logic and fantasies, politics of emotion, and structures of feeling. I have brought the last three concepts into the analysis as sensitizing concepts, since they allow me to take account of affects as the force of discourse. However, they relate to affective analysis and will be explained in detail further below.

Myths, as explained, are a central ontological as well as analytical category. Analytically, myths are particular signifiers that can be identified in the course of a discourse analysis, and they specifically relate to suturing dislocations, as this thesis suggests. Hence, I identify two myths: the myth of the Brussels agreement, which was supposed to suture the dislocation that Kosovo's independence generated for the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse; and the myth of partition, as an alternative way of suturing the dislocation by substituting it with another, more centered discourse of partition. In my theoretical chapter, I have talked about the spatiality of myths, which can be analytically understood as various nodal points that anchor an imaginized discourse, for instance the myth of the Brussels agreement being anchored by the A/CSM. The spatiality of myths is also reflected in their destabilizing effects on sedimented (spatialized) discourses, so any attempt to map out how a discourse is structured and re-structured is a spatial endeavor, as will become evident in the empirical chapters. The temporality of myths is reflected in them acting as empty signifiers, encapsulating an absent fullness and driven by the fantasy of a state to come, which is often contrasted with a past state of affairs (particularly evident in the idea of partitioning Kosovo in Chapter 6). I will not explain myths and **imaginaries** further, since I have already done so in the previous chapters, and Chapter 4 is entirely devoted to the Kosovo social imaginary. I will also refrain from repeating myself about **dislocations**, although I will elaborate on the material aspect of dislocations in the next subchapter on material analysis (3.2).

Articulation, as already explained in the introduction, is a central category of discourse theory and discourse-theoretical analysis. Articulatory practices (re-)produce connections between so-called "elements" (as possible units of meaning in a field of discursivity) and "moments" (as discursive units with a particular meaning) fixed and materialized as part of a discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). These fixations are never finite, as every discourse is only contingently grounded. They are also partial, as no discourse can institute itself as a coherent totality, but a speck of its contingency is always revealed by the existence of antagonisms and dislocations. As DeLuca (1999, 334) argues, "in a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality

temporarily.” This fixation of meaning occurs through **nodal points**, as moments of fixing the discourse around specific signifiers (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Relying on Palonen (2018a), I have also previously recognized that nodal points carry a temporal dimension (they are processual) and can be thus conceptualized as “discursive elements that anchor and materialize a certain discourse [...] in a certain symbolic moment. Any moment of institution of a discourse and any articulation that anchors that discourse can be seen as a nodal point” (Vulović 2020, 332). This category will be frequently used in the analysis, since discourses are organized and stabilized around nodal points. Nodal points are organized through discursive relations between them, building **chains of equivalence and difference** (see subchapter 2.1). Equivalence relates to nodal points being equated through a logic of commensurability in relation to a common outside or antagonism, while difference relates to the opposite: it dissolves chains of equivalence by weakening an antagonistic frontier (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000). In addition, signifiers whose meaning is not stabilized across different, opposing discourses are termed “**floating signifiers**” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) and they are crucial analytical categories for describing contestations of meaning. This will become evident in Chapter 4.

In order to explain practices of political institution/reactivation, we need to turn to Laclau’s discussion of the political and the social. Even though no discourse can be based upon its full or total closure of meaning, some discourses appear more stable than others, some accommodate a wide range of discursive identities that support them. In post-foundational discourse theory, our social world is conceived of as always potentially moving between sedimentation of meaning (accepting things at face value) and acts of politicization that reveal the contingent nature of sedimented meanings (or reactivation of sedimented notions). As Laclau (1999, 146) claims, “we live in a world of sedimented social practices. The moment of **reactivation** consists not in going to an original founding moment, [...] but to an original contingent decision through which the social was instituted. This moment of the institution of the social through contingent decisions is what I call ‘the political.’” In other words, “the more the ‘foundation’ of the social is put into question, the less the sedimented social practices are able to ensure social reproduction, and the more new acts of political intervention and identification are socially required” (Laclau 1994, 4). It is precisely this “instituting dimension – constitutive of social practices” (ibid.; see also Laclau 1996a, 47) that Laclau calls the *political*. **Political practices**, then, are those practices that aim to **institute** or stabilize certain meanings. This can be compared to Glynos and Howarth’s concept of political logics, which “emphasize the dynamic process by which political frontiers are constructed, stabilized, strengthened, or weakened and disarticulated” Glynos (2008a, 278). However, an absolutely fixed meaning is not possible (only a partial fixing through nodal points), because of the contingency of our social world: “a total political institution of the social can only

be the result of an absolute omnipotent will, in which case the contingency of what has been instituted – and hence its political nature – would disappear. The distinction between the social and the political is thus ontologically constitutive of social relations” (Laclau 1990, 35).

Performative practices, as explained in the theoretical chapter, are those citational practices that help sustain and materialize certain discourses. They thus relate to sedimentation of meaning, but they also have a reconstitutive character, since every repetition opens up the possibility for the performative re-articulation of dominant discourses, as Butler (2010) explains. This resonates with Laclau’s notion of the political and the social as ontologically constitutive of social relations. In this study, performative practices refer to those articulatory practices that help institute and maintain a certain dominant discourse on statehood, such as the Serbian Government’s claim to Kosovo being Serbian, which is performed through the institutional framework, the Serb community in Kosovo, and the establishment of new institutions in Kosovo, such as the A/CSM. Thus, performativity relates to the materialization of discourses and the practices that sustain it. Since it is a citational practice, performativity also relates to the body, specifically the body of the leader, when for instance citational practices of previously significant moments performed by past leaders (such as Slobodan Milošević’s speech at Gazimestan in 1989) are cited and re-constituted in a different spatial moment, namely in North Mitrovica by Aleksandar Vučić in 2018. Such moments re-constitute the leader, as well as the materiality of the space in which they are performed, in a new light. In this case, Northern Kosovo would be performed as politically significant, by contrast to Milošević performing Southern Kosovo as politically significant 30 years prior.

These practices also relate to **hegemony**, or hegemonic projects, which I often refer to in this thesis. According to Howarth (2015), discourse theory offers at least three ways of understanding hegemony, developed gradually by Laclau (and Mouffe) over the years. I will refer to two of them. The second model of hegemony refers to a “special type of articulatory practice that constitutes social formations” (Howarth 2015, 8), one that established contingent relations between discursive elements which stabilizes their meaning. It is an attempt to articulate a decision “taken in an undecidable terrain [of the social]” (Laclau 1993, 545), which aims to dominate the field of discursivity contingently. The third one, which this thesis mainly relies on, builds on Laclau’s usage of Lacanian and Derridean theory. Here, hegemony is understood as a process in which “one difference” in a signifying chain of discursive elements, “without ceasing to be a particular difference, assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality” (Laclau 2005, 70), assuming the place of universality. As Laclau argues, “the universal, lacking any means of direct representation, obtains only a borrowed presence through the distorted means of its investment in a certain particularity” (Laclau 2006, 648). Laclau maintains that “fullness can only be touched

through a radical investment in a partial object—which is not a partiality *within* the totality but a partiality which *is* the totality” (ibid., 651) referring to the Lacanian notion of *objet petit a* and its overlaps with what he has called the logic of hegemony (see also Laclau 2005). This discursive move of a particularity assuming the place of representing the totality of the signifying chain the heterogeneous elements of which it manages to unify is a tropological one (Laclau 2014), meaning that rhetoricity is not a form of language use, it is not solely about persuasion, but it is constitutive of meaning-making per se, ergo of politics. This aspect will be explained in greater detail below, when I discuss metonymy and metaphor.

The discussion on particularity and universality leads us to the **empty signifier**, which I have already explained in my theoretical chapter. Laclau argues that tropological substitution is the ground of politics itself, when he claims that “rhetorical mechanisms [...] constitute the anatomy of the social world” (Laclau 2005, 110). Namely, if politics functions based on instituting hegemonic formations and as explained above, hegemony is nothing more than one element of a signifying chain (a particularity) taking up the space of representing an incommensurable totality (replacing it, embodying the entire chain), then tropological substitution or replacement is at the heart of politics itself. Laclau argues that when an element assumes its hegemonic role, it loses its specificity and “becomes something on the order of an empty signifier, its own particularity embodying an unachievable fullness” (Laclau 2005, 71), naming something that is both impossible and necessary. Laclau (2014, 65) further adds that “what names the set cannot be part of it. What the rhetorical turn would add to this argument is that the term naming the set would be one of the particular elements of that set that splits its own identity between its own particularity and its role of signifying ‘the totality’. It is this double role that is at the root of all topological displacement.”

Hence, “If the empty signifier arises from the need to name an object which is both impossible and necessary, [...] the hegemonic operation will be catachrestical through and through” (Laclau 2005, 72). **Catachresis** in Laclau’s work is termed “the common denominator of rhetoricity as such” (ibid., 71) pointing to a constitutive gap in all systems of meaning, such as our symbolic system of language. (Symbolic) representation will always be rhetorical, since we would need to express something that the literal term would not transmit. This is why catachresis is constitutive of meaning-making per se, because meaning-making revolves both around an ontological impossibility and around the necessity of naming things that are “essentially unnamable” (Laclau 2005, 71) – ergo, it relies on the production of empty signifiers. Thus, catachresis in my analysis is evident in the (empty) signifier of a “solution” to the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo, mediated by Brussels. This “solution” is something that is essentially unnamable, so we need the production of empty signifiers that would take the place of representing this unnamable “thing”, as we do not know yet what that could possibly be. The signifiers that would take the place of representing the

unnamable solution are evident in two myths I have indicated before: The Brussels agreement the idea of partitioning Northern Kosovo (although the latter is rather a re-activation of an older idea). These hegemonic operations would be catachrestical in Laclaudian terms – the entire political process of the Brussels dialogue revolves around articulating a signifier that would embody this solution, that is, naming the “unnamable” since many attempts have been made, but no solution has yet been found. Generally, **naming** as an articulatory practice is very important for my analysis, since it entails an “act of *gathering* that articulates together a set of heterogeneous discursive elements” (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 187, italics in the original), whereby it can tap into a variety of discourses that are prevalent and that a number of social subjects affectively subscribe into. By the practice of naming, the named object is constituted as a new object that is able to represent a multitude of demands and reconcile the achievement of contradicting elements, as Howarth and Griggs (2006, 41) explain, defining naming as a “moment of catachresis *par excellence*” (see also Palonen 2006, 117-120; Palonen 2018b on catachresis). The way issues are named also has to do with upholding a given discursive and material practice (since it is a social logic) and must be understood in connection to performativity. Certain discourses are (re)constituted by the act of naming time and again, which opens up spaces for their re-articulation and change (a practice that can be understood as a *political* logic).

Having explained catachresis as the basis of rhetoricity as such, I will now move on to explain **metaphor** and **metonymy** as tropes that define political practice per se. Based on Laclau, Howarth and Griggs (2006) argue that

Rhetorical categories are at once important for both fleshing out the ontology of discourse theory, and as a means of analysing texts and linguistic practices. With respect to the former, for example, the concept of a hegemonic practice is understood principally as a metonymical operation in which a particular group or movement takes up demands articulated by contiguous groups – a student movement, for example, begins to organize and address workers’ demands – or extends one set of demands into adjacent spheres, as when workers’ struggles come to symbolise the demands of an entire nation [...]. By contrast, the stabilisation of such practices into a hegemonic form or order, each organised around an empty signifier, is metaphorical in that it involves the creation of new meaningful totalities via the disarticulation and replacement of previously existing formations.

In Laclau’s (2014) work, metaphor and metonymy refer to the two axes of language, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. The syntagmatic axis relies on a combination of signifiers based on a relation of contiguity (**metonymy**), whereas the paradigmatic axis relies on the substitution of signifiers based on a relation of analogy (**metaphor**). He claims that “hegemony means the passage from metonymy to metaphor, from a ‘contiguous’ starting point to its consolidation in ‘analogy’” (Laclau 2014, 22). Hence, a metonymic operation would involve a hegemonic or instituting practice (the *political*, as Laclau has argued), whereas a metaphoric operation would involve the stabilization

of such practices into a sedimented order, as Howarth and Griggs (2006) have argued above. As politics constantly moves between acts of politicization and sedimentation, these operations are intrinsically tied. However, in terms of analyzing hegemony (both as political practice and the sedimentation of orders), Laclau names one trope that is central to it, one that involves a metonymic relation of contiguity: synecdoche. **Synecdoche** refers to a “move[s] on [the] discursive field” whereby the move is dictated by a logic of articulation that is not always “fully conscious or actor derived” as Palonen (2018b, 181) argues in her elaboration of a rhetoric-performative approach to discourse analysis. Synecdoche is a trope that refers to a part representing the whole (ibid., 183), or in Laclau’s writing, when one particular signifier in a signifying chain takes the place of representing the totality of that chain (*pars pro toto*). As Baysha (2018, 236) argues, “synecdoche appears as a structural necessity of any hegemonic discourse”, since as I have explained, hegemony involves precisely this type of operation. If synecdoche refers to a part representing the inevitably failed wholeness/unity of identity (particularity standing for universality), then in the 2013 discourse, this “part” representing the claim to the whole is embodied by the signifier “the Serb community” (that is the people). Namely, the myth of the Brussels agreement as a means to mend the dislocation, involves the creation of a “new objectivity” in which Serbia’s universalizing claim to Kosovo has been embodied by the Serb community in Kosovo (synecdochic move) and all efforts have been directed towards preserving that community in Kosovo. This is what the Brussels agreement was supposed to achieve through the establishment of A/CSM. In a sense, the Serb community (the people) simultaneously functions as an empty signifier representing this totality. In 2018, on the other hand, we have “Northern Kosovo” (territory) as a signifier that is the part representing this universality, i.e., Serbia’s universalizing claim to Kosovo. Generally speaking, we have a metonymical move (synecdoche, part representing the whole) originally from territory (the entire Kosovo, universalizing claim) to people (the Serb community), and back to territory again (Northern Kosovo). People and territory are part of the same chain of equivalence (through a relation of contiguity) that forms Serbia’s claim to Kosovo.

Synecdoche is evident in the entire analysis, as moves substituting one signifying chain for a single signifier are part of these contestations within the Brussels dialogue. Several political projects are “fighting” for hegemony, so to speak, with the Brussels agreement and A/CSM being one that has at least partially attained hegemony and become fixed around different nodal points, such as the institutional integration in Northern Kosovo (local elections, judicial integration, integration of the police force etc.).

“Zooming out” from individual hegemonizing practices (such as the synecdochic moves explained above) to the sedimentation of hegemonic orders and the mentioned question of how myths relate to dislocations, we can recognize two practices that are evident in the two temporal moments of

2013 and 2018: concealment and displacement, both of which are tied to the concept of myth as a “new objectivity” and “empty signifier”. The following section will be devoted to this analytical distinction.

As explained in Chapters 1 and 2, myth as a means of mending a dislocation can be conceptualized in terms of a new objectivity and an empty signifier. A myth (as imaginized objectivity sustained by an empty signifier) can co-exist with the dislocated structure as a means to “ignore” or conceal it (metaphorically speaking), claiming that the structure is not dislocated at all. This is what the Brussels agreement has tried to achieve. Here we can speak of hegemony that is (at least partly) sedimented, as I have mentioned before. Laclau (2014, 16) talks of *distortion* as opposed to dislocation in this regard, claiming that

dislocation is constitutive, [...] [hence,] the very notion of a metaphysical closure has to be put into question. But the notion of distortion involves something more than mere dislocation – namely, that a *concealment* of some sort takes place in it. [...] [W]hat is concealed is the ultimate dislocation of what presents itself as a closed identity, and the act of concealment consists in projecting onto that identity the dimension of closure that it ultimately lacks.

He adds that “the distortive operation consists precisely in [...] projecting into something that is essentially divided the illusion of a fullness and self-transparency that it lacks” (Laclau 2014, 15). This so-called “illusion” can be conceived of as a myth that covers over or conceals the dislocated structure and offers a fully coherent story to the subjects that are affectively invested in the dislocated discourse. In a sense, this myth metaphorically “substitutes” the reading of the dislocated structure offering a new discursive-material-affective reality that makes sense to the subjects sustaining it, promising a unified/closed identity, free of dislocation (what was supposed to be offered by the Brussels agreement’s full implementation). Since this new reality’s coherence/closure will always be revealed by the same dislocation (and antagonisms) as ultimately failing, it will never entirely succeed in substituting it, but merely to conceal it, to cover it over by offering something alternative.

When a myth as part of an imaginized discourse (new objectivity) fails to accommodate an ever-increasing set of dislocations and social demands, a new myth needs to be generated. For instance, the central part of the Brussels agreement, the A/CSM, was never implemented, and after participating in the Kosovo local elections in 2013, the Serb community leaders in Kosovo (backed by the Serbian Government) were increasingly unwilling to make further concessions and fully integrate into Kosovo state structures. Since the Brussels agreement has not succeeded to mend the dislocation, Serbian hegemonic actors have articulated a new myth, one that would not simply co-exist with the dislocated discursive-material structure, but would hegemonically displace it (entirely, through paradigmatic substitution). By replacing the dislocated structure, it would

denounce that same structure, recognizing its dislocated nature, not merely covering it over. This recognition would inevitably result in the structure's falling apart, meaning that the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse would be denounced and displaced by something entirely new (on a paradigmatic level). Within this movement, synecdoche is easily recognizable, since this new project embodying a part of Kosovo (Northern Kosovo) that would replace Serbia's totalizing claim to entire Kosovo involves a metonymic relation of contiguity between these two elements. Within the partition discourse of 2018, a part – Northern Kosovo – comes to represent the whole, i.e., Serbia's totalizing claim to Kosovo. After all, Serbia would not simply recognize Kosovo as independent and abandon its hegemonic claim to it but replace it with a claim to only one of its parts, namely Northern Kosovo. Within this constellation, the dislocated "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse would inevitably fall apart, as the paradigmatic replacement would involve recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. However, even though the discursive move was paradigmatic, it was never fully realized, that is the partition discourse has not successfully replaced the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse. Therefore, we can only analyze it as a hegemonic practice (a sedimenting order), a myth, not a sedimented order, or metaphoric fixation in Laclau's words.

Lastly, we can turn to **hegemonic subjects** as a sensitizing concept used to illuminate the positionality of actors in discourse and their ability to engage politically with discourses. I will also introduce the notion of the "split subject", which is essential for understanding identificatory practices of social subjects with different discourses and their subjectivation into them, which can help us discuss agency in post-structuralist terms. In this tradition, the subject is not understood as a pre-given fixed entity, but "subjectivity *qua* social subjects' socially meaningful existence comes into being as the subsequent outcome of their definition in a discourse" (Marttila 2015, 74). Thus, we do not precisely speak of identity, but rather of *identification* as a practice through which we "attain" an identity within a specific discourse we subjectivate into. Equally, we can dis-identify with certain discourses and identify with others, sometimes simultaneously identifying with seemingly opposing discourses. The concept of identification is there to help us grasp the dynamic process of identity-building as never finite and never fully fixed. An attention to discourse and discursive identities brings us to the notion of the subject position (in contrast to the notion of the subject). A subject position is more-or-less an empirical category, since in '[the general field of objectivity,] there are only subject positions' (Laclau 1990, 61) – a "subject" will in discourse-analytical terms always escape our grasp. This means that we should focus on discourses as 'surfaces of inscription' of different subjects' 'identities' through acts of identification. Here we can speak of subjectivation, as the process of subjects assuming different subject positions in a certain discourse (Laclau 1990).

Marttila (2015, 75) also points out that identification also involves an “‘affective’ attachments to discourses and discursively conceptualized subject roles.” This affective dimension brings us to psychoanalysis and the notion of the “split subject” (or barred subject) and “subject as lack”. The Lacanian conception of subjectivity assumes that the subject is divided or alienated from itself through the subject’s entering the symbolic order of language. This split is constitutive of subjectivity as such, and the subject will always affectively yearn to cover over or mend this radical split through acts of identification. As Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 261) argue, “[s]ubjectivity in Lacan’s work [...] is linked not only to lack but also our attempts to eliminate this lack that, however, does not stop re-emerging” which is what identification is all about. What conceptualizing the subject in terms of split and lack means for social research is that “it avoids attributing to subjectivity a positively defined essence (such as a privileged notion of true interests/needs or a certain type of inherent rationality)” (ibid., 260).

In the attempts to mend a dislocation, articulate a counter-hegemonic project and offer new means of identification for social subjects around alternative nodal points, different subjects assume the role of “protagonists” (Marttila 2015) in offering these means of identification. Laclau (2000) maintains that a subject emerges as a political actor when a dislocated structure cannot accommodate a range of previously stabilized identifications, prompting these actors to identify themselves with new structures and reorganize or institute them. This is what hegemonic practice is all about, since these (particular) actors take upon themselves the task of speaking for an entire community, for instance a nation. As I have already mentioned before, a hegemonic relationship requires that a particular group takes at least some degree of representation of universality, say for a community as a whole. A **hegemonic subject** thus is a subject that would take upon themselves this task of embodying a universality, which in my analysis would be state actors (representing a whole national community, such as presidents, institutional representatives) a party (in my case the SNS, incarnating the two myths of the Brussels agreement and partition), an individual (such as Aleksandar Vučić) or other institutional (such as the EU) or cultural actors (such as the Serbian Orthodox Church – SOC). As the discursive field of trying to solve the Kosovo-Serbia dispute occurs in a transculturally entangled arena (the contact zone of the Brussels dialogue), these actors can range from EU representatives and Serbia’s state and party leaders, to state representatives of Russia, China or Serbia’s neighboring countries. However, these actors are only contextually analyzed, since the focus of this thesis lies on the SNS-majority and SNS-led government’s re-articulation of Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue. However, what the contextual analysis will reveal is the relational entanglements of these actors in the wider contact zone of the Brussels dialogue.

Having explained how the symbolic and affective constitution of subjectivity work, I will now move on to elaborate a few analytical categories that will be used in the analysis when trying to identify particular subject roles (Marttila's vocabulary) or subject positions (Laclau's vocabulary). Marttila's (2015, 132-134) has elaborated a topology of discursive identities, in which he expands on the relation between different subject roles and their position within a discourse. What Laclau and Mouffe (1985) would call nodal points of a discourse, Marttila names "ethical ideals" (paramount values and ideals embodied by nodal points), and discursive limits would be designated by "antagonistic others" (opponents and threats that endanger the attainment and sustainment of the ethical ideals and lie outside the discourse, constituting it). The subject positions are divided into "protagonists" (champions/protectors of the ethical ideals), "helpers" (subjects supporting the attainment/maintenance of ethical ideals) and "opponents" (subjects within the same discourse opposing/endangering the attainment of ethical ideals). Protagonists would thus be hegemonic subjects, or those who stabilize and institute (counter-)hegemonic orders. These categories will be brought up in the following Chapter 4 and embedded in the two identified discourses: the community and the partition discourse. It will become evident that in the community discourse, there was a greater number of heterogeneous hegemonic subjects trying to stabilize meanings around the Brussels agreement, whereas in the partition discourse, this heterogeneity is not so visible. In 2018, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić started to take on a more prominent role when it came to re-articulating the signifier of Kosovo, hegemonizing the political field around who supports his political vision (helpers) and who opposes it (opponents and antagonistic Others). The most visible re-articulation of subjects revolved around how Kosovo Albanians and Albanians in general are positioned. Whereas in 2013, Serbian hegemonic subjects tried to articulate the relationship between Serbs and Albanians in a more heterogeneous manner as increasingly agonistic (particularly because of the Brussels agreement which emphasizes cooperation between the communities), in 2018, Albanians were articulated as antagonistic forces lying outside "our" discursive project and attempt to block the attainment of "our" ethical ideals, hindering "our" full constitution of identity.

3.2 Material Analysis

As mentioned earlier, discursive materiality is one of the sensitizing concepts I have used, and it primarily refers to institutions; political, or ethnic groups that are articulated as objects rather than subjects in a discourse; symbolic places or objects; and bordering practices. Laclau's conception of discourse does not make a distinction between "ideas" and their "material conditions", but rather "encompass[es] all dimensions of social reality and not just the usual practices of speaking, writing, and communicating" (Howarth 2004, 265).

Carpentier has elaborated precisely *how* the discursive and the material are entangled through the discursive-material knot, in which the material is necessary to make sense of the discursive (Carpentier 2018a). He explains the knot as a “nonhierarchical ontology that theorizes the knotted interactions of the discursive and the material as restless, contingent, sometimes incessantly changing shapes and sometimes deeply sedimented” (ibid., 160). On the ontic level of social practices, Carpentier uses the notion of the assemblage which enables us to grasp “how the flows that characterize the social, with their endless range of possibilities to become fixated and to fixate, are arrested and channeled into particular combinations of the discursive and the material” (ibid., 161). While Carpentier maintains that materiality can only be meaningful within discourse, he adds that assemblages “have a materiality that invites for particular meanings to be attributed to them, and that dissuades other particular meanings from becoming attributed to them” (ibid., 164). This means that materials extend “an invitation to be discursified, or to be integrated in discourses, in always particular ways” (ibid.), for instance when a novel does not simply produce or determine meaning on its own, but when it invites the reader to identify with certain aspects of it or characters in it. Given that materiality is always already invested with meaning, “discourses impact on the production of materials, not only to give meaning to them but also to co-determine their materiality” (ibid.).

Apart from the invitation that the material extends to subjects to privilege the attribution of certain discourses to them over others, dislocation is another aspect that is central to the discursive-material knot. Dislocation is a central concept that has already been explained in the introduction of this thesis, but it is further elaborated here in light of its material aspects. As mentioned, Torfing has characterized dislocation as “the emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be represented, symbolized, or in other ways domesticated by the discursive structure – which is therefore disrupted” (Torfing 1999, 148). Carpentier insists that this dislocatory event is also material, not only discursive, referring to *material change* that would have the potential to dislocate a certain discourse: “[a]n event, in its materiality, dislocates a discourse because this discourse turns out to be unable to attribute meaning to the event, while the event simultaneously invites for its incorporation into this discourse” (2018a, 163). This type of dislocation is fairly evident in the case study of this thesis, namely the dislocation to the unity of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse that emerged as a result of Kosovo’s declaration of independence from 2008. This dislocation is material in that the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo have been present in Kosovo since 2008 (becoming even more sedimented with the UNMIK’s acknowledgment of their authoritative power to govern Kosovo in 2012), which materializes the discourse of Kosovo’s independence, i.e., Kosovo as a separate Republic, not a province of Serbia. Given that these institutions are a material effect of dislocatory discourses, they “invite” their incorporation into the dislocated

discourse, which is evident in the attempt to “bridge” this dislocatory event and incorporate it into the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse through the adoption of the Brussels agreement from 2013 (see Chapter 5). The *material change* that resulted from the gradual adaptation of different aspects of the Brussels agreement (although never implemented in its entirety) gradually foreclose the possibility of certain discourses (such as the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse) to be attributed to them, and privileged the attribution of alternative discourses, such as the discourse on Kosovo’s independence. If there are (relatively) functioning institutions in place in Northern Kosovo and otherwise that have been formed under the framework of the Republic of Kosovo, then it becomes ever more difficult to claim the opposite, namely that Kosovo is still a province of Serbia. This resulted in an attempt to “replace” one hegemonic project (maintaining the entire Kosovo as part of Serbia) with an alternative one in 2017 and 2018, namely the attempt to partition Northern Kosovo from the rest of Kosovo and incorporate it into the state framework of Serbia, while acknowledging the rest of Kosovo as independent, either formally or informally. Hence, material change is a gradual process and is always bound to the constitutive discourses that govern its materialization. This is why it is so important to look at both moments of attempting to suture the dislocation of Kosovo’s independence (the two myths I mentioned) and their effects on the unity of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse. The partition discourse of 2017 and 2018 would probably not have come about in the form that we know of, had it not been for the initial attempt to suture the dislocation with the Brussels agreement of 2013. It is the material change that resulted from the Brussels agreement – namely acknowledging and partially establishing the institutional authority of Kosovo central institutions in Northern Kosovo as well as the Southern “enclaves”¹² – and the *lack* of material change – namely establishing the A/CSM – that enabled the articulation of partition in the first place.

As for institutions, Marttila sees them through the lens of discursive sedimentation, which can be explained as a form of social “forgetting” of the contingency of discourses that helped institute them. Sedimentation “can to some extent explain the temporal stability of discourses and the social orders they motivated” (Marttila 2015, 63). Hence, institutionalization can be understood as a form of sedimentation, together with materialization and subjective internalization (habitualization). Institutions are formed in the process of discursive repetition and ritualization and can refer to “all kinds of social bodies with the socially accepted authority to sustain and implement the validity of particular discourses, regulate social access to subject roles, and sanction and control social subjects’

¹² For a more detailed discussion of Serbia’s institutional framework in the so-called enclaves in the South, see Dahlman and Williams (2010). The term is used to refer to areas in Kosovo south of the river Ibar with a homogeneous Serb population which are relatively institutionally independent from the Kosovo framework. However, this has begun to change with the adoption of the Brussels agreement in 2013 and nowadays, Serbs there tend to institutionally rely on the Kosovo state framework, except, for instance, when it comes to health or schooling.

adherence to presupposedly natural courses of both linguistic and pragmatic actions” (ibid., 65). Apart from institutions, bodies can also be considered as material (Carpentier 2018a), so the practices of homogenizing different bodies into specific ethnic and political groups can be considered as material practices. The same applies to bordering practices, in which material delineation (establishing walls, barricades etc.) is used to draw political frontiers between groups. Additionally, the materiality of certain places (such as Northern Kosovo) invites certain meanings to be attributed to them in a contingent manner (Carpentier 2018a), favoring the investment of certain meanings (such as partition) over others (such as integration into the Kosovo institutional framework). This will become evident in the course of the empirical analysis, especially in the ways that Serbia performs its claim to Kosovo (Chapter 5).

3.3 Affective Analysis

As a thread running through my analysis, apart from discursive/symbolic analysis (the *form* of discourses), I also explore the issue of affects, that is the *force* behind sustaining or challenging different discourses (*affective investment* in Laclaudian terms). As Laclau mentions, affect is not something *added* to signification, but any social whole “results from an indissociable articulation between signifying and affective dimensions” (Laclau 2005, 111). “Affect (that is, enjoyment [*jouissance*]) is the very essence of investment”, as Laclau (ibid., 115) continues. Similarly, Stavrakakis (2007, 21) points out that “[s]ymbolic power and authority finds its real support in the emotional dynamics of fantasy and (partial) enjoyment. Likewise, no social and political change can be effectively instituted if it is pursued merely at the level of knowledge, through transformations in consciousness.”

The prominent spot of affect in discourse analysis Stavrakakis (2017) explains with the following: “through the intervention of empty signifiers qua *objets petit a*, linguistic articulation acquires an extra dimension, which is necessary for its sedimentation and hegemonic appeal through its affective investment. This is how *jouissance* enters the picture to interact with language. Together, they produce discourse.” Given my previous elaboration of myths as empty signifiers anchoring imaginized discourses, affectivity is intrinsically tied to mythmaking inasmuch as for any myth to have an appeal for subjects, to “convince” them to subscribe to it in parallel to or instead of the dislocated structure, it needs to incite an affective response. This is why myths can “grip” subjects and why they become affectively invested in the discourses and fantasies promised by myths.

Glynos and Howarth introduce the analytical category of fantasmatic logic to explain how discourses grip subjects and motivate them to act. They are called fantasmatic because the analysis of this type of logic would primarily focus on fantasies that sustain certain discourses, on the beatific promises of such fantasies, and on the horrific consequences that loom if the promises are

not fulfilled (Glynos and Howarth 2007). As Glynos (2008a, 278.) mentions, “fantasmatic logics concern the force behind [signifying] operations. Fantasmatic logics thus contribute to our understanding of the resistance to change of social practices (the ‘inertia’ of social practices), but also the speed and direction of change when it does happen (the ‘vector’ of political practices).” Glynos and Howarth (2007) argue that a central aspect of maintaining a fantasmatic order is fantasy in Lacanian terms. As Glynos (2008a, 283) points out:

[T]he logic of fantasy names a narrative structure involving some reference to an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy). This narrative structure will have a range of features which will vary from context to context, of course, but one crucial element is the obstacle preventing the realization of one’s fantasmatic desire. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, realizing one’s fantasy is impossible because the subject (as a subject of desire) survives only insofar as its desire remains unsatisfied. But the obstacle, which often comes in the form of a prohibition or a threatening Other, transforms this impossibility into a ‘mere difficulty’, thus creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible. [...] In sum, the logic of such a fantasmatic narrative is such that it structures the subject’s desire by presenting it with an ideal as well as an impediment to the realization of that ideal.

The fantasy of a full closure of identity of a subject, which in the end can never be achieved fully, is what drives any political project further. For instance, the politics of utopia, as Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 261) have already recognized, provides an example of a narrative which promises to “[capture] our lost/impossible enjoyment”, offering fictions or “(imagarizations) of a future state in which the current limitations thwarting our enjoyment will be overcome.” More often than not, this lack of enjoyment is “attributed to someone who has ‘stolen it’”, for instance in nationalist narratives: “The identity of the evil ‘Other’ who prevents the nation from recouping the enjoyment it has lost shifts as a function of historical context. It may be a foreign occupier, [...], immigrants [...] etc. [...] [F]antasy fosters the solidarity of the national community, consolidates national identity, and animates national desire” (ibid., 262).

Adding to this, my case study demonstrates that the fantasy of restoring the full enjoyment of a social group both fosters a sense of national cohesion, or supports political articulations of the collective as a *nation*, and encompasses the constitution of a political “us” that is centered around a political party or a leader, which may or may not be ideological. This is the case with the aforementioned SNS, as will be explained in the empirical chapters.

Jouissance has already been explained in Chapter 2, but it is important to re-introduce it here in relation to the empirical analysis. The supposedly lost enjoyment of having Kosovo as part of Serbia, Kosovo as the cradle of Serbdom, is what fuels the identification with the Kosovo is Serbia discourse and why it still has such potency. The fantasy of “restoring” Kosovo promises to suture this primordial lack, to restore an enjoyment “we” once had. Ultimately, this promise is doomed

to fail since *jouissance* can never be fully attained and the lack in the subject (and by extension the community) never sutured, since it is an ontological condition of subjectivity itself. The promise of “restoring” Kosovo through attaching Northern Kosovo to Serbia and giving up the rest promises to fulfill a different fantasy: one that would solve all of Serbia’s problems, advance the country economically and secure its future within the European Union. The fantasmatic logic goes: if only we could attain Northern Kosovo instead of the lost cause of fighting for all of Kosovo, we would have it all – maintain at least part of Kosovo as Serbian, solve the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, prosper economically because of increased stability and investment, and secure EU membership in the near future. As Stavrakakis (2007, 196) argues, “almost all political discourse focuses on the delivery of the ‘good life’ or a ‘just society’, which are, both, fictions of a future state in which current limitations thwarting our enjoyment will be overcome.” Hence, the promise of restoring the once lost *jouissance* cannot be fulfilled, since there is always going to be a remainder of the dislocation or of antagonism present revealing the contingency of the neat structure the fantasy promises to bring, and the imaginized *jouissance* it promises to deliver. However, imaginized *jouissance* is not the only thing that sustains desire, but also the ability of political projects to deliver partial experiences of enjoyment of the body. Namely, in certain instances, the demands and desires of subjects subscribing to a certain project coincide, which is experienced as *jouissance* of the body (Lacan 1962, seminar of 2 May). These limit-experiences of bodily enjoyment on a national level can be a win for the national football team, or winning a war (Stavrakakis 2007, 197). In my case study, the conclusion of the Brussels agreement that the Serbian Government has described as a win for Serbia amidst international pressure, the so-called “Kosovo is Serbia” train that was sent from Belgrade to Mitrovica in 2017 incarnating the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, and the commemoration of the ethnically-motivated riots in Kosovo against mainly Kosovo Serbs on 17 March 2004 can be seen as experiences of partial enjoyment. They incite a bodily enjoyment because of defiance, because all of these practices defy and contest the dominant Kosovo Albanian perceptions on the statehood of Kosovo, on their sovereignty and on the righteousness of their efforts towards self-determination. This is also addressed in the empirical chapters.

Although fantasmatic logic is a dynamic process and identifying the structure of fantasies that underpin a given discourse is useful for analysis, Glynos and Howarth’s framework does not provide us with the tools to grasp affective signifiers used in discourse, which can explain why certain discourses have a significant emotive impact on subjects. This is why I bring Sara Ahmed’s (2004) cultural politics of emotion into the analysis, since it explains how words “stick” to bodies and material spaces and form them as affective objects, bringing about certain habitualized emotions attached to them each time they are articulated. Looking at the politics of emotion can

also help us to grasp how antagonistic Others are *re*-articulated into agonistic ones, and hence, how political frontiers are re-drawn.

Stavrakakis (2007) also draws parallels between discourse theory and Ahmed's (2004, 60) politics of emotion, who recognizes that "some words stick because they become attached *through* particular affects", operationalizing the notion of stickiness of emotions. Emotions in her Derridean reading emerge as signs, the repetition of which conceals their material and historic context of production – the sign, through repetition, becomes detached from its context, carrying traces of it. Certain words accumulate meaning via repetition over time, and through this repetition, they generate bodily affects which carry a specific bodily value or incite response. Emotions as signs "stick" to bodies and produce the "effects that they name" (ibid., 92), in a Butlerian sense. This is how bodies become grouped or labeled as dangerous, hostile, adversary etc., which is how the politics of emotion produces and re-draws frontiers between "us" and "them" – which will become particularly evident in my empirical chapters. The stickiness of emotions can also explain the sedimentation of affects attached not only to bodies, but also to material spaces such as Kosovo, which has been articulated as an emotionally important place for Serbs throughout history.

This leads us to a discussion of the structural (sedimented) aspect of affectivity, for which I rely on the concept of "structures of feeling", coined by Raymond Williams, which can be defined as "specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought [...]. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension" (Williams 2015, 23). Structures of feeling can be conceptualized as sedimented ways of feeling about a certain issue in society. The structures of feeling about Kosovo in Serbian political practice have mainly been about *love* for the holy land of Kosovo as a site of the origin of Serbian nationhood and statehood since medieval times. They have also been about the love for the remaining Serbian people there in the present, who are often articulated as defenders of everything that is Serbia and Serbian in Kosovo. These structures are also about the *honor* of defending Serbia and Serbian ideals in this holy land, or what has been referred to as Prince Lazar's pledge: a *pledge* not to give up Kosovo because giving it up would mean giving up a part of the soul of the Serbian nation. Additionally, *spite* (*inat* in Serbian) and *defiance* also form a part of these structures of feeling around Kosovo, as it explains why Serbs will never give it up: to spite the Kosovo Albanian struggle for self-determination, to spite and defy the hegemonic West, who have unjustifiably supported Kosovo's independence even contrary to international law. Spite relates to a discourse on geopolitical self-victimization of Serbia (see Vranić 2019), who has suffered under the unjust practices of great powers in their alignment with the politics of self-determination of Kosovo Albanians. What Vučić's counter-hegemonic project of partition from 2018 attempts to do is not only re-articulate the discursive-material

structures around Kosovo, but also the structures of feeling that constitute them. Vučić's call for "rationalizing" the Kosovo question evident in the internal dialogue from 2017 prompts a rethinking of the emotional attachment to Kosovo in Serbian politics.

These structures of feeling constitute any discourse, but like all structures, they are contingent, and looking into the politics of emotion that destabilizes these structures is key to understanding how subjects might disarticulate from them. It is also imperative to look at the fantasies that support such articulations, which is why I have brought all three concepts into the analysis as sensitizing concepts to analyze the social phenomena at hand.

What will follow in the next segment is a description of the research procedure I employed. I will also illuminate how traditional qualitative content analysis tools, as the Brussels school advocates, have been employed to categorize practices and form the two main analytic discourses, the community and the partition discourse (Chapters 5 and 6).

3.4 Methodological Premises of Discourse Theory and Research Procedure

In order to explain the methodological premises of discourse theory, I will rely on two significant works, Glynos and Howarth's (2007) *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* and Marttila's (2015) *Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis* that builds on Glynos and Howarth's work. Both have further developed the insights of discourse theory into methodological application. For instance, Glynos and Howarth (2007) have contrasted the contextualized self-interpretation that is typical of hermeneutic approaches with their own concepts of critical explanation – political, social and fantasmatic logics – which enable the researcher to "carve out a critical space external to, yet *within*, the practice or regime under study" (82), thus emphasizing that critical explanation always has "an ontical and an ontological impulse" (15) rooted in radical contingency and the incompleteness of any social order, which discourse theory argues for. The operation of logics is situated between contextualized self-interpretation and positivism, so we would not speak of causality nor of the subjective experience of reality, but rather of logics. Following on this, Marttila (2015) has pointed out a few methodological premises of post-foundational discourse analysis. This type of analysis is based on an understanding of the world that "denies the possibility of 'subjective' and 'immediate' experiences of reality and argues that every first encounter with an object is necessarily influenced by the socio-cultural context of that encounter" (*ibid.*, 105). It is also based on an assumption that there is a constitutive link between discourses and different subjects' practices of articulation. It implies that "all social practices – including the practices of scientific inquiry – are supported, motivated and rationalized against the background of explicit/implicit and acknowledged discourses" (*ibid.*, 110). What empirical research should mainly do, in Marttila's view, is "render visibility to the general discourse that determines subject roles' general context of

appearance and the particular order of discourse that conceptualizes a subject role” (ibid., 95). Such research should also be methodologically holistic, and one way to achieve this is to rely on a theory-driven construction of the studied phenomena, that is, to operationalize “theoretical propositions into corresponding analytical concepts and categories” (ibid., 112). Even though such methodological frameworks are theoretically motivated, it is important to bear in mind that the analytical grammar developed is also empirically applicable by sensitizing the theoretical concepts. This resonates with the work of the Brussels school, which calls for bringing in additional concepts if the empirical material reveals the necessity for them. These concepts are middle-range concepts, theory inspired but empirically malleable, which is also reflected in the emphasis on the politics of emotion and structures of feeling that I have advocated for above.

In terms of research procedure, Marttila (2015, Chapter 8) suggests that a researcher should start with problematizing, that is, identifying a research puzzle or a question that they want to answer. What follows is a first attempt to identify regimes of practice – as rather stable systems of practices that give rise to social structures – such as human and non-human, symbolic and material practices. From this, one can identify relatively regular patterns of practice that a limited group of subjects produce that can also be sedimented, like social imaginaries, institutional arrangements and hegemonic discourses. In this step, it will also become visible how discourses and material arrangements subjectivate various subjects into their subject roles/positions, and how and why these subjects might be attached to these discourses. Here, it is useful to refer to fantasmatic logic and specific fantasies that underpin any discourse. Lastly, the researcher would conduct a contents-related analysis of the compiled data, that is, identify how a discourse is structured through nodal points, empty and floating signifiers, fleeting and more stable articulations such as material ones, which is specifically useful when one is looking at contestations of meaning, such as those portrayed in this thesis. To identify discursive change, one would rather focus on de-stabilizations of meaning and articulatory practices instead of regimes of practice, because those regimes might not have been established yet. One would also pay attention to the shifting political frontiers in a discourse, for instance from antagonism to agonism and vice-versa.

In order to structure the empirical material around discourses, I have relied on a combination of identifying regimes of practice and qualitative content analysis techniques, for which I used a flexible coding scheme to identify articulations of the Other, the subject of contestation (Kosovo), nodal points such as “territory” or “the people” which anchor specific discourses, affective investment into discourses (for instance, when Kosovo is articulated as an emotional issue), etc. Building from my primary research question – how the Serbian Government re-articulated its claim to Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue – I observed in my data that in 2013, there was a relatively stable regime of articulating Kosovo as Serbian while at the same time recognizing that the Brussels

agreement opened up the possibility for recognizing the Albanian Other as a subject Serbia negotiates with, rather than an object of contestation in the negotiations. This prompted me to identify shifting political frontiers, with increasing articulations of the Albanian Other as an adversary instead of an enemy. The latter insight emerged through content analysis, since I coded for subjects and the ways the Other has been articulated. I additionally observed that in 2017 and 2018, the rapprochement that was made between Serbia and Kosovo in the Brussels dialogue was overshadowed by antagonistic articulations of the Albanian Other and a relatively stable regime of practice that was characterized by ethnic separation and calls for partition. The political logic driving this shift further had to do with issues of territoriality. Here, territory becomes contested as opposed to how to organize the lives of people living in Kosovo. Hence, I have termed these two dominant discourses the “community” and the “partition discourse” and organized my empirical chapters around them.

Following my content analysis, I have organized the empirical chapters along the dominant themes (that were often repeated by subjects and encountered in the material) that have emerged through coding: what nodal points anchor the “community” and “partition” discourse, what fantasies underpin the two discourses, how the dislocation was accommodated through two distinct myths, how articulatory claims to Kosovo have been performed in various discursive and material practices, how political frontiers were drawn through affective articulations, as well as how agonism was increasingly transformed into antagonism through articulating the conflict between the Serbs and Albanians as perennial and insurmountable, which in turn resulted in a more significant polarization of Serbian politics (and beyond) into two camps: those who supported the idea of partition and those who opposed it, who were discursively cast out of the political collective.

To illustrate this dynamic further in my empirical chapters, I have attempted to portray the most prominent articulations and subjects propagating them. I selected the quotes because they oftentimes condensed several themes into one or a few sentences, making them illustrative examples of larger claims and themes. As for validity, discourse-theoretical analysis relies on internal or introspective validation, since it rejects the belief that there is objectively “valid” scientific knowledge (see Marttila 2015). Hence, instead of claiming that my analysis is a “true” and objective representation of what “really” happened from 2012 to 2018, I aim to critically scrutinize and reflect on the conditions under which the data was selected and generated and the empirical results emerged. There is always a selection bias when discourse analysis is conducted, since the researchers themselves choose what data to use and “identify” certain discourses over others that they might deem more important or representative in their own assessment of the social phenomena they study.

Hence, the following and last subchapter will be devoted to my selection methods and data used. I will portray the manner in which I collected my empirical material and explain my motivation for relying on that specific material. I will also devote attention to the implications of using media material as representational and problematize the relation between media- and government-produced texts. I will also give a more detailed illustration of my coding scheme and illustrate how the codes can even be used quantitatively to say something more about the discursive shifts that occurred from 2013 to 2018.

3.5 Data Collection and Approach to Data

In my analysis, I relied on official EU, UN and government documents that are relevant to the Brussels dialogue, Serbia's EU integration process and Serbia's position towards Kosovo. These range from the official EU membership negotiation framework, such as Chapter 35, progress reports, the so-called Brussels agreement (officially called the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations) and all subsequent agreements reached in Brussels (59 documents in the corpus). I also relied on documents from Serbia's institutional framework, such as the Constitution, several parliamentary declarations on Kosovo being Serbia, as well as government decisions and platforms (26 documents in the corpus). Most of this material is available online, with a few exceptions of documents I gathered during my visit to the Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija in November 2017. Since these documents do not provide insight into the contestation of meaning that helped institute them, I rely on the public discourse given by the media, which also helps me map out all relevant actors. For this, I relied on two media sources: firstly, the most watched news TV program in Serbia, the second *Dnevnik* (*Dnevnik 2*) airing on the public broadcaster RTS (*Radio-televizija Srbije*) every day at 19:30; secondly, the online news outlet *Danas*. Both outlets have publicly available online archives, which I went through manually to collect the material. The final corpus consists of 844 transcripts of individual shows from *Dnevnik 2*, and 4842 written news stories from *Danas*, all relating to or mentioning Kosovo, from July 2012 (when the Ivica Dačić-led government was formed together with a majority won by the SNS), to December 2018 (when the Brussels dialogue was put on hold for another two years, only to be reactivated in summer 2020). Additionally, for more context, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with subjects involved in the dialogue on Kosovo, namely the former directors of the Serbian team Borko Stefanović and Marko Đurić, as well as the head of the parliamentary group on Kosovo Milovan Drecun and one former representative of the Serbian community in Kosovo gathered around Srpska lista, Ljubomir Marić. In my researcher's capacity, I also visited Northern Kosovo in June 2017 and July 2019 to map out the field and get a better sense of the political climate there.

The reason I chose media sources as my material instead of conducting more thorough field work was motivated by the theoretical and analytical framework employed in this thesis. As Marttila (2015) mentions, “all social practices – including the practices of scientific inquiry – are supported, motivated and rationalized against the background of explicit/implicit and acknowledged discourses” (ibid., 110). What empirical research should mainly do, in Marttila’s view, is to “render visibility to the general discourse that determines subject roles’ general context of appearance and the particular order of discourse that conceptualizes a subject role” (Marttila 2015, 95). So called “public discourses” are particularly relevant. They emerge in mostly open social settings and circulate in public media, such as TV shows, newspapers, social media etc. These public discourses give a significant number of subjects from a range of fields the opportunity to perform practices of articulation that are constitutive of certain discourses (ibid., 179). They also convey generally accepted values and norms, that is, sedimented meanings, that different subjects might adhere to (ibid., 181). Hence, using media texts as a source allows the researcher to determine precisely the general discourses that are constitutive of different subject positions and render visible the different sedimented and articulatory practices these subjects adhere to and perform. Of course, the media are not just one of many social spheres where discourses “circulate” but are also “[discursive] machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social phenomena” (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007, 274). As mentioned at the beginning, seeing institutions as part of the discourse implies that media are also a part of it. Consequently, using *specific* media outlets as a source necessarily implies a certain representation of objectivity that might not be present in other media outlets. The media itself attain certain subject positions within broader discourses and choose to represent ideological views aligned with those positions, but this does not imply that the media are defenseless against the influx of such ideological views. As Carpentier (2008, 32-33) suggests, the specificity of certain media should be considered, particularly those who position themselves as independent organizations. Thus, as I am conducting a discourse-theoretical analysis, studying representations is inevitable and the media outlets were chosen because of their position in the wider field of political contestation around Kosovo in Serbia. Namely, *Dnevnik 2* can be deemed to represent the views of the ruling parties and the Government particularly well. Additionally, it is also the most viewed information program in the Serbian media landscape (Živanović 2017, in Danas, 12 December), even though it has become the target of criticism in more recent years for being extremely partial to representing the political messages of the ruling SNS party. This makes an even stronger argument to use it as a source, due to the constant flow of articulations on Kosovo by the SNS that *Dnevnik 2* chooses to transmit. On the other hand, *Danas* offers a counterweight to the *Dnevnik* outlet, since it represents the critical voices against the regime very well and views itself as constitutive of the opposition movement in Serbia. It is used also in case that *Dnevnik 2* omits messages that would be critical of the regime’s politics towards Kosovo.

Other outlets could have been chosen, but only *Dnevnik 2* and *Danas* have consistently held their position as pro- and anti-regime outlets throughout the entire period of analysis and have offered unobstructed access to their archives.

As for my approach to data, I first collected and manually transcribed all parts of *Dnevnik 2* shows available from their online archive which refer to Kosovo during the period mentioned, and all the news articles relating to Kosovo from the “Politics” section of the *Danas* archive, also for the relevant period, and saved them on the University of Helsinki online server in OneDrive. I also collected all relevant national and international documents pertaining to Kosovo and the Brussels dialogue and saved them in the same OneDrive folder. Subsequently, I uploaded my entire corpus into Atlas.ti, a program for qualitative data analysis that allows coding, and coded my data along a basic content analysis scheme. I coded for subjects, including specific ones which are frequently found in the material, such as “Subject RS: Vučić”, “Subject EU: Ashton”, “Subject KS: Thaçi” etc. I also maintained some general designations for subjects, such as “Subject: EU” or “Subject: UN”, when I deemed that they would be only used for contextual analysis. I also coded for particular performative moments and articulations, such as “Local elections” in Kosovo, when they were first held in 2013 and 2017 subsequently, or “A/CSM” whenever the Association/Community was mentioned in connection to other signifiers such as the “Judiciary”, or “Energy”, both of which are part of the Brussels agreement. All of these moments and articulations can be considered as being nodal points, the most frequent of which that I coded in my material were “EU integration”, which includes mentions on the Brussels dialogue (182 mentions of the codes combined), “The People” (103 mentions) and the “A/CSM” (63 mentions), or codes related to territoriality, such as “Northern Kosovo” (91 mentions), “Territory” (42 mentions), or “Compromise” (98 mentions) and “Partition” (70 mentions). I also coded for different articulations of Kosovo, for instance “Sharing Kosovo”, “Kosovo is Serbia” etc., emotions and affective articulations such as “Love for Kosovo”, “We will go to war over Kosovo” etc. Attention has also been paid to antagonistic and agonistic articulations of the Other, not only Serbian hegemonic actors and their articulation of Albanians and other Others, but also how Kosovo Albanians articulate the Serb community, which creates a reference point and counterweight for the Serbian actors’ articulations. Once I conducted the first round of coding, I moved on to writing up the analysis but I have frequently returned to the data in the process to expand the coding scheme in a second round, consolidating or expanding on some codes. The coding has allowed me to find data I was looking for quickly and given the fact that I also coded for the subjects who articulated them, relate the data to the subjects. This also allowed me to assess how dominant certain subjects were in the analysis, comparing both political moments of 2012-2013 and 2017-2018. For instance, President Vučić was by far the most prominent articulatory

subject in 2018 (181 code mentions), and a transition can also be recognized from 2017 when Prime Minister Ana Brnabić or Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić were also proportionally heard more (since the 2017 dataset is smaller than the 2018). In 2017, Dačić was coded 16 times, and Brnabić 6 times, in relation to Vučić being coded 55 times. By contrast, in 2018, Dačić was coded 27 times, and Brnabić 8 times, in relation to the 181 times Vučić was coded. In other words, in 2017, for every 3.43 mentions of Vučić, there was one mention of Dačić, while in 2018, for every 6.7 mentions of Vučić, there was one mention of Dačić. Compared to 2013, a wider range of subjects could be identified, for instance Dačić and Vučić were mentioned, as well as former President Tomislav Nikolić or Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar Vulin, all on a similar footing in terms of frequency (Nikolić mentioned 35 times, Dačić 68 times, Vučić 39 times, and Vulin 21 times). When looking at the overall dataset, Vučić is by far the most dominant subject behind articulations of Kosovo, with 285 code mentions altogether. In 2012/2013, the Albanian Other was articulated agonistically more frequently, where a call for peace and co-existence was recognizable (9 mentions of agonism related to 25 mentions of antagonism), while in 2017/2018, this turned into an antagonistic articulation where a call for absolute separation, ethnic and territorial, was visible (8 mentions of agonism related to 55 mentions of antagonism).

The fact that I coded for a range of articulations of Kosovo allowed me to portray exactly the way Serbian hegemonic subjects in the analysis referred to Kosovo: the term “Kosovo and Metohija” is exclusively used when referring to Kosovo and denotes its belonging to Serbia, since even under the Constitution, Kosovo is described as a province with the additional designation of Metohija. This term embodies Serbia’s hegemonic claim to this territory and designates a specific “reading” of the situation and Kosovo’s claim to independence, rendering it illegitimate. When Serbian hegemonic subjects do articulate the term “Kosovo” to designate the territory, it is almost exclusively with the prefix “takozvano” (which translates to “so-called”), reifying the illegitimacy of Kosovo’s independence and, so to speak, “casting out” this term to be part of the antagonistic discourse of Kosovo Albanians.

4 The Kosovo Imaginary in Serbia and its Re-articulation within the Brussels Dialogue as a Political Contact Zone

This chapter focuses on the context that my analysis is embedded in, while simultaneously bridging the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis through analytical insights from the material. That is, the re-articulation of what Kosovo means for Serbian state political practice occurs against the background of already sedimented discourses that are hegemonic, such as the mentioned “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which a significant portion of Chapter 5 is devoted to. On the other hand, before I can portray the rest of my analysis, I need to unpack the nodal points of the Kosovo social imaginary in Serbia. After that I will move on to explain how it draws from other discourses with which it intersects, such as the discourse of self-victimization in Serbia, especially its element of Kosovo being “stolen” from Serbia by international powers backing Kosovo’s claim for independence. Another discourse entangled in this web is the supposedly historic animosity between Serbs and Albanians, mainly over the claim to the territory of Kosovo, as well as the dominant mnemonic discourse of the wars of the 1990s, in which the quest of Kosovo Albanians for independence is articulated as illegitimate, with the year 1999 construed as a traumatic moment for Serbian nationhood when Kosovo was placed under UN protection and administration. I have recognized both of those discourses in my material, which is why they are elaborated below. After that, I move on to explain what Serbia’s claim to and ownership of Kosovo precisely entails within the context of its EU integration process, finishing with an elaboration of the Brussels dialogue through the lens of a “contact zone”. As such, the Brussels dialogue brings together various actors with different hegemonic subject positions and constrains as well as enables their field of action.

4.1 The Nodal Points of the Kosovo Imaginary in Serbia and its Intersecting Discourses

What I term the Kosovo imaginary in this thesis refers to a broad array of discourses related to Kosovo that form the horizon of meanings and political practice in Serbia. Generally, it is important to start the discussion on the importance of Kosovo in Serbia with the introduction of the Kosovo myth mentioned in Chapter 1. Some scholars refer to the Kosovo myth as a specific historically situated narrative surrounding the Battle of Kosovo from 1389, found in Church literature and vernacular poetry that has been transmitted via oral tales through generations (see e.g., Bakić-Hayden 2004; Čolović 2017; Pavlović 2019). In these tales, Kosovo is considered to be a place in which the faith of the early Serbian nationhood and statehood was decided, in which the leader of the Serb forces Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović gave up earthly control over Kosovo over securing an eternal place in Heaven for all Serbs and their ancestors (see Čolović 2017). These tales

surrounding the Battle have been used in several politically important moments in history to justify Serbia's claim to the territory of Kosovo, evident in the well-known speech by Slobodan Milošević commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1989 – a moment which cemented Milošević's grip on power and re-articulated Serbia's claim to Kosovo in the wake of Yugoslav disintegration. The 1980s were especially instrumental in reviving a discourse on Kosovo's importance for Serbian national identity, which is particularly evident in the famous Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) from 1986. In the Memorandum, the intellectual elite of Serbia called attention to the "persecution and expulsion" of Serbs from Kosovo, which, together with other factors such as the discrimination of Serbs and Serbia within the context of Yugoslavia, was destabilizing the entire country (Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences 1986). This was an implicit call for a nationalization policy about Kosovo, which came to be realized under Milošević and culminated in the Kosovo war of 1998-1999. Still today, following the wars of Yugoslav succession from the 1990s, as well as Kosovo's declaration of independence from 2008, the claim to Kosovo resonates strongly in Serbian political discourse, particularly its policy about Kosovo.

Since the famous Serbian writer Matija Bećković characterized Kosovo as the "dearest" or "most precious" Serbian word (*Kosovo je najskuplja srpska reč*), this claim has become a sedimented repertoire of Serbian nationalist politicians regarding Kosovo. Kosovo is regarded as the origin of the Serbian medieval state, the stuff of Serbian nationalism (Bieber 2002) and still today, it plays a significant role in conceptions of self-identity of the Serbian political collective (see Čolović 2017; Daskalovski 2003; Ejdus and Subotić 2014; Pavlović 2019, Vujačić 2015). Kosovo refers to a territory, a place, that is considered an integral part of the Serbian state, not only today, but also throughout history; it is equally considered as an ontological, symbolic¹³ space onto which conceptions of "Serbdom" and Serbian nationhood can be projected (Ejdus 2020). Hence, this thesis argues that the Kosovo social imaginary acts as a "foundation" or a horizon of meaning that structures political practices in Serbia since Milošević – what can be officially articulated, practiced in terms of policy, as well as questioned and felt. **The nodal points of the Kosovo imaginary** mapped out as a discourse include: the notion of the territory of Kosovo being Serbian (and Serbia's); a historic right to that territory; the Serbian people who live there, who have lived and died there, constituting the territory as eternally Serbian, even if it is not under direct sovereign control of Serbia; and the so-called Kosovo pledge, which Prince Lazar's army took before going

¹³ It is important to point out that the use of the word "symbolic" in this chapter does not relate to the Lacanian order of the Symbolic, which would encompass all signifying practices (discourse as Symbolic order, elaborated in Chapter 2). Rather, it relates to discursive practices which are detached from their material conditions of possibility, having no desire to translate them into material practices, or in Laclau's (1990) words, into "objective spatiality". It is a **metaphoric** use of Kosovo, to designate a metaphoric space or a metaphoric claim to it.

into battle against the Ottomans to give their lives defending Kosovo – a pledge that often gets re-articulated in current political practice as a vow to never give up Kosovo, and fight for Kosovo with whatever means necessary and most importantly, united as a political and national collective. The pledge is also a story of betrayal, in which, according to the legend, one of Lazar's allies, Vuk Branković, betrays him before the battle and never shows up, resulting in the Serb forces' demise against the Ottomans. While traditionally the Kosovo myth is not about a place, but about a battle that occurred in a specific place, the Kosovo imaginary relies heavily on Serbia's claims to the place, not only the symbolic space of Kosovo. These nodal points are affectively invested with different emotions. The "structures of feeling" about Kosovo in Serbian political discourse have mainly been about *love* for the holy land as a site of the origin of Serbian nationhood and statehood since medieval times, as well as love for the remaining Serbian people there, who are often articulated as defenders of everything that is Serbia and Serbian in Kosovo. These affective structures are also about the *honor* of defending Serbia and Serbian ideals in this holy land and relate to the lesson about betrayal, anchoring a *pledge* not to give it up, because giving it up would mean giving up a part of the soul of the Serbian nation. Additionally, *spite (inat)* and *defiance* also anchor the same promise: in order to spite the hegemonic West, Serbs will never give up Kosovo, because the West has supported Kosovo's independence even contrary to international law. Spite relates to a discourse on geopolitical self-victimization of Serbia (see Vranić 2019), which has suffered under the unjust practices of great powers in their alignment with the Kosovo Albanian politics of self-determination.

Discourses on Kosovo, it can be argued, are some of those discourses with the most mobilizing potential to unify the different voices in the Serbian political landscape – as evident in Milošević's re-articulation of the Kosovo myth as the founding moment of Serbian nationalist politics since the late 1980s and 1990s. Vranić (2019, 259) has characterized Kosovo as the Serbian "populist potato", pointing out that the case of Kosovo has been "[t]he strongest link between populism, territorial grievances and party mobilization strategies in Serbia over the past twenty-five years" (ibid., 262). Ejodus (2020, 40) has also argued that political elites in Serbia have made Kosovo "the epicenter of the very idea of Serbia" and have constructed it as Serbia's ontic space. Even the "internal dialogue" on Kosovo from 2017 and 2018 (supposed to re-calibrate Serbia's approach to Kosovo), has only served for further nationalist mobilization, as Ejodus argues (ibid., 143). Hence, even today, this mythical narrative has been re-articulated and embedded into different political practices of the Serbian state – the claim over the physical place and ontological space of Kosovo is inscribed into different institutions, the Constitution, parliamentary declarations, its reiteration in public discourse, all of which is condensed in the articulation that "Kosovo is Serbia". I will return to the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse which is structured by the Kosovo imaginary in Chapter

5, but for now, it suffices to illuminate the material effects of the demand that Kosovo is Serbia. This is most evident in the institution with the highest legal authority in Serbia – its Constitution of 2006. The preamble to the Constitution (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2006) states that citizens of Serbia adopt it based on the following:

Considering the state tradition of the Serbian people and equality of all citizens and ethnic communities in Serbia, Considering also that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of Serbia, that it has the status of a substantial autonomy within the sovereign state of Serbia and that from such status of the Province of Kosovo and Metohija follow constitutional obligations of all state bodies to uphold and protect the state interests of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija in all internal and foreign political relations.

Not only is Kosovo and Metohija – a signifier that differs from the word “Kosovo” used to designate the political practice of Kosovo Albanian authorities which Serbia does not recognize in the legal sense (see Chapter 3) – an integral Serbian territory, but the Constitution also obliges the entire institutional system of Serbia to work towards upholding this assumption and defending such Serbian interests both in Kosovo and abroad.

Given the strong mobilizing potential of Kosovo discourses and their sedimentation in various discursive and material practices in the political arena, any attempt to re-articulate their elements must occur against the background of their embeddedness and intersection with other related discourses, such as the discourse on a historic and timeless animosity between Serbs and Albanians (see Čolović 2002; Mertus 1999; Zdravković 2005). This has increasingly come into focus since the Kosovo war and Kosovo’s proclamation of independence. The conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo has often been characterized as a conflict over territory, since both parties lay claim to it (see Bieber 2003; Daskalovski 2003; Guzina 2003; Stefanović 2005). This is also visible in empirical Chapters 5 and 6, in which the nodal point of “territory” is articulated in connection to the “Serbian people” in Kosovo. This “struggle” over Kosovo has been evident in different interpretations of the same events, or different “truths on Kosovo” (see Guzina 2003). For instance, there is the issue of “who was there first”, by which Kosovo Albanians rely on an interpretation of Illyrian origin which would precede the Serbs’ claim to having lived in the region since as early as the 7th century (Daskalovski 2003). The same logic applies to the end of the Balkan wars and WWI in the second decade of the 20th century, which Serbs frame as a rightful re-integration of Kosovo as part of Serbia after centuries of Ottoman rule, while Albanians see this move as an occupation and invasion of historically predominantly populated Albanian lands. But most importantly, remembering the most recent Kosovo war of 1998-99 exacerbates the animosity paradigm even more, since for the most part, this event is a part of lived history in which not only debates about the historic “truth” of the events that took place, but also about who has the moral authority on the matter. In this context, it is important to mention the ethnic violence that occurred

on 17 March 2004, in which Kosovo Albanian rioters committed violence through large-scale attacks that quickly turned against Kosovo Serbs, their property and religious sites. As a result of the riots, the International Crisis Group (2004) reported that about 4,500 people were displaced, numerous private Kosovo Serb, Ashkali and Roma properties were destroyed and over 30 Orthodox religious sites were damaged or destroyed. This has been termed the March pogrom in Serbia and is commemorated by a school class and a public minute of silence. The re-articulation and commemoration of the pogrom constitutes Albanians as violent and connects to the discourse on self-victimization in Serbia. At the same time, references to crimes committed by Albanians are used as a strategy of comparative victimization (see Gordy 2013, 6), pointing out that the other side has also committed atrocities and functioning as a type of denial or avoidance of one's own crimes.

In this context, the Kosovo Albanians see their war of liberation as morally justified, fought against a stronger and oppressive enemy with a guerilla army (the Kosovo Liberation Army – KLA), while the Serbs label the KLA as a terrorist organization and emphasize the legitimacy of defending Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the Serbs in Kosovo. Both parties also overemphasize the number of their victims and displaced persons, while pushing to the background the legitimate claims of the other party – something which occurs both in vernacular and official discourse (see Zdravković 2005; Zdravković-Zonta 2009). The discourse of self-victimization in Serbia is not only evident in the different articulations of the past, but it also relates to the notion of unfair treatment by the international community, which has illegitimately occupied Kosovo in the aftermath of the war (Spasojević 2016) and is sympathetic only to the suffering of the Kosovo Albanians, creating a context in which Serbs' victimhood is potentially not legitimate (Zdravković-Zonta 2009). This will also be thematized in Chapter 6, alongside an articulation of the international community as siding with the Kosovo Albanians in their quest for international recognition by the UN. Here, of course, the view of the international community is nuanced to other and outcast Western European powers, while Russia and China are articulated as supporters of Serbia's politics of de-recognition and vouch for Resolution 1244 to be upheld in the UN Security Council, guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia. Serbia's inability to accomplish anything substantial in their efforts to preserve Kosovo within Serbia is often attributed to this "conspiracy" by the Western powers.

Apart from the intersecting discourses mentioned (discourse on self-victimization, and the historic animosity between Serbs and Albanians) it is important to emphasize that the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse that entails Serbia's territorial claim to Kosovo is also embedded in the European integration process of Serbia. This is the case specifically because the Brussels dialogue has initiated a re-articulation of Serbia's claim to Kosovo, as I will explain in the sections below. Within this

process, a tendency to substitute one social imaginary with another can be recognized, namely the Kosovo imaginary being in specific moments substituted with an imaginary of EU integration structuring the field of intelligibility, when EU integration is articulated as taking precedence over “preserving” Kosovo. Consequently, one fantasy (that Kosovo is Serbia) underpinning the former imaginary is substituted with another one, namely the beatific fantasy that once Serbia solves its “Kosovo question”, an economically prosperous future awaits as part of the European Union. I will deal with this in detail in Chapter 6, but for now, it suffices to explore the contextual importance of Serbia’s European integration process and its connection to the Brussels dialogue.

4.2 From a “Technical” to a “Political” Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina

After Kosovo’s declaration of independence from February 2008, Serbia immediately reacted domestically and internationally. Domestic measures against the declaration, some of which were adopted a few months before the declaration, included resolutions and decisions of the Serbian Parliament from 2007 (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2007a; 2007b), 2010 (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2010), and 2011 (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2011). These resolutions had a very strong focus on international law principles, such as the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and Resolution 1244, taken as defense of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. International measures included a request to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to deliver an advisory opinion on whether Kosovo’s declaration of independence was contrary to international law. The ICJ reached a verdict on 22 July 2010 and delivered its opinion on the *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence In Respect of Kosovo*, which stated that the declaration was not contrary to international law. This opinion raised some uncertainties within the international community, as the Court left unclear whether the declaration was an official act of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) or not. Serbia’s main argument was that the Kosovo PISG declaring independence exceeded the authority given to them by the UNMIK Constitutional Framework. In fact, the Court determined it was issued by “representatives of the people of Kosovo” (International Court of Justice 2010, 406, 448) acting outside the established PISG, with no clear definition of whether Kosovo was a state or not. Even though the Court’s opinion provided some answers, it left unanswered the most important ones, such as the issue of statehood.¹⁴

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of why Serbia chose to formulate its question the way it did and what the Serbian Government had to gain from this, see Ker-Lindsay, James. 2015. “Explaining Serbia’s decision to go to the ICJ.” In *The Law and Politics of the Kosovo Advisory Opinion*, edited by Marko Milanović and Michael Wood, 9-20. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The edited book provides additional insight into the whole process of reaching the opinion and the international and domestic political practices that preceded it and proceeded from it.

After the decision, Serbia submitted under EU pressure a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly (GA) in which they called for new negotiations on Kosovo and on 9 September 2010, the GA adopted Resolution 64/298 (United Nations General Assembly 2010) that welcomed “the readiness of the European Union to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties [Serbia and Kosovo].” The dialogue was supposed to be “a factor for peace, security and stability in the region” and “promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people” (ibid.). With this broad scope in mind, the official EU-mediated talks began in March 2011 and came to be known as the Brussels dialogue, or, in official EU discourse, the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. They started with the negotiations on “technical issues”, aligned with the abovementioned principles of improving the lives of the people. This meant, as Visoka and Doyle (2016) explain, that technical or practical aspects of cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo were emphasized in the dialogue, instead of grand narratives of reconciliation or brotherhood. Larger political questions were broken down into “low-level” political and technical issues and these technical agreements ranged from the issues of freedom of movement, cadastral records, civil registry books, customs stamps and integrated border/boundary management, to regional representation and other agreements (Gashi, Musliu and Orbie 2017). However, as already recognized by many scholars (Bieber 2015; Gashi, Musliu and Orbie 2017; Visoka and Doyle 2016), the technical dialogue could only accomplish so much, since the negotiations often seemed to end up at a point at which the *status* question played a significant role. An issue that brought the dialogue to a halt was the crisis that started in July 2011 in North Kosovo and concerned the failed implementation of the integrated border/boundary management deal which resulted in the erection of roadblocks by local Kosovo Serbs. As noted by Bieber (2015), the implementation of the agreements reached in Brussels relied not only on high representatives of both Serbia and Kosovo, but also on Kosovo Serbs. Thus, after the dialogue came to a halt during the North Kosovo crisis and was prolonged by parliamentary elections in Serbia in 2012, the dialogue was resumed by the newly elected SNS-majority government in Serbia and discussions began on involving heads of states and later governments into the dialogue as well. The dialogue needed new impetus, as discussions on technical issues were not enough. Each technical issue was political as well, for instance whether, or to what extent, the crossing between Northern Kosovo and Serbia proper would be called or put to practice as a border. This also concerned the question whether or to what extent customs duty was levied on goods and whether this would mean that Serbia would recognize Kosovo as a separate customs entity, or a state.

It is important to point out that the reading of “political dialogue” by the Serbian authorities is not the same as its reading by EU representatives, or Kosovo Albanian authorities. For instance, the EU has its mandate under UN Resolution 64/298, which clearly states what the scope of the

dialogue is (albeit very broadly), as mentioned above, and in this understanding, no negotiations on status were to take place, since Kosovo had already declared independence, which was deemed not to be contrary to international law. Kosovo authorities, on the other hand, interpret the political dialogue as a means to an end, which was achieving full independence and UN state recognition. For Serbia, the engagement in the “political dialogue” has always been about the status question, trying to settle on a shared meaning regarding the territoriality of Kosovo, preferably within Serbia. As Tomislav Nikolić, the former President of Serbia said in late 2012, when Serbia expressed interest to engage in the dialogue on the highest level: “We want to first and foremost talk about the status, because we do not recognize Kosovo’s independence. You [the EU and International organizations] do not recognize that there is any other status except independence, so we ask what kind of talks should we be engaging in [if not on status]?” (Dnevnik 2, 26.09.2012, 12:00).

The issue of status, or the territoriality of Kosovo has played a big role in the context of Serbia’s EU integration process, specifically Serbia’s manifold representations of Kosovo in official discourse, for instance simultaneously as status-neutral within the framework of UN Resolution 1244, as part of Serbia within the Constitutional framework, and occasionally as a separate entity with limited international subjectivity under Kosovo Albanian rule. This is not a surprise since the political contestation around Kosovo is still ongoing so there are inevitably going to be opposing meanings simultaneously present and “fighting” for hegemony. This will be further discussed in the next segment, specifically the relations between Serbia’s claim to and ownership of Kosovo and its EU integration process.

4.3 The Brussels Dialogue and Serbia’s EU Integration Process

The Brussels dialogue does more than follow the UN GA’s resolution after the ICJ’s opinion, in an effort to find a mode for the final settlement of the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo. The Brussels dialogue is also inscribed into the fabric of Serbia’s EU integration process, as evident in Chapter 35 of its *acquis*. Chapter 35, or the “Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo*¹⁵” (European Commission 2015) postulates that

the advancement of Serbia’s EU accession negotiations will be guided by Serbia’s progress in preparing for accession, which will be measured in particular against Serbia’s continued engagement towards a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo, as well as the other requirements contained in point 23 of the Negotiating Framework.

¹⁵ The EU has adapted a way of referring to Kosovo from a “status-neutral” perspective by adding an asterisk whenever Kosovo is first mentioned in an EU document. The asterisk refers to the following: “This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN SC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.” However, in other discursive practice within the EU this can look quite different, since the majority of EU member states have recognized Kosovo as an independent state.

Chapter 35 acts as a link between the Brussels dialogue and Serbia's EU accession process: whether Serbia will eventually join the EU will depend on, among other things, its full normalization of relations with Kosovo. This is why the role of the EU can be defined as hegemonic in these contestations on Kosovo, and not simply a neutral one. Neutrality in political practice hardly ever exists, since power is always at play between those seeking to join the EU and the EU itself. Even though membership is voluntary, non-membership is hardly a choice since Serbia is already very much dependent on EU economic cooperation, aid provided by the EU, as well as political cooperation and the role of the EU as a guarantor of stability in the Balkans, especially after the wars of Yugoslav succession. All these issues are important when we talk about Serbia's engagement in the Brussels dialogue as a means of advancing into the EU. There is always a level of political pressure performed on Serbia to comply with the *acquis*, specifically Chapter 35 because it would have implications for the stability of and security in the Balkans, which the EU has an incentive to maintain.

On the other hand, what the full "normalization of relations" means is an open question: it acts essentially as an empty signifier, driving further Serbia's political project of joining the EU, but not having a stabilized point of reference. The full normalization of relations can be compared with the signifier "solution" which the Serbian Government often tends to use when speaking about this process. Thus, it is possible to fill these signifiers with various contents with sometimes entirely opposing meanings, depending on what discourse these meanings are part of. For instance, in Serbia the full normalization of relations (or a solution) can mean either the highest level of autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia, with Northern Kosovo as an autonomous region within an autonomous region, or it can mean the partition of Kosovo into a Serb-majority and Albanian-majority populated part. It can also mean the formal non-recognition of Kosovo as a state, with full *de jure* separation of governance between Serbia and Kosovo, where the status question would not be problematized at all (the so-called model of "two Germanys", which will be addressed in Chapter 6). In Kosovo, on the other hand, the normalization of relations can mean entirely different things, for instance attainment of full statehood as recognized by all UN states, including or excluding Serbia. Lastly, for the EU, it can mean a permanent and stable, mutual consensual, legally regulated relationship between Serbia and Kosovo, be it through formal recognition or not. This is why this signifier can also be conceived of as a floating signifier, since it acquires different meanings in different discourses.

This only illustrates that the Brussels dialogue is a complex phenomenon that not only serves as a means of settling the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo on an international level, within the UN and amongst UN member states, where crucial international law principles are debated, such as sovereignty, or the right to self-determination. It also serves as a vehicle for bringing both Serbia

and Kosovo closer to the EU and improving the relations between them, which is not only an incentive for the two states, but also for the EU.

4.4 Ownership of and Claim to Kosovo in Serbia's Official Discourse

All issues related to the Brussels dialogue as part of Serbia's EU integration process raised in the previous subchapter are connected to the dominant discourses on the importance of Kosovo as a physical place and symbolic space for both Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.¹⁶ One area in which these two representations of importance meet is Northern Kosovo, as it is an arena where symbolic and physical space entangle. Symbolically, Northern Kosovo bears importance for the Serbian nationalist project because the claim to Kosovo is fully realized there, since the "Serbian people" live on "Serbian land": Northern Kosovo is predominantly Serb-populated and still has Serbian state structures in place, where Serbia can exert some form of governance. Northern Kosovo is neither the only place in Kosovo where Serbs live, nor is it the place of the most important religious sites that are located in central and Southern Kosovo. However, due to its proximity to Serbia proper, adjacent to the border, and the fact that Serbia has some form of governance over this area, it becomes contested. Thus, the issue of territoriality, i.e., Northern Kosovo as a territory that Serbia can control, is essential. I have dealt with the issue in terms of Serbia performing statehood in Northern Kosovo elsewhere (see Vulović 2020). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, two nodal points of the Kosovo imaginary are the claim to territory and the Serb people in that territory, which inevitably entangle in Northern Kosovo. Kosovo is considered as the origin of Serbian *nationhood* firstly because of the well-known Kosovo myth in which Prince Lazar has ensured an eternal place in the heavenly kingdom for the Serb people by losing the Battle of Kosovo. Secondly, Kosovo is constituted as Serbian because Serbia is where Serb victims lie buried, with so many Serb lives having been laid down for Kosovo throughout history. Ejodus (2020, 52) has referred to Kosovo as metaphorically being constructed as both Serbia's cradle and its tomb. Kosovo is also where Serb people (still) live, not only lie buried. Since Serb people live in Kosovo today, and are particularly numerous and homogeneous in Northern Kosovo, Kosovo would still be considered Serbian. It is also considered as the origin of Serbian *statehood* because the Serbian medieval kingdom under the Nemanjić dynasty originated in the very place of today's Kosovo, particularly the Metohija region (which is not in the North), where many medieval Serb monasteries are still located today. This means that the ownership over the symbolic space of Kosovo in the Serbian nationalist discourse (the claim of the origin of Serbian nationhood and statehood)

¹⁶ It is also symbolically important for the international community, or at least certain powers in the international community, because of the symbolic weight Kosovo has in breaking with previously dominant international legal principles, for instance, territorial integrity, self-determination, intervention.

coincides with the claim over physical place of today's Kosovo (the claim that Kosovo is still Serbia or the "heart" of Serbia – what I have referred to as the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse).

As Bieber (2002) elaborates, there are three important dimensions of the relationship between Serbian nationalism and the narrative of the Kosovo myth as a national "founding" myth. First, the myth became incorporated into the "commemorative calendar of the nation" (ibid., 96) by remembering the Kosovo battle once a year on St Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*), the 28 June, a commemoration marked by pilgrimage to the site of the battle and Christian Orthodox liturgies held either at the site of the battle, or in Serbian medieval monasteries in Kosovo. This commemoration ties the "historical record of the battle" with its "mythical representation" (ibid.). The second dimension, and most important for this study, is the claim to Kosovo, symbolic and physical. Through commemorative practices, past and present are woven together: the fact that Kosovo was important to the medieval Serbian kingdom "serves to ground a territorial claim irrespective of the fact of population distribution in the region and impervious to subsequent historical development" (ibid., 97). A third aspect of the myth follows from the second, in that the myth "establishes a historical continuity between the contemporary Serbian nation and the 'Serbs' of the Middle Ages, suggesting a perennial nation" (ibid.). This way, the claim to Kosovo, be it in a symbolic or physical sense, transcends constraints of time and space and informs the way it is re-articulated within the framework of the Brussels dialogue. This symbolic and physical claim to Kosovo is exceptionally pronounced in Northern Kosovo and visible in the negotiations surrounding this area within the Brussels dialogue. This area in particular is what the majority of agreements within the dialogue are about. Because of its specific institutional setting, harboring both institutional frameworks of Kosovo and Serbia at the same time, it is even more so considered "Serbian" than the rest of Kosovo in the discourse I am analyzing.

What is interesting about this interpretation is that most elements of the Kosovo national myth address Southern Kosovo, or the area of Metohija (*Dukagjini* in Albanian) where the Serbian medieval monasteries are located. The Kosovo battle also took place in *Kosovo Polje*, the Field of the Blackbirds, located in today's central and Southern Kosovo. However, as the current structural conditions do not allow Serbia to exert any form of governance or sovereignty over this area, having only limited governance over the North, the claim to the "entire Kosovo", in this discourse referring to the South, is symbolic. This means that even if Serbia claims sovereignty over entire Kosovo, it does not attempt to *institute* its sovereignty structurally. Hence, it remains metaphorical. One could argue that the claim to entire Kosovo is challenged by the "encounter with the Real" (see Laclau 1996b; Stavrakakis 2007), that is, the undeniable claim to independence of Kosovo and the material existence of Kosovo state institutions, which are the dominant governing authority in the rest of Kosovo, except the North. There are no Serbian institutions on a central level in

Kosovo, only marginally in the so-called Serb “enclaves” in the South and, of course, in the entire North. By contrast, the claim to Northern Kosovo is based on material state and national interests, anchored around the imaginization that Serbia still has some maneuvering potential to not “share” this territory with the Kosovo Albanian institutional framework. In other words, even though Serbia claims that “Kosovo is Serbia” in its Constitution, different parliamentary resolutions, plans, government decisions, it does not attempt to “take back” Southern Kosovo, but it does so with Northern Kosovo, specifically within the partition discourse of 2017 and 2018. Thus, signifiers like “sovereignty” or “territorial integrity” can be perceived as floating between these two intersecting discourses in Serbia on **community** and **partition**. In the former, “sovereignty” and “territorial integrity” are not politicized and problematized, they refer to having power over the entire territory, North and South, which includes a physical “sharing” of space and only symbolic ownership of the entire territory. In the latter, they refer to maintaining power and abolishing the presence of the antagonistic, Albanian “other”, which includes exclusive ownership of the physical space of the North and (potentially) symbolic ownership of the rest of Kosovo in the South.

This reading points to four articulations of ownership, or four *claims* to Kosovo in the Serbian political discourse since the Brussels dialogue began: 1) “our Kosovo” in a symbolic sense, which embodies the symbolic claim to entire Kosovo (space); 2) “our Kosovo” in a physical sense, which embodies the physical claim to Northern Kosovo (place); 3) “our Kosovo” in a physical and symbolic sense, which embodies sharing the space of Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians (space and place); and 4) “their Kosovo” which embodies the claim that Kosovo is an independent state, tied to the Kosovo Albanian nationalist project (place). Within the community discourse, the first and third readings are dominant, whereas the partition discourse revolves around the second and fourth reading, with elements of the first. The nodal point of “national” or “state interests” in the community discourse of 2012/2013 refers to symbolic ownership of the entire Kosovo, while in the partition discourse of 2017/2018, it refers to the physical ownership of the North while maintaining symbolic ownership of the South, since Kosovo will “always be Serbia” as an anchoring signifier of Serbian statehood and nationhood throughout history.

It is particularly important to focus on the aspect of “sharing” Kosovo, since it denotes a claim to Kosovo that is not exclusive, meaning that it offers a platform for the re-articulation of political frontiers between Serbs and Albanians from antagonism into agonism, something that is important for cross-community understanding and political practice (see Carpentier 2018b). It is also important to dwell more on this because it helps us understand how the Brussels dialogue was initially conceived and practiced by the actors involved, and how a re-articulation of agonism into antagonism happened after 2017. Initially, namely, after the second high-level meeting between

Hashim Thaçi, Prime Minister (PM) of Kosovo and Ivica Dačić, PM of Serbia on 8 November 2012 in Brussels, Dačić declared that the meeting was exceptionally fruitful and that “what has been inconceivable until now has become normal” (Dnevnik 2, 08.11.2012, 01:42). What has been inconceivable until that point is for the two parties to meet in person and even shake hands, not to mention constructively engage in a dialogue. The Brussels dialogue could have been considered as an attempt to re-articulate antagonistic relations between Serbs and Kosovo Albanian in this initial phase. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the notion of “sharing” Kosovo dominated the debates. For instance, when Dačić and Thaçi met for the first time in Brussels on 19 October 2012, Dačić claimed that he told Thaçi that “as much as Kosovo is yours, as much it is mine” (Dnevnik 2, 19.10.2012, 05:54), reminding him that Kosovo Serbs have an equal right to exist in Kosovo and maintain their institutions as Kosovo Albanians had during Milošević’s rule, when they, too, maintained parallel structures (ibid.). Similarly, President Tomislav Nikolić, after his first meeting with his counterpart of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga on 6 February 2013, recognized that the claim to Kosovo was not exclusively Serbia’s, but that Kosovo Albanians had a legitimate claim, too:

I tried to express Serbia’s position that we are ready to talk, to find an agreement, to provide a better and more peaceful life [to Kosovo residents], [...] but also to emphasize that Serbia cannot recognize the independence of Kosovo and Metohija; however, we can recognize the specific status of the territory and their Parliament, Government, their Presidency, while of course keeping in mind the specific position of not only the Serb, but also the Roma and Muslim communities in Kosovo and Metohija” (Dnevnik 2, 06.02.2013, 02:05).

Sharing Kosovo does not involve Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo’s statehood, as evident on the Government’s Platform on the negotiations with Pristina (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2013), but a recognition of the legitimacy of the Kosovo Albanian claim to this territory, something which in Dačić’s words, was indeed “inconceivable” in Serbia before (see Spasojević 2016). Sharing Kosovo also involves a degree of recognition of the specific position of Serbs in Kosovo (unlike other Serbs in Serbia proper), as Nikolić mentioned, because in this constellation, they acquire a degree of detachment from the rest of the national collective and are treated as a separate and “specific” category. In Vulin’s words: “The state [of Serbia] must not allow Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija to be left without the attention of their own state, to be left without their own system, and to allow anyone to push them into a system that attempts to create the state of Kosovo” (Dnevnik 2, 09.01.2013, 08:59). This particular statement illustrates the way this category is constructed, by which Serbia can be understood as an “external homeland” (see Brubaker 1996) to the Serbs in Kosovo and the Serbs in Kosovo as a specific (minority) community outside the reach of the “kin state”. This category is also homogenized to enhance the claim of their specificity, which is evident in Vulin’s statement that “Serbia does not distinguish between North and South Kosovo Serbs. Both Northern and Southern Serbs are exactly the same for us and, in our opinion,

they must have the same rights and receive the same degree of care from their own state” (Dnevnik 2, 09.01.2013, 09:43).

Even though the idea of sharing Kosovo dominated the debates, the playing field was never level to begin with. Given that Kosovo was at a clear disadvantage in the talks, having not attained full statehood and having limited maneuvering potential in talks with a fully recognized state it sought independence from. The Serbian “gaze” on Kosovo and its quest for independence is not only colored by the mentioned discourse of Serb-Albanian animosity, but also by fantasies of Serb superiority over Albanians, in which Albanians are articulated as the radical Other – inferior, primitive, undeserving (see Salecl 1994). To illustrate this point, after Dačić and Thaçi’s first meeting in Brussels on 19 October 2012, a meeting at which no state symbols of either Kosovo or Serbia were present, except for two small pins on their suit lapels, Dačić pointed out that his pin with the flag of Serbia was bigger than that of his counterpart from Kosovo (Dnevnik 2, 19.10.2012, 09:54).

Hence, all these opportunities created by the Brussels dialogue, such as the opportunity to re-articulate the antagonism between Serbs and Albanians, have to be considered against the background of constraints that the Brussels dialogue also puts forward. The intersecting discourses of the two opposing political projects of Kosovo and Serbia, one fighting for independence, the other against it, and the fantasies that support them, all form the horizon of contestation of meanings within the Brussels dialogue. These contestations are not only constrained by the prejudices and historically repeated otherings of Albanians (and Serbs as oppressors in the Kosovo-Albanian context), but also by the involvement of the international community and the view of particularly influential individual states on how the dialogue should play out. Hence, on the one hand, the Brussels dialogue should be able to offer a platform for the expansion of these horizons of meaning, enabling contestations that were not possible before, but on the other hand, it is constrained by different discourses and material structures, whether they are sustained by the two negotiating parties, by the EU, or specific members of the international community. To unpack this, in the following two segments, I will elaborate on my conception of the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone (with its own opportunities and constraints) and move on to discuss the hegemonic subjects and their positions in a wider context of the contact zone. This will be an analytical endeavor, but only used contextually in this thesis, since the main focus is on the re-articulation of Kosovo by the Serbian Government since 2012.

4.5 The Brussels Dialogue as a Political Contact Zone

The Brussels dialogue was set to resolve the conflicting claims over who has the ownership of the symbolic and physical space of Kosovo. Even though the status question was not supposed to be

discussed within the dialogue, the aim still was to find common ground on and shared understanding of different issues, such as the institutional setting, borders etc. The partition discourse has particularly shown that this common understanding (stabilization/fixation of meaning over different, conflicting discourses) is needed, since the EU's approach of constructive ambiguity (Bieber 2015; Guzina and Marijan 2014) did not lead to the implementation of many crucial agreements. Taking the above into account, this thesis conceptualizes the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone (Pratt 2008) bringing together actors from various contexts and with conflicting claims about the same issue of Kosovo. This conception constitutes a novel reading of the Brussels dialogue, and particularly emphasizes spaces of encounter with the Other (Ahmed 2000) in which sedimented meanings attached to the Other can be transformed. So far, the Brussels dialogue has been discussed purely from the point of view of international relations and diplomacy, and Serbia's or Kosovo EU integration process (see Beysoylu 2018; Bieber 2015; Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Ejodus 2014; Gashi, Musliu, and Orbie 2017; Guzina and Marijan 2014; Troncota 2018), lacking a discourse-theoretical and cultural perspective. This perspective is needed because if any solution is to be found within the Brussels dialogue, its successful implementation will depend on re-articulating sedimented narratives of the Other, as well as those sedimentations that prevent the current implementation of agreements (such as constitutional obstacles towards recognizing Kosovo in Serbia or establishing the A/CSM in Kosovo). Another benefit of conceptualizing the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone is that it enables us to articulate it as an arena for accommodating dislocations, which helps us debate how actors politicize sedimentations by also paying attention to the power dynamics and changing articulations of the Other that are at play here.

In Pratt's words, contact zones are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths" (Pratt 2008, 34). Even though we cannot speak of colonialism or slavery in the case of Kosovo and Serbia (although some discourses define Serbia's politics towards Kosovo throughout history as colonizing), the fact remains that asymmetrical power relations are a key feature of the dialogue, as well as that the dialogue provides a space in which contestations can be carried out. Building on this, Yüksek and Carpentier's (2018, 4) notion of the *participatory contact zone* is particularly useful here, claiming that "contact zones focus not specifically on the actors and their attitudes, but on the interactions between them, and act as a space for non-violent argumentation of conflicting narratives, beliefs, points of view, as well as for learning (about the others)." I would like to supplement this notion with a reading of the Brussels dialogue as a *political* (participatory) contact zone because at the heart of the dialogue lies the idea of contestation, not merely argumentation, where quite obviously asymmetrical power relations

between all parties involved come to the fore. These power relations are not only asymmetrical between Serbia and Kosovo, but also the EU's mediation potential is embedded in sedimented notions of how to negotiate on Kosovo, allowing certain ideas (such as the Brussels agreement) and not others (such as discussions on territory and status). The dialogue is political in a post-foundational sense, relying on Laclau and Mouffe's notions of the political as the moment of institution and re-activation of a discourse – as I explained in Chapters 2 and 3. The contestation involves a struggle to define the meanings of crucial nodal points in such a way that that understanding is *shared* across conflicting discourses, inevitably expanding them to include previously non-viable options and meanings. Thus, a political contact zone is a space that provides for the expansion of the horizons of meaning of conflicting discourses, bringing them closer together and possibly, helping them accommodate dislocations. It offers them a possibility to intersect and interact, and in an *idealized* situation, create a common discourse out of the conflicting ones (which rarely happens in practice). These shared meanings would subsequently be “translated” into the various discourses of the negotiating parties, for the understanding of which the concept of cultural translation is important. According to Papastergiadis (2000, 131) cultural translation is “a dynamic interaction within which conceptual boundaries are expanded and residual differences respected”, a definition that resembles Carpentier's (2018b) elaboration of agonism mentioned in Chapter 2. It is neither “the appropriation of a foreign culture according to the rule of one's own culture”, nor is it “a reproduction which totally reflects the world-view of the other” (Papastergiadis 2000, 131). Instead, it respects “residual differences” in an agonistic manner and does not necessarily require the de-structuration of any one of the conflicting discourses. Translation as a political practice is constitutive of the re-articulation of the Kosovo imaginary in Serbia, since each time an agreement is reached in the Brussels dialogue, it has to be accommodated by the hegemonic and institutionalized discourses in Serbia. However, this is not always done in an agonistic manner nor respecting residual differences, as the analysis in Chapter 5 and 6 will reveal.

In a more *practical* situation, the political contact zone should offer a space for stabilizing the meaning of floating signifiers (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), signifiers that have a different meaning depending on the discourse they are embedded in. For example, such floating signifiers in the dialogue have been the “normalization of relations” as mentioned earlier. The A/CSM is another floating signifier, which for Serbia has full competence to decide on its matters and near-complete administrative independence from the central institutions in Pristina, while for Kosovo, it should only be a loose association between municipalities with an NGO-like status. It is here that a respect of residual differences in translating the shared meanings into the dominant context is imperative if the dialogue is going to succeed, since the respective translations of the concepts need to have as close as possible a meaning in both contexts, even if they are read slightly differently.

Even though the opportunities of a political contact zone are to create a shared understanding of the various issues (stabilization of meaning of floating signifiers, negotiating dislocations), and potentially re-articulate antagonisms into agonisms, it does not mean that this always translates into political practice. More often than not, the Brussels dialogue has demonstrated that antagonism prevails: the dialogue has been stopped or obstructed by the involved parties on multiple occasions, and the partition discourse dominating over the community discourse since 2017 demonstrates this clearly. When the tension over the fixation of meaning cannot be overcome, anchoring floating signifiers such as “normalization of relations” or “A/CSM” and filling them with meaning that is understood and shared by everyone in the dialogue in the same way, separation and antagonism increasingly become an option. This is why the EU’s notion of “constructive ambiguity” is highly problematic, especially in a situation in which conflicting discourses have such a visceral underpinning such as the nationalist discourse of Kosovo being Serbia, or the nationalist discourse of Kosovo being an independent state, both of which might have tangible implications for the lives of people living there. With constructive ambiguity, the issue of translating floating signifiers into local contexts that would have as close a meaning as possible becomes problematic, leaving greater room for individual interpretation of these contested signifiers, and thus not entirely bringing the two parties closer together.

Contrary to opportunities offered by a political contact zone, there are also constraints, because not all options are viable options within the dialogue – the horizon of possible meanings is extended, but it is not unlimited. As Stengel and Nabers (2019) argue, and as I demonstrated in subchapter 2.2, any credible re-articulation of meaning inevitably occurs against the background of already sedimented and institutionalized political practices, which can act as constraints. This involves, for instance, the expectations and habitualized practices of the international community in regard to Kosovo, with UN Resolution 1244 granting it status-neutrality while at the same time transferring all its administrative and governance competencies to the recently formed institutions of the Republic of Kosovo in 2012. The Republic of Kosovo is obviously not a status-neutral entity but acts like a state and performs statehood in the international arena as well through its efforts at international recognition (see Visoka 2018). The Brussels dialogue was not supposed to discuss issues of status. Rather it should have focused on tangible issues and technically solvable challenges that people in Kosovo might experience on an everyday basis. To illustrate the constraints of the dialogue on a practical example: the fact that Serbia does not want to negotiate on UN membership of Kosovo also means that it is equally impossible for them to claim that Kosovo is part of Serbia, which might seem paradoxical at first. Since Kosovo is status neutral in the framework that Serbia refers to and relies on (UN Resolution 1244), which does not exist in practice (because the UN institutions transferred their competencies onto Kosovo institutions), Kosovo cannot at the same

time be *not* status-neutral, ergo a province of Serbia. Status-neutrality is an idealized principle that cannot be practiced, since it exists in the tension between Kosovo claiming statehood and Serbia claiming Kosovo as an autonomous province. On the other side of this spectrum are the recognizing states of Kosovo, which to date, amount to 97¹⁷, among which there are three permanent members of the UN Security Council (that is a guarantor of the UN Resolution 1244): United States, United Kingdom and France. The two remaining permanent members, China and the Russian Federation, do not recognize Kosovo. The EU is equally split on this matter: the economically and politically most influential states do recognize Kosovo (Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy – 22 out of the 27 EU member states), while five states do not (Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Cyprus and Greece). Therefore, the Brussels dialogue can never be neutral, since there are always power imbalances at play, “tipping” the dialogue towards what suits the greatest number of EU member states. The non-recognizing states usually have a self-determination or separation issue within their borders, and often argue for the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity to be upheld in the international arena. All of this means that any solution to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute has to in some shape or form satisfy these different expectations by the international community, not to mention be accepted domestically in both Serbia and Kosovo. These are the constraints of the Brussels dialogue, in which not *everything* can be said or negotiated on, such as the issue of status or territoriality by many considered a done deal. The failed implementation of the idea of partition demonstrates this, since even though it floated around in 2013 when Dačić attempted to advocate for it and was a suppressed possibility during Zoran Đinđić’s rule in the early 2000s, it never actually came to be. Another issue that is “off limits” at least for the Serbian side is the recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign country, whereas *de facto* vs. *de jure* recognition could be an option (the model of “two Germanys”).

It is important to stress the primacy of analyzing discourses in a setting of transnational entanglement that is evident in the case of the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone. Instead of focusing on international relations (IR) actors such as states (even though I often refer to individual states as subjects myself in this context chapter), it is more fruitful to focus on individual hegemonic subjects and map out their particular subject positions within a multitude of discourses they are embedded in and that they perform. When dealing with the Kosovo question, the usual approach is to view it in terms of one IR actor’s point of view, for instance as part of Serbia’s or Kosovo’s EU integration process (see Bieber 2015; Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015; Vachudova 2014);

¹⁷ There is considerable disagreement between the number of recognizing and non-recognizing states, because of the extensive de-recognition campaign of Serbia who lobbied many countries to withdraw their recognition of Kosovo. To date (December 2020), there are 15 such countries (Palickova 2019; World Population Review 2020), while the Government of Kosovo claims the number of UN states having recognized Kosovo to be 114 (Republic of Kosovo 2018). In turn, Serbia claims this number to be 93 with 5 states that have a “fluid” understanding of Kosovo’s statehood (N1 Srbija 2020).

in terms of the Europeanization paradigm and/or the transformative power of Europe (see Anastasakis, Caplan and Economides 2013; Börzel 2011; Mladenov and Stahl 2015); or from a historical and cultural perspective embedded in the Kosovo myth related to the study of nationalism (Bieber 2002; Ejodus and Subotić 2014; Listhaug, Ramet and Dulić 2011). While these approaches all offer a valuable perspective, they put nation-states as actors to the fore and individual subjects to the back. This thesis is not disciplinarily embedded in an IR perspective. Rather, I would like to analyze how a particular set of subjects within the Serbian Government, such as high-ranking members of the Serbian Progressive Party, SNS, and their affiliates, such as individuals from the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), and Movement of Socialists (PS), came to define the Kosovo question when they came to power in 2012 and the SNS consolidated its power in 2017 with Aleksandar Vučić becoming President. All those actors are part of the Serbian Government and are hegemonic inasmuch as they take the place of representing a “universality”, be it the Serbian state or the Serbian nation. Castaldo (2020) has already paid attention to the authoritarian tendencies of the SNS-regime and democratic backsliding in Serbia, and Dragojlov (2020) has already analyzed SNS’s contradictory politics of EU integration and Kosovo non-recognition. I would like to build on these recent analyses and investigate how specific discourses on Kosovo (the re-articulations) are performed by these hegemonic subjects and how seemingly contradictory politics are reconciled through practices of transgression and re-articulation of political frontiers. A discourse-theoretical and performative analysis, which does not neglect materiality and affectivity (as already elaborated in Chapter 3), can be an exceptionally fruitful tool in this endeavor. It can also illuminate the polarization of the political field around the empty signifier of a “strong leader”, which Vučić embodies, and increasing antagonization of the Other in the SNS’s shift towards a discourse of partition and separation from Albanians. Such an analysis can illuminate the process of change.

4.6 Hegemonic Subjects in the Brussels Dialogue

The Brussels dialogue understood as a contact zone involved not only representatives of the EU, Serbia and Kosovo, but also other interested and involved parties, such as representatives of the US State Department, the Russian Government, even China. This is because of the implications for the international community and practice of international law that any solution pertaining to Kosovo might have. Hence, negotiations were not just held in Brussels during the meetings of the technical teams or heads of governments and states of Serbia and Kosovo, but also “on the margins” of other events (such as the EU summit in Sofia in May 2018). This phrase was often used when the talks on partition started entering public debates more prominently in 2018 (Danas 2018m, 18 May; Danas 2018q, 30 October; Danas 2018a, 31 October) and such “marginal” talks

were exceptionally practiced since the US administration said that they would support any solution that Serbia and Kosovo agree on, not excluding correction of borders (Dnevnik 2, 28.08.2018). Calls were also made for the US or Russia to be included in the dialogue officially, since consultations with them were always ongoing “on the margins”. In December 2017, Vučić claimed that Serbia would invite Russia to be part of the negotiations in Brussels should the Kosovo side decide to invite the US. Vučić said that “if you want to include another country, which has already recognized the independence of Kosovo, then Serbia will certainly request the presence of someone who has not recognized the independence of Kosovo, and that would be Russia who would accept such an invitation” (Dnevnik 2, 20.12.2017, 02:30). Even though no such moves to include other countries were officially made, consultations on Kosovo were always ongoing, evident in Vučić’s frequent talks with Russian officials and visits to Russia (Dnevnik 2, 18.12.2017; 08.05.2018; 12.06.2018; 23.11.2018). Additionally, during the peak of negotiating on partition in the summer of 2018, the US ambassador to Serbia Michael Scot said that “I think that the entire international community has a role in this [negotiations in Brussels], because we want to support peace building and stability in this region, and when I say we, I mean the EU and the entire community of the UN” (Dnevnik 2, 09.06.2018, 04:26).

However, the consultations with other countries were not only a practice that followed the partition negotiations of 2017 and 2018. It was practiced even before the conclusion of the Brussels agreement in April 2013, and some Western countries and their ambassadors were always brought in to consult on domestic legislation and platforms, such as the Serbian Government’s platform on the negotiations with Pristina from January 2013, stating the main principles and red tape of negotiating with Kosovo, such as non-recognition (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2013). Serbia often consulted with the so-called Quint states, a decision-making group consisting of the USA, UK, Germany, Italy and France (excluding Russia, all of which were part of the so-called Contact Group), who was also involved in the Ahtisaari-led UN-mediated talks in Vienna in 2006 and 2007 (see Bergmann 2018).

To illustrate this point, during the time of the drafting of the platform in late 2012, the President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić met with the Ambassadors of Russia, China and the UK to consult on the platform. The Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Chepurin reassured Serbia that Russia would help Serbia’s views be represented in international institutions, while the Chinese Ambassador Zhang Wanxue thanked Serbia for its view on the question of Tibet and Taiwan and claimed to back Serbia in its preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty (Dnevnik 2, 17.12.2012). One day later, Nikolić met with all the Ambassadors of EU member states to discuss the platform, among other things, to which they could also give input. As the then Head of the EU delegation to Serbia Vincent Degert said after his meeting with Nikolić, the Ambassadors were brought to the

meeting to give their views and comments, since the platform was not yet a finalized document, and evaluate how the platform relates to Serbia's EU integration process and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue (Dnevnik 2, 18.12.2012, 03:55). Hence, all of these parties the Serbian Government consulted with had a degree of say in the matter, which is particularly important since the platform determined the framework of an agreement with Kosovo for Serbia.

Similarly, a few months before the Brussels agreement was concluded on 19 April 2013, the Prime Minister of Serbia Iвица Dačić talked to the Ambassadors of the Quint states about the particularities of an agreement with Kosovo. While Dačić was meeting with the Quint states, Aleksandar Vulin, the then director of the Serbian Office for Kosovo and Metohija, was meeting with the ambassadors of non-European countries who did not recognize Kosovo on the same day, to re-affirm their commitment to non-recognition of Kosovo (Dnevnik 2, 25.02.2013, 08:40). This illustrates that the negotiations in Brussels were from the beginning followed by a campaign of non-recognition by Serbia, in a similar way as Kosovo was following a campaign of recognition, lobbying states to recognize it and increase its maneuvering potential in the Brussels talks with Serbia. These two dimensions were always intertwined. The statements made by members of the Serbian Government and the negotiating teams in the Brussels dialogue went so far as to not only claim that, in order to reach an agreement with Kosovo, Serbia would need to consult with the US as a "significant actor in the region" (Marko Đurić in Dnevnik 2, 07.03.2013, 03:55), next to the Quint countries and the EU Commission. They also went so far as to claim that a potential agreement would be made between Serbia and Western powers (Aleksandar Vučić in Dnevnik 2, 03.04.2013, 15:08), articulating Kosovo rather as an object of the discussions, instead of a subject they are discussing with. Rather, Kosovo was a "proxy" for finding a solution to it with the great powers.

Even though these entanglements between talks in the Brussels dialogue and talks on its "margins" with other actors who are not officially part of the dialogue itself are undeniable, they are not the focus of this thesis and are only brought in contextually. The focus of this study lies on how hegemonic actors in the Serbian Government re-articulated Serbia's claim to Kosovo during the dialogue process and how they drew from these transnational entanglements in support of their discursive and material practices. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the subjects I will focus on are the "protagonists" of a discourse (the SNS-dominated Serbian Government), while other subjects may act as "helpers" to achieving the ethical ideals of discourses the protagonists are performing, or as "opponents" obstructing them (Marttila 2015). Hence, Russia, China and the Quint countries as separate entities from the official ones that are part of the Brussels dialogue are only considered in light of their helping or opposing role and do not take the center stage. The subjects that do are members of the Serbian Government, who evidently can perform several

discourses simultaneously, for instance in 2018 claiming Kosovo to be Serbia while at the same time advocating for partition. Without opposing discourses existing simultaneously, there would be no room for contestation.

Consequently, having defined the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone, I would like to elaborate on it as an arena for the opportunity to encounter the Other, which is one of the main aspects of a contact zone (Pratt 2008). Focusing on encounters, Ahmed (2000, 11) builds on the theory of the contact zone and states that “encounter involves both a temporal and spatial dislocation that transforms both the colonizing and colonized subjects: in other words, colonial encounters involve a necessarily unequal and asymmetrical dialogue between once distant cultures that transforms each one.” Even though Ahmed develops her theory with a post-colonial gaze and discusses it in such contexts, I see no problem in using the ideas developed there in any other context with unequal and asymmetrical power relations, in which the Other is perceived as distant and differing. This can be said for an encounter between Serbs and Albanians within the Brussels dialogue, basing this argument on the earlier elaborated discourse on enmity between the two groups. For this study, “distant” does not necessarily refer to spatially distant, or even “exotic”, but structurally and discursively “distant”, whereby the potential for accommodating opposing discourses of both sides on the same issue is very slim. As mentioned earlier, even the gesture of shaking hands with the other country’s prime minister was taken as a historic move, one that was both criticized by the opposition in Serbia and praised (Dnevnik 2, 19.10.2012). In Serbia, meeting with Kosovo officials was not seen as welcomed before, due to the frequently mentioned accusation of the leadership of Kosovo of being guilty of war crimes against the Serbs. Hence, “encounter” with the leadership of Kosovo Albanians was marked by past experiences of encountering them in the framework of war and battle. As Ahmed (2000, 8) argues, “each encounter reopens past encounters” whereby “prior histories of encounter” – which were most recently marked by violence between Serbs and Albanians – “violate and fix others in regimes of difference.” These regimes of difference that are constituting the Other through past experiences can also act as a constraint in the Brussels dialogue. Affective economies that stick to these experiences are inevitably part of these encounters, in which re-articulating or changing the way one “feels” about the Other is possible, albeit marginally. This option is opened up by the Brussels agreement and its re-articulation of the Serb-Albanian relationship as an agonistic one, but affective economies need time to change, and additional experience marked by positive emotions of and with the Other are necessary. However, this was not the case, since the Brussels agreement was only marginally implemented, thus resulting in agonism turning into antagonism again. Parts of Chapter 5 and 6 are devoted to specifically this debate, and how the encounter with the Other in the Brussels dialogue was brought to a halt altogether.

However, the Brussels dialogue has fleshed out a conception of the Albanian Other as a legitimate subject, one with whom it is necessary to negotiate (something which was not a given before the Brussels dialogue), not simply an object of discussion. Such a conception can make a big difference in the encounter itself, as it can initiate a re-articulation of entire structures of meanings attached to and feelings about the Other. And although these encounters existed from 2012 to 2018 (which were only recently revived again in mid-2020), the analysis revealed that the affective structuration of the Other is quite rigid. Backed by a gaping lack of positive experiences, only a marginally possible re-articulation of the Other is provided, something that was evident in the early stages before and after the conclusion of the Brussels agreement from April 2013. The articulation of the Other was henceforth increasingly antagonistic as the lack of implementation of the key points of the Brussels agreement became more evident. This ultimately culminated in the discussion of partitioning Kosovo along ethnic lines in 2017 and 2018, which relies on absolute separation from the Other as a solution to the problem. In light of this, it came as no surprise that the Brussels dialogue was halted in November 2018, as the space for encountering and thus re-articulating the Other increasingly shrank over time.

5 Community Discourse

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the “political dialogue” which essentially put a focus on negotiations between high-level political subjects from both Serbia and Kosovo opened up opportunities to renegotiate hegemonic structures and discourses embedded in both contexts. The analysis focuses on the claims-making process carried out by Serbian hegemonic subjects, with a specific focus on different elements of the Kosovo imaginary and their re-articulation. I have argued that the Kosovo imaginary as a horizon of intelligibility on what can be said and done in relation to Kosovo, is embedded in various state structures. Those are institutions (The Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, The Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija) with their materiality, subjects (The Orthodox Church, the Minister for Kosovo and Metohija, the Head of the Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija etc.), as well as other cultural representations (popular culture, on the streets, in digital space etc.). Whenever somebody articulates the importance of Kosovo for Serbia, the meaning of that articulation is constituted through its referentiality to the narrative of the Kosovo myth (turned social imaginary) and its importance for the Serbian nationalist project. This is why the Serbian *claim* to Kosovo plays such a crucial role in this case study, since the claim itself embodies references to Kosovo’s historic importance for Serbia, as well as past, present and future physical and symbolic ownership of Kosovo by the Serbian nation and the Serbian state. In other words, the claim represents a specific *political demand* that forms the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is also affectively invested with meanings and feelings. As I have argued, the claim to the territory of Kosovo is a central nodal point of the Kosovo imaginary, which in turn structures the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the analysis will start with mapping out the nodal points of the discourse in question, those elements and moments that stabilize meanings. I have identified two dominant discursive constellations in this case study at two different moments: the **community** discourse of 2012 and 2013, and the **partition** discourse of 2017 and 2018, both anchored by different myths: the former by the Brussels agreement and the latter by the idea of partition. This chapter will focus on the community discourse of 2012 and 2013 which can be understood as a larger context in which debates on the Brussels agreement are situated. Any re-constitution of its discursive elements must consider which elements were fixing the discourse in the first place. Thus, the first part of the analysis will map out the nodal points of the community discourse. As this study aims to demonstrate how discursive change has occurred, nodal points before the engagement in the political dialogue and the introduction of the idea of A/CSM are going to be mapped out (focusing on the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse), demonstrating subsequently the reconfiguration of these nodal points with the conclusion of the Brussels agreement. Secondly, I

will look at various practices of meaning-making, such as the re-constitution of elements resulting in new points of fixture and analyze which moves on the discursive field and performative acts led to this re-constitution. Here, a discussion on the creation of political frontiers will be provided which is affectively underpinned. Thirdly, I will analyze how the very subjects behind these shifts (re-)constitute themselves in this very process. Lastly, I will provide a brief summary of the analysis and create a bridge towards the next discursive constellation, the partition discourse.

5.1 Nodal Points of the “Kosovo is Serbia” Discourse Prior to the Political Dialogue and Transition towards the Brussels Agreement

The discourse on Kosovo in Serbia prior to the Serbian Government’s engagement in the high-level “political” dialogue with the Kosovo Government was fixed around the articulation of Kosovo being an integral part of Serbia (as anchored in the Constitution as well). Hence, **the nodal points** of the “**Kosovo is Serbia**” discourse are a re-articulation of the nodal points of the Kosovo imaginary, supported by the same fantasy that Kosovo is part of Serbia: the claim to the territory of Kosovo; a legal and international right and obligation to defend Serbia’s right to that territory; the Serbian people living there that make Kosovo “still” Serbian even after Kosovo’s declaration of independence and unfettered by the demographic composition of Kosovo; and a pledge to be unified and unitary in getting around any obstacles that the current situation with Kosovo might pose for the Serbian state and nation – in line with the famous saying “Samo sloga Srbina spašava” (an alliteration which translates into “only unity will save the Serbs”). This call for unity resonates with Vuk Branković’s betrayal of Lazar on the Field of the Blackbirds and is supposed to be a reminder of how discord and disunity can be the downfall of Serbia when it comes to Kosovo. Thus, all these nodal points have an anchoring effect against the competing discourse generated by Kosovo’s declaration of independence, as well as the embeddedness of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse in the institutional framework of Serbia. This discourse is affectively underpinned with emotions such as love, pride, as well as spite and disdain for whomever tries to “take away” Kosovo from Serbia and the Serbs. Spite and disdain are not so pronounced in the community discourse as they are in the partition discourse, since the emphasis here is laid on an agonistic articulation of the Albanian Other as well as on “sharing” Kosovo with them.

The competing discourse, which claims that Kosovo is *not* Serbia, but a separate entity, an independent state constitutes the limit of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse. The high-level political dialogue is important as it allows subjects adhering to and constituting these discourses to interact and negotiate meanings situated “between” these two exclusionary poles, meanings that, ideally, will be shared across discourses, creating new nodal points. These are the opportunities of the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone that I have mentioned previously.

Even though the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse is hegemonic, the Brussels dialogue slightly dislocated its fixity: if everything is set in stone, if Kosovo is indeed Serbia, why does Serbia engage in negotiations at all and what are they negotiating? The EU has often mentioned that Serbia does not need to recognize¹⁸ Kosovo’s independence to join the EU through its engagement in the dialogue, something that has been verbally reaffirmed many times by Catherine Ashton, the former chief mediator in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, and is anchored in the EU negotiation framework of Serbia such as Chapter 35 of *acquis* (European Commission 2012b; 2015). This allowed the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse to still be fixed around the above-mentioned nodal points even with Serbia pursuing EU integration. This fixity is mostly achieved through another nodal point dominant in the same discourse, namely status-neutrality that is related to territory. Status-neutrality of Kosovo, as guaranteed by Resolution 1244 which is still in force, is what allows Serbian political subjects to claim that Kosovo is Serbia and still engage in the Brussels dialogue: by calling the Brussels dialogue status-neutral, they simultaneously claim that engaging with the Kosovo issue as something that needs to be solved means accommodating the potential solution into a status-neutral framework.

This status neutrality has formed the cornerstone of Serbia’s willingness to participate in the high-level dialogue and continue its engagement in it. An example of the EU’s commitment to status-neutrality is the designation of Kosovo with an asterisk (Kosovo*) in all EU documents. The documents always refer to Kosovo in the footnote as “without prejudice to positions on status, and [...] in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.” However, only the first mention of Kosovo in any given document is marked with an asterisk, any subsequent mention is without it. Additionally, even though the asterisk refers to Resolution 1244, it also refers to the ICJ opinion, which is “less” neutral since it states that Kosovo’s declaration of independence was not contrary to international law. For Serbia, the asterisk has played a big role in accommodating its engagement with members of the Kosovo Government as a separate entity with the dominant “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse: by claiming that Kosovo* designates a status-neutral entity, they are able to engage in negotiations with it. This has culminated in the agreement on regional representation in which both Serbia and Kosovo agree to engage in regional cooperation and in which “Kosovo* is the only denomination to be used within the framework of regional cooperation” (Kosovo Prime Minister Office 2012).

The prospect of jeopardizing this principle of neutrality has often led to friction among the parties, such as the formulation found in the EU enlargement strategy from October 2012 (European

¹⁸ Even though recognition is not articulated as a condition of Serbia’s EU membership, doing something semantically similar would be expected (for example recognizing Kosovo *de facto*, instead of *de jure*), since the EU forecloses the possibility of Kosovo “returning” under the governance of Serbia.

Commission 2012a, 26), stating that an essential element of Serbia's normalization process with Kosovo will be "[a]ddressing the problems in northern Kosovo, while respecting the territorial integrity of Kosovo and the particular needs of the local population." Serbian officials considered the phrase "territorial integrity of Kosovo" to be highly problematic, since one of the central components of statehood is territorial integrity, thus claiming that the EU has implicitly put into question its status-neutral position towards Kosovo's statehood.

To this, Štefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy responded in an interview with *RTS* on 10 October 2012 that they did not "introduce any new concepts" and that the principle of "not changing the borders of Kosovo was stated by the Contact Group already in November 2005, in the guidelines for the negotiations on the status of Kosovo. The mention of territorial integrity has nothing to do with the status of Kosovo and the Commission made it clear in its report that it remains status neutral. Our request only means that we do not want the partition of Kosovo" (*Dnevnik 2*, 10.10.2012, 03:05). Indeed, the Contact Group's guidelines state that "[t]here will be no changes in the current territory of Kosovo, i.e., no partition of Kosovo and no union of Kosovo with any country or part of any country. The territorial integrity and internal stability of regional neighbours will be fully respected" (United Nations Security Council 2005). This has prompted Prime Minister Dačić to react by claiming that Serbia can only continue on its EU path if there are no new conditions, such as accepting the statehood of Kosovo, and if the dialogue is status neutral. Comparing the phrase "territorial integrity of Kosovo" with a "milder alternative to recognizing Kosovo's independence", he claimed that it would be even "more honest" by the EU to make Serbia recognize the independence of Kosovo instead of making them recognize Kosovo's territorial integrity, since there are no states with territorial integrity that do not have sovereignty (*Dnevnik 2*, 10.10.2012, 08:35). Already the next day, Füle visited Belgrade and tried not only to convince Serbia's state leadership of the EU's commitment to status neutrality, but spoke in the Serbian Parliament to the opposition as well, presenting the Enlargement strategy. After being asked by the opposition party DSS whether the EU will omit this controversial phrase, Füle stated that they will not do so because they "firmly believe that territory is one of the elements of statehood, but not the crucial one" (*Dnevnik 2*, 11.10.2012, 06:10). In this sense, the EU implicitly acknowledges that Kosovo might exhibit features of statehood, which is related to my previous argument on how the Brussels dialogue is constrained by sedimented convictions held by the EU as a hegemonic actor. It is clear that "status-neutrality" is a floating signifier that has two meanings. In the EU discourse, given that most EU member states have recognized Kosovo as an independent state, while five states have not, status-neutrality is a term designating a gray area of political practice between full statehood and "traces" of it. In Serbia, it does not simply mean that Kosovo is status-neutral, since neutrality can hardly

exist in political practice – status-neutrality means that Kosovo is still Serbia, since its final status has not yet been determined by an alternative resolution to Resolution 1244. I have discussed the paradoxical nature of this claim in Chapter 4.

Given the fact that Serbia is trying to join the EU, and recognizing the discrepancy between these two interpretations of status-neutrality which somehow need to be renegotiated during the EU integration process, Serbia is articulating Kosovo within the framework of the Brussels dialogue as a “question” or a “problem” that needs to be solved or somehow dealt with. For instance, after Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić’s speech at the UN General Assembly on 26 September 2012, officially declaring Serbia’s readiness to participate in the high-level political dialogue with Pristina, he mentioned in his interview with *RTS* that Kosovo and Metohija is currently a “problem” which all parties need to engage with in order to find a solution, for which time is slowly running out. If they do not engage, Kosovo will persist as a problem that future generations will need to deal with (Dnevnik 2, 26.09.2012, 10:20).

Similarly, the Government platform for the negotiations with Pristina ratified by the Serbian Parliament on 13 January 2013 through a resolution, also frames Kosovo and Metohija as an issue that needs to be dealt with. Before its finalization and submission to the Parliament, Dačić said that

this is the first document in which the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the President of the Republic of Serbia address such a difficult problem such as Kosovo and Metohija, and try to suggest something which would be a viable solution, not just something which would be our general goals, for which we know in advance cannot be realized” (Dnevnik 2, 22.12.2012, 02:50).

The “general goals” Dačić has mentioned are a reference to the previous government and parliamentary resolutions and platforms that explicitly do not consider Kosovo as a problem or an issue that needs to be dealt with, but simply reify the dominant discourse that Kosovo is Serbia and ignore the existence of Kosovo Government structures as a possible negotiation party, or somebody the Serbian Government can or needs to engage with. For instance, the last resolution on Kosovo and Metohija prior to the adoption of the abovementioned one from 2013, dates back to July 2011 after the Brussels dialogue had begun. It was adopted during the North Kosovo crisis and was meant to reify Serbia’s commitment to preserving its territorial integrity and sovereignty against the “unilateral” acts of Pristina, a term mentioned five times in the resolution (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2011). The Kosovo Government is described as “temporary institutions of self-government in Pristina”, thus negating Kosovo’s prospects at becoming a fully independent state in the future. The resolution was anchored around temporality or interim, where the “compromise solution” the resolution calls for acts as an empty signifier, since the text does not articulate what this solution might be. The emphasis on temporariness allows for an imaginization of Kosovo still being Serbian in the future.

This solution, alongside articulating Kosovo as a problem, is offered in the earlier mentioned Government platform from 2013, which acknowledges that Serbia has given PISG a “limited legal and international subjectivity and legitimacy” (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2013). By articulating the “temporary” institutions of Pristina as a legitimate party that needs to be engaged if Serbia is to solve the Kosovo problem, the Platform constitutes them as a separate entity that is here to stay, something that can no longer be ignored as merely interim, even though the designation stays the same. The Platform further speaks of “the Constitution of the province”, referring to the Kosovo constitution within the legal order of the Kosovo state, which is a contradiction in terms: all previous resolutions and this Platform as well have acknowledged that its province Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of Serbia under Serbia’s Constitution and that a compromise must be in accordance with that same Constitution. By acknowledging that the province has its own Constitution, the Platform acknowledges something that should not be there under the conditions of the Serbian state’s legal order. The platform further calls for the return of displaced persons and their offspring to be written down in the Constitution of Kosovo, as well as Serbian and other non-Albanian communities to be represented in central institutions, as foreseen by a mechanism (points G and D of the platform). These moves explicitly acknowledge the existence of institutions that are clearly part of the state and legal framework of Kosovo as an independent entity, and that Kosovo has some international subjectivity, both of which are hard to accommodate with the discourse that “Kosovo is Serbia”.

Even though this might be the case, the platform states that the compromise solution resulting from the high-level political dialogue should be about “overcoming institutional parallelisms”, not touching upon the status question (that is, upon the question of international and state or legal status of PISG). Status-neutrality is still a key nodal point, which allows the Serbian state to claim the existence of Kosovo as something separate from Serbia, and something that is part of Serbia at the same time. This results in the four representations of Kosovo in the Serbian political discourse (Chapter 4). Status-neutrality is very accommodating to conflicting interpretations of statehood, since it can mean exactly the opposite in different discourses, as demonstrated above with the example of “territorial integrity of Kosovo”. However, what is new is the acknowledgement of the institutions in Pristina as a party that needs to be negotiated with, as a *political subject* with its own power and interests that cannot be ignored. President Nikolić, before meeting with the EU delegation in Brussels on 11 March 2013, representing the main points as established by the Platform, stated that for him the maximum he is willing to compromise about (the frequently mentioned red tape) is:

that Serbia recognizes Kosovo as a territory that is specific in relation to other parts of Serbia, that it is willing to accept many things that Kosovo succeeded to become with the help of the UN and EU, that it knows that Kosovo as such has its own Constitution, its laws, a

president, a parliament, but that on that territory, which we will never recognize as an independent state, there is also a big Serbian community, which we want to preserve there entirely and enable its return (Dnevnik 2, 11.03.2013, 05:05).

Even though Kosovo's subjectivity is acknowledged, the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse still predominates, but the representation of Kosovo in Serbia is multi-layered, and so is the representation of Serbia in Kosovo. Here it is evident that the dislocation created by Kosovo's declaration of independence is incorporated into the given dominant discursive structure through some compromises made, such as additional meanings acquired by the signifier Kosovo (the four articulations of Kosovo in Chapter 4). The platform introduces the idea of an "Autonomous community of Serbian municipalities" as a compromise solution (a myth representing the solution as an empty signifier) whose establishment is conditioned by direct ties with Serbia. The community should have the right to establish direct cooperation with Serbian authorities, as well as the right to additional financing as foreseen by the budget of Serbia. Hence, it is not only important to preserve Kosovo in Serbia (physically and symbolically), but also *Serbia in Kosovo*, as they are acknowledged as separate entities.

5.2 Community Discourse: From Territory to People

This shift of focus from Kosovo in Serbia to preserving Serbia in Kosovo is predominantly done through anchoring the discourse around the nodal point of the people, as evident in Nikolić's statement above. I have called the 2012 and 2013 discourse a community discourse not only because the focus is on the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities as an institution, but also because the people, i.e., the Serbian community in Kosovo – their status, position, power, opportunities, quality of life etc. – is what drives the negotiations in Brussels further. Making the people a contested signifier in the community discourse allows Serbian hegemonic subjects to renegotiate the "reach" of Serbian statehood within Kosovo as a separate entity and helps further fragment the meaning of Kosovo in the Serbian political discourse. As I mentioned earlier, the first and third articulation of Kosovo are dominant in the community discourse, meaning that the entire Kosovo is symbolically and physically part of Serbia ("our Kosovo"), and that the people constitute the boundaries of sharing that space with the Kosovo Albanians ("their Kosovo"). This is another reason I have called this discourse a community discourse, because the emphasis is on sharing this space between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo. Thus, the community discourse at times follows a logic of difference, by which antagonistic frontiers are weakened, instead a logic of equivalence (subchapter 5.7). It is about separation through integration into the Kosovo institutional framework. It is not about physical as well as symbolic separation, as we will see in Chapter 6 with the partition discourse. In summary, the dislocated "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse is "concealed" with the myth of the Brussels

agreement, which anchors the “community discourse” as a larger context in which these contestations of meaning occur. The main nodal point of the community discourse, apart from the Brussels agreement, is “the people”, which is also reflected in the Brussels agreement itself, as I will demonstrate in the next subchapter.

The people are a “stretchy” category in many ways: firstly, the category can “extend” Serbia’s territorial claim over “their (Albanian) Kosovo”, in that the autonomous community creates a separate territorial entity within Kosovo under direct cooperation with Serbia. The platform even suggests that the autonomous community could be one of the many regions of Kosovo, something that the Serbian side would suggest in the negotiations. Secondly, it allows Serbia to be part of and have an influence on the state structures of Kosovo through the Serb community’s representation in central institutions in Pristina, as well as their involvement in the constitution of the court system as envisioned by the autonomous community’s responsibilities and powers. The representation of Serbs in central institutions is guaranteed by the Kosovo Constitution and by Serbia acknowledging these institutions it could perform control over them by exerting influence on the Kosovo Serbs in these institutions. Had it maintained its rejections of the institutions, it would have had less influence in Kosovo. Thirdly, it allows Serbia’s statehood to be present and above all visible in Kosovo through symbolic practices, such as the community’s independence in deciding on the appearance and use of their symbols (coat of arms, flag, anthem, etc.). Fourthly, through integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo state structures and their foreseen participation in Kosovo elections, Serbia extends its state influence by providing or omitting its support of different Serb-led parties. I will return to the last point later in the analysis when I discuss *Srpska lista* (the Serbian list).

Ultimately, “the people” becomes a political category, one which is not only debated among different parties in the Brussels dialogue, but one which embodies Serbia’s hegemonic claim over Kosovo, and in that manner represents a nodal point of stabilizing the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse. Kosovo is still Serbia as long as the Serbian community is living there. If Kosovo is recognized as a separate entity, which would fragment the claim over Kosovo in terms of a unified territory, then the people signify a way for Serbian state and national interests to be represented in Kosovo. The people not only anchor the discourse of “Kosovo is Serbia”, but they also anchor the discourse that Kosovo is status-neutral and that Kosovo is an independent state. They do so because “the people” the parties in the dialogue are debating on do not have a legal international status or subjectivity. They are a seemingly apolitical category, which by virtue of being discussed and debated on within the dialogue, becomes a political category.

Why have the parties in the Brussels dialogue started debating on the position of the people in Kosovo, instead of something else? The answer primarily lies in the mandate given to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue by the UN, after the decision of the ICJ on the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence from 2010. The UN GA has, by adopting Resolution 64/298, welcomed

the readiness of the European Union to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties [Serbia and Kosovo]; the process of dialogue in itself would be a factor for peace, security and stability in the region, and that dialogue would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people (United Nations General Assembly 2010).

As this resolution acknowledges the ICJ's advisory opinion on the *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in respect of Kosovo*, without providing a final verdict on the status of Kosovo, the EU is welcomed as a facilitator able to negotiate on the practical aspects of the dispute between the parties. Improving the lives of the people is one of the core imperatives of this facilitation. The people are defined here in "status-neutral" terms: there is no mention of which state or legal framework these people are part of, or whether status should be something to debate on. Leaving no room to debate anything else, the dialogue mainly concerns the position of the people in Kosovo, especially those whose lives need improvement through the difficulties created by institutional parallelisms. This was one of the main imperatives of the "technical" dialogue: solving conflicting issues on the grounds, apart from the agreements on regional representation and arrangements for official visits.

Through metaphorically transposing Serbia's entire hegemonic claim to Kosovo onto the people, the Serbian Government effectively abandoned earlier reiterations of "preserving the sovereignty/territorial integrity of Serbia" in its resolutions. What is debated now is not the territory, or the efforts to preserve it, but to find a "compromise" with the Government in Pristina on how to improve the lives of the people: in other words, how to preserve Serbia in Kosovo through preserving the Serbian community in Kosovo. "The people" are operationalized in the service of Serbia's claim to Kosovo, as a means to exert its hegemony without fully exerting territorial control. By hegemonizing the people (there can only be a Serb community that belongs to Serbia, not a Serb community that belongs to the Albanian Kosovo), Serbia can still be present in Kosovo and Kosovo in Serbia if the Serb community lives there. Through the people, there is an intrinsic link between these two claims: Kosovo will always be Serbia and Serbia will always be in Kosovo as long as there is the Serb community.

5.3 Accommodating the Dislocatory Moment of Kosovo's Declaration of Independence through the Brussels Agreement

The Brussels agreement reached on April 13, 2013 played a crucial role in allowing Serbian hegemonic actors to materialize the claim of Kosovo in Serbia and Serbia in Kosovo. This means accommodating the dislocation occurred by Kosovo's declaration of independence, which clashed with the hegemonic discourse on "Kosovo is Serbia". The Brussels agreement, with its "constructively ambiguous" language represents an attempt to incorporate the dislocation into the dislocated discourse and is thus considered a myth (one which ultimately failed the trial by space and was only marginally implemented). By claiming that the Brussels agreement is a way to preserve Serbia in Kosovo through preserving its people there, Kosovo can still remain a part of Serbia while simultaneously being separate from it. The ambiguity of language allows for a metaphorical "covering over" of the dislocation while simultaneously maintaining the unity of the Kosovo is Serbia discourse. If we look at the way different issues in the Brussels agreement were articulated, it becomes evident that ambiguity is its central characteristic, signified by the dash ("/"). The Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities already indicates a double-layered meaning: the term Association is supposed to signify its relation to other existing associations of municipalities in Kosovo under the Kosovo law, which do not have any executive powers (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo 2008). By contrast, the term Community is supposed to signify an independent or autonomous body as part of the Kosovo institutional framework but comprising of the majority Serb community, where executive powers are the key (as was foreseen with the Government platform from January 2013). Even the way of writing it alternates within the text: sometimes Association comes before the dash followed by Community, and sometimes it is the opposite (Government of Kosovo 2013). This indicates that the meaning is not stabilized as a nodal point, around a singular signifier that would mean the same, or have as close a meaning as possible in both discourses of "Kosovo is Serbia" and "Kosovo is an independent state".

By extension, the extent to which this ambiguity has impaired the negotiation process becomes evident in the subsequent agreement on the general principles of how the A/CSM should be set up from August 2015 (European Union External Action 2015). In this text, the parties reached an agreement that the A/CSM should "*exercise* full overview [...] to develop local economy, [...] in the area of education, [...] to improve local primary and secondary health and social care, [...] to coordinate urban and rural planning" (ibid., emphasis added). The First agreement foresaw that the A/CSM "*have* full overview of the areas of economic development, education, health, urban and rural planning" (Government of Kosovo 2013, emphasis added). The verb "exercise" is transitive and refers to putting something into action, whereas "have" is intransitive and refers to being in possession of something, having a quality. This has allowed Serbian officials to claim that the

A/CSM will have executive powers, whereas the Kosovo officials have claimed that giving executive powers to the A/CSM would create a “second Bosnia” (Dnevnik 2, 20.04.2013, 12:20) or a second Republika Srpska in Kosovo (M. S. 2016, in Danas, 15 November) and have maintained that the A/CSM will be set up in the form of an NGO. This has resulted in the Kosovo Government referring this agreement to the Constitutional court that decided that the second agreement on A/CSM is contrary to the Kosovo constitution (Constitutional Court of Kosovo 2015). This resulted in a blockage in the implementation of the A/CSM to date, since the Serbian side insisted on executive powers, whereas the Kosovo side insisted in following the recommendations of the Constitutional court.

Returning to the Brussels agreement, at the time of its conclusion it was hailed as a “historic agreement” by EU officials specifically, such as Herman van Rompuy, Catherine Ashton and Štefan Füle (Dnevnik 2, 19.04.2013). This phrase has been re-iterated by the prime ministers of Kosovo and of Serbia, uplifting the moments of the agreement’s conclusion as historic, and something that will benefit the European future of both countries (ibid; Dnevnik 2, 16.06.2013). However, Dačić acknowledged that this agreement was not ideal, and Vučić and Nikolić insisted that with this agreement, Serbia lost as little as necessary by gaining as much as possible (Dnevnik 2, 20.04.2013). The report on the agreement was subsequently adopted by the Serbian Parliament, since adopting the agreement as such would mean recognizing Kosovo as a state (Serbia would have entered in a legal agreement with a separate state entity), hence only a report could be adopted as explained by Nebojša Stefanović, the Speaker of the National Assembly (Dnevnik 2, 22.04.2013, 08:22). Even though the discrepancy between the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse and the Brussels agreement was acknowledged by Serbian state officials, the dislocation was incorporated into the dominant structure of meaning not the least through the institutional acknowledgement and adoption of the report. Additionally, it was incorporated through relying on constructive ambiguity and the agreement being anchored by the nodal point of the people. In this manner, concealment of the dislocation could take place, by slightly re-structuring the dislocated discourse and incorporating additional nodal points. It was no longer about “preserving Kosovo and Metohija” or “defending Serbia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” but about the position of the Serb community and Serbian state and national interests *in* Kosovo. Therefore, we can speak of the community discourse covering over the dislocated discourse, since the conversation is moved along debating the position of the people in Kosovo, instead of emphasizing the two discourses’ discrepancies. As Dačić stated in his speech before the Parliament when the mentioned report on the Brussels agreement was adopted, Serbia should “view this document as a charter of the rights and freedoms of Kosovo Serbs, a charter that is small for our [Serbia’s] wishes, but big for their [Kosovo Serbs] future existence in Kosovo and Metohija” (Dnevnik 2, 26.04.2013, 02:22). He further added in his address:

This is now a chance for us to try to defend our state and national interests in a different manner. Not to celebrate our defeats after all that has happened. We cannot even defend Northern Kosovo today, not to mention defending Serbia! Defending it from poverty, lack of perspective for the future, and total failure. To refuse to acknowledge this would result in another *Oluja*¹⁹ in Kosovo” (ibid., 02:37, emphasis added).

To accommodate the dislocation means to re-articulate different elements of the Kosovo is Serbia discourse, such as Serbia’s territorial claim to Kosovo. Dačić therefore further frames the Brussels agreement as a break with previous state politics towards Kosovo, especially the way Kosovo’s declaration of independence was handled in 2008, which resulted in popular riots and setting fire to several Western embassies in Belgrade. Dačić is re-articulating the political frontier between “us” and “them”, be it Kosovo Albanians or Western powers, and positioning the Brussels agreement as a break from isolationist practices on the international stage, as evident in the following statement:

We could have banished the foreigners. We could have set fire to embassies and mosques. We could have directed our cannons towards Kosovo. We could have even become Europe’s North Korea. But what would happen then? Would we have won?! Would we have concurred Pristina?! There is no hiding anymore behind Kosovo. We are alone on this lonely island of ours! And it only depends on us what we will find on it tomorrow. Factories, schools, hospitals, apartments... or only vast cemeteries and tears. This is a question of to be or not to be! But not only for North Kosovo, but also for the rest of Serbia. This is why today we do not only talk about the negotiations on Kosovo in Brussels. We choose. Choose what kind of Serbia we want to have tomorrow. A humiliated one, a Serbia in soup kitchens, suffocated in tears, or a strong, economically developed Serbia in which everybody will have access to cures and in which Serbia will be the cure for everything” (ibid., 03:13).

It is evident that continuing the “stubborn” and uncompromising politics around Kosovo is articulated in opposition to attaining economic and social prosperity in the future, as part of Europe. It is evident in these moments that one imaginary supported by one fantasy is being amended with a different imaginary of EU integration, supported by fantasies of prosperity and stability. Something similar occurs with the idea of partition, but the material and affective claim to Kosovo is re-articulated as well, which is not the case with the Brussels agreement. In fact, the only way Serbia can truly become part of Europe is by compromising around Kosovo, but not compromising on the territorial question, which is not debated here. Frequent articulations of “doomsday scenarios” (a horrific fantasy) on what would happen if the Parliament and the broader public did not accept the Brussels agreement is reinforcing the hegemonic narrative of this being the “best deal possible”. This constitutes concealment as well, in service of delegitimizing responses that would reveal the dislocation: if we have compromised only as much as to enable a better life for our people, but only as far as it would allow us to still keep Kosovo within the framework of

¹⁹ Operation Storm, or *Oluja* in Croatian was the name of the military intervention in 1995 when the majority Serb population of Krajina (approximately 150000) was expelled from Eastern Croatia.

Serbia, then nothing has essentially changed. The hegemonic discourse of “Kosovo is Serbia” can still be constitutive of Serbia’s political practice regarding Kosovo.

This concealment is also evident in the decision of Serbia’s Constitutional court to define the Brussels agreement as a “political” instead of a “legal” one. Namely, the parliamentary caucus of the opposition party DSS (*Demokratska Stranka Srbije*), supported by other MPs outside the caucus, submitted a proposal to the Constitutional court for deciding on the constitutionality of the Brussels agreement on 8 May 2013. They claimed that the agreement is in violation of the law and Serbia’s Constitution and that it instead affirms the “Constitution and laws of the false state of Kosovo” (*Dnevnik 2*, 08.05.2013, 10:00). The public debate in the Parliament on this issue occurred a year after the submission and the Court’s decision was reached on 10 October 2014, although made public only four months after that, in February 2015. In the decision, the Court maintained that it could not reach a decision on the Brussels agreement because (1) it cannot be considered an international agreement, and (2) because the agreement and the subsequent conclusion of the Government on the acceptance of the Brussels agreement and the decision of the Parliament to ratify this conclusion cannot be defined as general legal acts (Constitutional Court of Serbia 2014; see also Đerić and Papić 2016).

In saying that the Constitutional court had no capacity to decide on the legality of the agreement, it was not declared dislocatory to the constitutional and legal order of Serbia. Since the Government and the Parliament adopted reports on the agreement, not the agreement itself, as explained by Stefanović, it can only be deemed a political document instead of a legal one, only the latter of which would fall under the domain of the Constitutional court. The dislocatory potential of the Brussels agreement to the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse that even dominates the constitutional order of Serbia has been concealed by the Court’s decision. However, because the Constitution only forbids the recognition of Kosovo as a separate state, but it does not prescribe the modalities of the institutional infrastructure present within Kosovo, the plan of the Government since they began their engagement in the political dialogue has been to pass a law on Kosovo’s substantial autonomy, as Dačić explained immediately after the Brussels agreement was reached. He said that “The Community [A/CSM] will become a part of the constitutional-legal system of Serbia in that we need to pass a law on the substantial autonomy [of Kosovo and Metohija]. This law will be a constitutional law which will enable all the competences that the Community [A/CSM] will have, that Kosovo will have, to become legally valid under the Constitution” (*Dnevnik 2*, 20.04.2013, 02:52). Even though the dislocation was noted at the beginning, the subsequent Constitutional court’s decision has concealed it, enabling the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse to be upheld.

On another level, discursive practices such as naming play a big role in accommodating and concealing the dislocation as well. For instance, Prime Minister Dačić has claimed that the Brussels agreement was “the most Serbia could gain in this moment” and represented the fact that “for the first time, we have an internationally recognized North [Kosovo], that is, a Community of Serbs that they have so far been calling ‘parallel structures’” (Dnevnik 2, 20.04.2013, 02:44). Naming the A/CSM the “internationally recognized North” or a “Community of Serbs” defies the logic of illegitimacy of Serbian state institutions in Kosovo and its breaking with the principles of Resolution 1244 since the beginning of the international supervision. It legitimizes the Serbian state in Kosovo and articulates the A/CSM as a whole that is separate, special and specific to the rest of Kosovo, a whole that is “ours” and not “theirs”. The “they” in the previous statement refers to both Kosovo Albanians and the international community, because both of those Others have identified Serbian state structures in Kosovo as parallel structures. Naming the A/CSM the way Dačić did is a subversive move, as it not only emphasizes the “separateness” of the A/CSM from the Kosovo framework, but also embeds it within the discourse of the international community on abolishing these parallel structures. By constituting it as separate, Dačić is claiming it as a double victory: it is through becoming a part of the international community’s discourse that the A/CSM can be named “Serbian”, after all it is a community of *Serb* municipalities that is recognized by all parties, not just by Serbia as was the case with parallel structures.

At the same time, the dislocation is concealed by articulating the Serb community as a subject with agency and ability to tap into various resources offered by Belgrade, Pristina and the international community alike. Through the Brussels agreement, the Serb community would be able to resist something they do not support in an open-ended fight in which the fulfillment of their goals is possible – goals, that are inevitably aligned with the goals of the Serbian state. This is partially done through citationality, drawing parallels between Albanian “dissent” during the 1990s, as Rasim Ljajić, the Deputy Prime Minister, explained after the Brussels agreement was concluded:

It is clear that the political fight does not end [with this agreement]. During the 1990s, Kosovo Albanians have fought for their rights, they did not accept the state of Serbia, but they have used all the resources Serbia offered them, starting with salaries, pensions, welfare, to investments in infrastructure that Belgrade financed. Practically everything. I think that now Kosovo Serbs should do the same, to fight for their goals by using all the mechanisms of the international community, Pristina and Belgrade. Nobody is forcing them to give up on their political goals (Milenković 2013, in Danas, 29 April).

The previously discussed articulation of the Serb community in Kosovo as a nodal point in the community discourse is central to Serbia’s claim to Kosovo. Performing this claim to Kosovo within this discourse by Serbian hegemonic actors happens in a few ways. Firstly, the claim is performed through the institutional integration of the community in the Kosovo state framework, which is mainly done through the establishment of the A/CSM. Secondly, the claim is performed

through the institutional framework in Serbia as such: through the work of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija and by keeping the Serbia-run institutions in Kosovo still in place, after the adoption of the Brussels agreement. Thirdly, it is performed through various subjects of the Serbian community in Kosovo, mainly the newly elected mayors and the largest Serbia-backed political party Srpska lista (Serbian list), which was created as a result of the Brussels agreement and the necessity of Kosovo Serbs to participate in the first local elections in 2013.

5.4 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through Institutional Integration: A/CSM

Part of the logic of the contact zone is that it offers an opportunity for the production of empty signifiers which can bring conflicting political projects closer: particular meanings are debated across conflicting discourses until a specific nodal point takes the place of representing an unachieved universality that would stabilize conflicting discourses around it. That would imply that the meaning of a specific nodal point that has taken the place of universality is *shared* across conflicting discourses, that is all parties have to be in agreement on what it means. However, as I will demonstrate below, these nodal points remain simply floating signifiers, acquiring different meanings in these conflicting discourses. The Brussels agreement demonstrates the complexity of reaching such a shared understanding across conflicting discourses, and the main issue lies with the mentioned principle of “constructive ambiguity”. Ambiguity per se cannot be about a signifier having the same meaning across discourses. As I indicated earlier, the A/CSM is one of those floating signifiers the meaning of which is not stabilized across discourses. The empty signifier in this constellation would be a *compromise*, or a *solution* (that which is absent from the discourse, the “presence of an absence”) to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, with the A/CSM taking the place of representing that solution. However, since the A/CSM does not have a stabilized meaning across discourses (it is read in an ambiguous manner, as I indicated earlier), the practice of contestation prevails over the practice of stabilization of meaning in the Brussels dialogue.

A practice that serves the production of empty signifiers is naming, specifically “naming the unnamable” (Laclau 2005), when new terms emerging in the discursive field take the place of representing a whole, and which is usually the consequence of dislocation, as aptly explained by Palonen (2018b). This move would be a *catachrestical* one, as I indicted in Chapter 3. As explained by Howarth and Griggs (2006), the practice of naming, which they define as a “moment of catachresis *par excellence*”, constitutes the reference of the named object as such. Naming can tap into a variety of discourses that are prevalent and that several social subjects affectively subscribe to. By the practice of naming, the named object is constituted as a new object that can represent a multitude of demands and reconcile the achievement of contradicting elements (*ibid.*, 41). Following this logic, naming the A/CSM as such, with a dash incarnating the ambiguity of such

naming, allows for this newly emerged object to represent a multitude of conflicting demands, all seemingly achievable at the same time (A/CSM representing the fantasy of social fullness, a *solution* to the dispute). However, it is the particularities of what lies on the other side of the dash that eventually fail to take the representation of fullness and accommodate these conflicting demands. This became especially evident in late 2015, after Kosovo's Constitutional court found that the A/CSM could not be implemented as foreseen by the agreement on common principles concluded in August 2015. Hence, the main impetus of a contact zone as defined by this case study would be to foster the production of nodal points that would stabilize intersecting and conflicting discourses, instead of the production of floating signifiers. Although constructive ambiguity might be beneficial to bridge a gap between conflicting demands, at a certain moment, these conflicting demands need to be stabilized around a signifier whose meaning (content) is shared across discourses. This would ideally mean the emergence of a new discourse, unifying the previously conflicting ones, whose center of fixity is that specific nodal point, something that the Brussels dialogue has not been able to achieve yet.

What this specifically entails is evident in the idea of "institutional integration" of Kosovo Serbs in the Kosovo institutional framework, specifically the establishment of the A/CSM. One of the reasons it was never implemented was the lack of a shared understanding on its setup, capacities and responsibilities, since both parties could continue to produce opposing demands. The Serbian representatives continued to articulate it as a way of preserving Serbia's statehood in Kosovo, and the Kosovo representatives continued to articulate it as a triumph of consolidating Kosovo's statehood (the logic of a floating signifier). This production of a new object has also been acknowledged by Dačić during the negotiations in Brussels, just prior to the conclusion of the Brussels agreement: "We will evidently need to figure out a non-standard solution [to the dispute] if we ever want to achieve an agreement, since the entire situation around Kosovo is non-standard" (Dnevnik 2, 05.03.2013, 02:00).

This new object, as already mentioned, would become the A/CSM with a dash. For this object to be articulated, a few discursive elements needed to be re-constituted, so that performing the claim to Kosovo could occur through institutional integration as a proposed solution. First and foremost, it was about acknowledging the specificity of the situation around Kosovo, as evident in the above statement by Dačić. Secondly, it was about operationalizing the various representations of Kosovo in Serbia and Serbia in Kosovo, which would mean anchoring the claim to Kosovo around the nodal point of the people, i.e., the Serb community in Kosovo.

Not only the specificity of the situation around the A/CSM was articulated, but the entire supposedly particular situation of Kosovo's current status in the international legal order and its

particular position as part of Serbia's demands to statehood in Kosovo. A few days before the conclusion of the Brussels agreement, Dačić acknowledged that

On the one hand, Serbia has lost control over the majority of Kosovo after the NATO bombing of 1999. On the other, Pristina does not have sovereignty over parts of the province's territory that is majority Serb-populated. We are ready to talk about the international status of Kosovo with Pristina, but they are not willing to do so. They view their independence as a done deal and believe that there is nothing more to talk about (Dnevnik 2, 15.04.2013, 06:13).

These majority Serb-populated areas are used as an anchor of Serbia's statehood in Kosovo. Since the representatives of Kosovo view the question of territory as finally set (meaning that Kosovo is an independent state with an unchangeable territory), the negotiations did not revolve around territorial issues. However, because the Serb community inevitably occupies a certain part of the territory, an equivalential relation is articulated between the Serb community and the parts of territory they live in. Hence, the claim to Kosovo does not refer to the entire territory of Kosovo here, but only to those parts where the Serb people live. This makes Northern Kosovo a very important bargaining chip for the Serb representatives, which is also evident in the Brussels agreement itself, in which about half of the agreement refers to this specific area. Establishing the A/CSM in Northern Kosovo is particularly vital, since this area is considered as the "last foothold" of Serbia's statehood in Kosovo, both in terms of the population and territorial setup, given that the area borders Serbia proper.

Since the specificity of Kosovo was recognized, it has also been recognized that the areas populated by Serbs, especially Northern Kosovo because of its territorial position, were specific as well. A compromise would need to address the issue of the Serb community as an umbrella term, under which the issue of territoriality in the North could be discussed. During the peak of negotiations in March and April 2013, these issues have been brought up by Prime Minister Dačić, claiming that no Serbs would ever offer more than his government had offered to Pristina (Dnevnik 2, 08.03.2013). He claimed (*ibid.*, 02:12):

We have no maneuvering potential anymore. What we have suggested, we have suggested honestly, not because we wanted to bargain. No Serb will ever offer to Pristina more than we have offered. I said that openly to Thaçi: 'Listen, you can come to Northern Kosovo only with guns. If you do not understand that, that it will cause regional instability, then we do not have enough room for an agreement.' On the other hand, we are ready to solve the issue of parallel institutions. This solution proposed by our President Nikolić was very decent and just. If even that is not enough, then I do not know what else we can offer.

In the above statement, Dačić articulates Northern Kosovo as Serbian, since it will defy any attempts at control by the authorities in Pristina. The representation of "their", Kosovo Albanian Kosovo is anchored strongly here in opposition to what is "ours". The political frontier is drawn between Serbian and Kosovo Albanian interests and the antagonistic relations between Serbs and Albanians as peoples is incarnated in the signifier "guns" which evokes the memories of past wars

and incites and affective response: the Kosovo Albanian Other is defined as an existential threat, not only to Serbian state interests, but more importantly to the local Serb community. It is because of this antagonism that the A/CSM has no alternative, since not having it in place would either mean the expulsion of Serbs from Kosovo, or another war if they try to defend themselves.

The A/CSM comes to embody the performative claim to Serbia's continued statehood in Kosovo. The fact that it would have "full overview" of essential areas of daily life, such as education, health care, urban planning etc. only serves to sediment this claim. Through the establishment of the A/CSM, as envisioned by the Serbian Government, having executive powers, Serbia would be able to uphold the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse as anchored in its Constitution, as well as maintain the emerging demands of "Serbia in Kosovo" in parallel.

An event that very much amplified this performative claim to statehood was the first local elections as envisioned by the Brussels agreement, in which Kosovo Serbs would elect representatives to form mayoral offices in the majority Serb-populated municipalities. This step towards institutional integration, once the municipalities under the Kosovo system are established, would enable the formation of the A/CSM in Kosovo. If successful, it would also mean that the responsibilities of the Serbia-run institutions are transferred onto the A/CSM, so that there would no longer be "parallel institutions" in place. However, since the local municipalities under the Serbian system were run by members of the opposition party DSS and parties and groups associated with them, they have from the start opposed the implementation of the Brussels agreement and did not want to participate in the local elections. In fact, they have requested a referendum on the acceptance of the Brussels agreement once the Serbian Government has adopted the conclusions on the agreement on 22 April 2013. The DSS organized protests against the adoption of the agreement in both Belgrade and North Mitrovica. The leader of the local government of Mitrovica Krstimir Pantić called even for the establishment of a third system – the Parliament of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (*Skupština AP KiM*) – that would not be obedient to either Belgrade or Pristina (Dnevnik 2, 22.04.2013, 10:29). Simultaneously, the leader of the DSS Vojislav Koštunica at the protest in Belgrade called for the resignation of the Government and the annulment of the Brussels agreement, since it adheres only to the Kosovo laws (ibid., 11:17). Because of the continuous boycott of the local Serb representatives from Kosovo and their unwillingness to participate in the upcoming Kosovo elections, the Government of Serbia decided to dissolve the four municipalities in Northern Kosovo (Kosovska Mitrovica, Leposavić, Zvečan and Zubin Potok) on 10 September 2013. In their place, the heads and members of the temporary institutions in these municipalities were named, representatives whose political views would be aligned with the Government's. In response to this move, Aleksandar Vulin, the director of the Government's Office for Kosovo and Metohija said:

These are historic times, truly faith-determining times, and in these times, nobody has the right not to be a part of the state of Serbia when the state of Serbia is fighting to remain on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. The people who have left [the opposition substituted with government-aligned representatives] are not dishonorable people. The people who have left, they are not criminals, nor did we replace them because we think that they need to be incarcerated. But at the same time, the people who have taken their place are no less honorable, or lesser patriots, and no less capable than the others were (Dnevnik 2, 10.09.2013, 07:59).

The decision of the representatives of local governments that were replaced to boycott the local elections was equated to boycotting the entire state of Serbia and its interests. If there are no elections in Kosovo, then there cannot be “Serbia in Kosovo” as a solution to the dispute, or the re-articulation of the dislocated structure. The local elections constitute a practice of performing Serbia’s statehood in Kosovo, even though they are organized within the Kosovo system, largely because of the re-articulation of Serbia’s claim to Kosovo from “Kosovo is Serbia” to “Serbia in Kosovo”. On 17 October 2013, during the campaign for the local elections in Kosovo, the first ones to ever be held in the North, the Minister of Energy, Development and Environmental Protection Zorana Mihajlović and the head of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar Vulin articulated the participation of Serbs in the local elections as the beginning of the creation of a new system of Serbia *in* Kosovo and Metohija, which will be reflected in the Community of Serb municipalities (Dnevnik 2, 17.10.2013, 08:04). Such a reconstitution of elements, in which “Serbia” becomes fragmented into systems, one in place in Serbia and one in Kosovo as separate entities, acknowledges that space in Kosovo is multi-layered (our Serbian and their Kosovo Albanian) and that these two representations need to meet at the intersection of institutional integration through performing elections and establishing the A/CSM. In short, that space needs to be shared.

Another practice of performing Serbia’s claim to statehood in Kosovo is material, infrastructural to be more precise. Namely, when the energy and telecommunications agreement was reached between Belgrade and Pristina in Brussels on 9 September 2013, Vulin identified it as crucial for Serbia, especially in terms of its claim to Northern Kosovo as a specifically important area:

The essence of Northern Kosovo is energy, it is Trepča. Energy has remained in the same position as it had before, the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija will continue to be supplied with electricity from our system, electricity will be charged via our companies [...] We keep an eye on this, we continue to fight for every detail of life for Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and I will add one more thing: not a single project we have started in the municipalities in Northern Kosovo will stop, all of them will be finished, and we will start new ones. We are replacing people [the local municipal representatives], but our politics of North Kosovo’s development, the preservation of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija will not change (Dnevnik 2, 10.09.2013, 11:25).

Energy and infrastructure financed by the Serbian state is articulated as “Serbia in Kosovo” and through this move, in part at least, Northern Kosovo is articulated as “Serbia in Kosovo”. By putting it in the locus of negotiations, using the fact that Northern Kosovo is not integrated within Kosovo state structures as a bargaining chip, to establish the A/CSM in the first place (recalling

Dačić's statement that the Albanians can only come to the North by using guns), this area becomes a material incarnation of Serbia's claim to Kosovo. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, Northern Kosovo will embody Serbia's claim to Kosovo fully when the idea of partition is introduced in late 2017 and 2018, when the rest of Kosovo ceases to play a significant role for the fulfillment of "Serbian state and national interests". In a nutshell, the people are made political in the community discourse in order for territory to be left un-politicized. In the partition discourse, territory is made political through the previous articulation of equivalence between the people as Serb community and the places where they live in Kosovo. Only those parts of territory in which Serb people live are part of the claim to Kosovo, meaning that both territory and the people acquire additional meanings, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6.

5.5 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through the Serbian Institutional Framework

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the community discourse is characterized by the dominant two representations of Kosovo: sharing Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians and the symbolic claim to entire Kosovo, meaning that the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse can be upheld while simultaneously claiming that Kosovo is a separate subject. In maintaining that Kosovo is Serbia, this claim is performed through Serbia's institutional framework as well, not only in the practices of institutional integration of Serbia-run institutions into the Kosovo framework. Even though institutional integration happened in some areas, Serbia still maintained all its crucial institutions in place in Kosovo, specifically in the areas populated by the Serb community. Their abolition should have happened with the establishment of the A/CSM but during that transition period, they were upheld and are still in place (since the A/CSM was never realized). Because of this, Serbia was still able to maintain its claim to statehood in Kosovo, both symbolically and materially.

Firstly, this claim was performed through the general institutional framework of Serbia, such as the Constitution, whose preamble claims that "the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an indivisible part of the territory of Serbia" (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2006). This has been reified in many declarations and resolutions of the Parliament, specifically those concluded prior to and in 2011, which emphasize the "preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity". A resolution that complicates this picture is the one from 13 January 2013, even though this resolution also confirms the principles set out in all the previous resolutions on the fact that "the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with international law, the Constitution and the will of the people does not and will never recognize the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo" (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2013). Initiated by members of the ruling parties SNS and SPS, the adoption of the resolution was supported by an overwhelming majority of the Parliament, namely 175 MPs, while 19 voted against it (MPs of the Democratic Party of Serbia – DSS, the

Liberal Democratic Party – LDP and the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina – LSV), and two abstained. The resolution is a perfect illustration of how upholding both the claim to Kosovo in Serbia and recognizing Kosovo as a separate subject can be maintained, and it is primarily by making certain issues political, and not touching on others at all. In this case, territory and its status are left undebated, while the position of the people, the Serbs community is politicized.

The resolution opens with the statement that Kosovo and Metohija occupies a central spot in the political, economic, cultural, spiritual and social life of Serbia, and continues to define what the main state and national goals are: “maintaining territorial integrity and sovereignty, economic development, the protection of political, economic and security interests of the Republic of Serbia in the area of Kosovo and Metohija, enabling a better life for all citizens through EU integration, demographic recovery” (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2013). The resolution affirms that any solution pertaining to Kosovo (be it its final territorial status, the position of the Serbian people in the province or the position of Serbia’s religious and cultural heritage) must be in accordance with the Constitution and valid international resolutions. This excludes the recognition of Kosovo’s independence (since it is prohibited by the Constitution) and the quest for an alternative solution to the Kosovo question is left revolving around the latter two aspects mentioned above. The resolution thus calls for the following:

The aim of the negotiations [in Brussels] is to create *conditions* for the Serbian community and all other national communities in Kosovo and Metohija that would guarantee security and full protection of human rights. The Government of the Republic of Serbia will demand the protection of all guaranteed rights for Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, the right of return and property rights. The Government of the Republic of Serbia is committed to continue to shed light onto the fates of missing persons and to follow the trials of people accused of perpetrating ethnic violence against the Serbs (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

The specific conditions that would need to be provided must also be in line with the abovementioned legal principles, which affirms again that territory cannot be politicized, ergo: everything must follow from the Constitution and affirm the state and national interests mentioned in the resolution. As the resolution further explains: “The Republic of Serbia is ready to make additional concessions in order to overcome the current state of affairs between the Serbian and Albanian people. At the same time, the Republic of Serbia is not ready to make additional concessions that could jeopardize its state and national interests.” It is quite evident how the resolution articulates the main issue: as an issue between the two communities, not two countries, and by politicizing the people, “state and national interests” in terms of territory are left outside of the frame of debate.

Another institutional constellation that embodies the performative claim to Kosovo is the Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija, established in 2012. There is a long history of specific ministries and offices in Serbia that deal explicitly with affairs pertaining to Kosovo,

starting from the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, via the Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo and Metohija, to the Government Office for Kosovo and Metohija (KiM) today. It can be argued that this institutional transformation also reflects the re-constitution of Serbia's claim to Kosovo and the attempts at changing its hegemonic status. Basing this argument on the fact that ministries have the highest institutional status in a government, changing it into an institution represented by a Minister without Portfolio and subsequently to an Office of the Government testifies to the attempt at re-constituting the meaning of such institutions. It also testifies to the attempt to change the subjects behind affairs pertaining to Kosovo and the institutional procedures that follow it. For instance, prior to the introduction of the Office for KiM in mid-2012, with the constitution of the new, SNS-majority government led by Iвица Dačić from SPS, the procedure of adopting any agreement (or the standard procedure of a report on the agreement) made in Brussels had to go to the Parliament where it would face a majority vote (Borko Stefanović, personal correspondence 2017). However, with the adoption of the Government platform which was ratified by the resolution from January 2013, the procedure was changed so that the Government could simply adopt the (report on) agreements during government sessions and let the Parliament subsequently ratify it. This gave much more independence to the Government instead of the Parliament in deciding on the implementability of agreements reached in Brussels. This was evident during the peak of negotiations to reach the Brussels agreement in April 2013 and Vučić's statement on the draft paper of the agreement. He said that "we need to look at the real facts, we do not need *a priori* attitudes from the Parliament" (Dnevnik 2, 03.04.2013, 23:00). This is an indication of why the Government has taken on a bigger role in the negotiations, since this move enables quicker decision-making, fewer people involved in the decision process and most importantly, enables the marginalization of opposition voices from the Parliament. The Government can decide on the negotiation direction and the specific contents of the agreement, and the Parliament is left with a "take it or leave it" choice, which is no choice at all if the government parties have a parliamentary majority. Hence, the opposition is marginalized from input to the content of the agreements, something that was not the case in the previous procedures prior to 2013. One of the reasons why the idea of partition gained traction, as will be elaborated in the following chapter, is because alternative political demands were institutionally marginalized from the process of producing a solution, enabling political actors to institute an idea hegemonically that otherwise might not have passed the debates in Parliament. Another reason is of course the failed implementation of the A/CSM, and the recognition that an alternative solution was needed, all of which will be addressed in detail later.

When Aleksandar Vulin became head of this Office, he maintained that:

The main goal of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija is to preserve the existing number of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and to increase this number. Of course, it is about ensuring a better, more just life for them, and when I say this, I do not only mean this in legal terms but also in economic terms. The misery of our people is not commensurate with the amount of money that Serbia allocates for its southern province (Dnevnik 2, 23.07.2012, 07:42).

Vulin ties the main reason the Office was put in place to the position of the people, the Serb community in Kosovo. He also articulates his position as “the hardest and most honorable task in the new government” (ibid., 07:25). The responsibilities of the Office are tied partially to the previous responsibilities of the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, as indicated on their website, and are also evident in the special Regulation that brought this institution about. The regulation (Office for Kosovo and Metohija 2012) claims that

The Office performs professional tasks for the needs of the Government and responsible Ministries related to the: functioning of the institutions of the Republic of Serbia on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija; education, health, social policy, culture, infrastructure, local government and telecommunications in the Serb areas of Kosovo and Metohija; functioning of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija; restoration and protection of spiritual and cultural heritage; financial, legal, technical and personnel assistance in all areas relevant to Serbs and other non-Albanian communities in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija; cooperation with the Commissariat for Refugees in terms of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija; cooperation with the United Nations civilian and military mission in Kosovo and Metohija (UNMIK and KFOR) pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1244.

The Office also performs “professional and operational tasks in the negotiation process with the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina”, specifically those relating to the negotiation process and the implementation of agreements (a provision that was added in 2013). Hence, the main task of the Office is to preserve “Serbia in Kosovo” in all its forms, be it Serbia-run institutions, the Serb community itself or the religious heritage in Kosovo. Since the Serb community came to embody Serbia’s performative claim to statehood in Kosovo, preserving the Serb community (or even increasing it, as Vulin mentioned) would entail the realization of this hegemonic project. The bigger the Serb community in Kosovo, the bigger Serbia’s claim to Kosovo. As also indicated in the Resolution from 2013, all institutions should act together in order to achieve the main state and national goals it defines, and that would be “the protection of political, economic and security interests of the Republic of Serbia in the area of Kosovo and Metohija, enabling a better life for all citizens through EU integration, [and] demographic recovery” (National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2013). The focus on preserving “Serbia in Kosovo” mainly through the Serb community is quite clear in the entire institutional framework. In sum, even though Serbia’s claim to Kosovo is performed through the Office for KiM, its very existence reaffirms the paradoxical notion that Kosovo is part of Serbia, albeit being recognized as something different from the rest of Serbia. However, due to the re-articulation of the claim to Kosovo into “Serbia *in* Kosovo”, its specificity and difference is re-affirmed as necessary, because it is articulated as the only way Serbia can preserve its statehood there, as Vulin mentioned.

Apart from the Office for KiM, Serbia is performing its claim to Kosovo through the institutional framework by keeping the Serbia-run institutional bodies in place in Kosovo, even though Kosovo has been recognized as a separate subject. It is not only about the performative potential of the institutional framework in Serbia as such, but also about its parallel existence to the already Kosovo-integrated institutions. These integrated institutions are local municipalities formed after the first local elections in November 2013, as well as the judiciary integrated in 2017, the police force, and the telecommunications company Telekom. Serbia thus dissolved their state-run structures in the field of telecommunications, police and judiciary, but kept financing local governments, as well as other institutions pertaining to social issues, such as hospitals, clinics, schools, cultural centers etc. Another institution that remained in limbo was energy, for which an agreement was reached, but had not been implemented to date. The initial idea was to keep these parallel institutions in place until they could be transformed into the institutions of the A/CSM, which would mean a full institutional integration with no parallelisms.

The main objective with the A/CSM, as explained earlier by Serbian Government representatives, was to keep “Serbia in Kosovo”, and even strengthen it, because the so-called “parallel structures” would then be recognized by all parties as the structures of A/CSM. During the negotiation process for reaching the First agreement, Vulin said in January 2013 that “the institutions will remain, [...] life will continue as it did before” (Dnevnik 2, 18.01.2013, 07:25). What was generally emphasized by Serbian representatives was that these new institutions (what would crystallize into the idea of A/CSM) would be “the institutions of the Serbian people”. At the same time, “these institutions that some would consider today to be institutions of Serbia, would be recognized by Pristina as well” (ibid., 06:40). The Serbian people metaphorically take on the representation of the integrated institutions, in order to accommodate the dislocation created by Kosovo’s declaration of independence: in effect, the integration of institutions means that they would fall under the Kosovo state framework, but by articulating them as the institutions of the Serbian people, they can remain part of the Serbian state framework, since the Serb community has been re-iterated as the embodiment of Serbia in Kosovo. The fact that the new institutions would continue to be financed from Serbia only reinforces this claim, since the Serbian state representatives can argue that nothing has changed, as evident in the abovementioned statement by Vulin.

5.6 Performing the Claim to Kosovo through Members of the Serb Community

I discussed in Chapter 4 the different representations or articulations of Kosovo in Serbia. At the same time, as the community discourse has been anchored around the nodal point of the people, this signifier also acquires several meanings. In 2013, and primarily with the adoption of the Brussels agreement, there are two representations of Serbs based on political affiliation: 1) the ones

supporting Serbian state and national interests in Kosovo (members and supporters of Srpska lista), and 2) the ones who do not support these interests (labeled with an array of expressions, such as traitors, dissidents, but also “fine people” as expressed earlier by Vulin when DSS municipality representatives in Northern Kosovo were replaced by government-aligned). In the community discourse, the Serbian Government representatives tend to articulate the Serb community in Kosovo as a unified whole, without much distinction between Serbs from North Kosovo and those living in the South. This was primarily because of the setup of the A/CSM, since it was supposed to be comprised of municipalities with a Serbian majority from all over Kosovo. However, this changed within the partition discourse, since separating Northern Kosovo from the rest was at the top of the agenda, which has resulted in a divided view of the Serb community itself: 3) Serbs from Northern Kosovo and 4) Serbs from South of the Ibar River. Serbs from Northern Kosovo became a political category since they were the locus of negotiations with Pristina, particularly because of their ties to the specific territory of Northern Kosovo. This will be elaborated in the following chapter, but the focus of this one is how Serbia’s claim to statehood in Kosovo was performed through the Serb community as such, however, politically divided.

Serbia’s claim to statehood is mainly performed through the Srpska lista (Serbian list). When the Srpska lista was registered for the local elections on 4 September 2013 under the name of *Gradanska inicijativa Srbija* (Citizens’ initiative Serbia), Dačić claimed that with the formation of this party, the Government wanted to “show that there is a list which Serbia stands behind, that is the state authorities of Serbia” (Dnevnik 2, 04.09.2013, 00:30). This was also confirmed by one of the high-level members of the Srpska lista, claiming that the party was an “extension of the Serbian Government” (Ljubomir Marić, personal correspondence, July 2017). In this sense, the unitary Serbian list that would later become Srpska lista performatively embodies the state of Serbia in Kosovo, since its members are selected in direct contact with Belgrade and the ruling parties.

Even on the formation of this list, Dačić made it clear that “they” (referring to the Kosovo Albanian representatives)

only verbally want Serbs to participate in the elections in the right manner, but they obviously have some other favorite Serbian lists that they think should take part. That is why we have agreed, regardless of all the problems, that it would be in the Serbian interest to have a single, unified list. When I say unified, I mean that it should be composed of the most important Serbian political factors in Kosovo and Metohija, where this is possible (ibid., 02:32).

Serbian interest here can refer to both Serbian state interest and the interest of the Serb community in Kosovo. A unified list is important for performing the state of Serbia in Kosovo because it allows for a very focused influence on the political landscape of Kosovo. This way, opposition voices from the Serb community that might not agree with the Serbian state’s hegemonic project in Kosovo are immediately disqualified as illegitimate. Dačić is also articulating a division between

those Serbs who would be representing the Serbian state interests on the one hand, and those Serbs “favored” by Albanians that would represent theirs on the other. These “other” Serbs Dačić has called “Thaçi’s Serbs” (Tasić 2013d, in Danas, 23 May) to warn the Serbs from Kosovo not to boycott the local elections in November 2013, because the future A/CSM will be run by the said “Thaçi’s Serbs”. Accordingly, those Serbs who are not part of this list cannot be deemed as legitimate representatives of Serbs and Serbia.

As explained in the methodology chapter, naming is an important aspect of performativity, since it enables the institution and re-articulation of hegemonic discourses. Hence, another aspect of performing Serbia’s claim to statehood is the very name of this Serbian list. When it registered for the elections as the “Citizens’ initiative Serbia”, the central election commission of Kosovo remarked that the name was unacceptable, since it contained the name of a foreign country in its title. Two lists by Kosovo Serbs were deemed inappropriate: the “Građanska inicijativa Srbija”, backed up by the Serbian Government, and the list “Srbija, demokratija, pravda” (Serbia, democracy, justice). After a meeting in Brussels on 7 September 2013, Vulin as a member of the Serbian delegation remarked that the “Albanian side” had issues with the name, but that any change to it has to be agreed with [the members of the Serb community]” (Dnevnik 2, 07.09.2013, 02:37). Vulin further ironically remarked that “you cannot expect of Serbs to name their list ‘the spirit of reconciliation’, or to name it something entirely neutral. These are elections where one nation [*nacija*] is gathering and where one nation takes responsibility for its own future. This is why its name has to be Serbian [*srpska*]” (Dnevnik 2, 09.09.2013, 06:50). By claiming that the upcoming elections would gather an entire nation, meaning the Serbian nation, irrespective of the territory they inhabit, Srpska lista comes to represent an extension of Serbia’s statehood and metonymically stands in place of Serbian state and national interests. The suggestion to call the list Serbian (*srpska*) instead of Serbia (*Srbija*) was eventually accepted by the central elections commission, a move that enabled the focus to be shifted away from claiming that Kosovo is a part of the Serbian state in territorial terms, to Kosovo as a part of the Serbian nation in terms of the Serb community there.

The *Građanska inicijativa Srpska* (later renamed Srpska lista) began their election campaign on 4 October 2013 with a rally in Štrpce, a Serb-majority municipality in South Kosovo. At the rally, the representatives of Srpska lista said that their victory means preserving both (Serbia-funded) salaries and the state institutions of Serbia, as well as preventing the “Albanianization” of Serb communities in Kosovo and Metohija (Dnevnik 2, 04.10.2013). The Serbian list is re-articulating what has been previously mentioned by the Serbian Government representatives: they are metaphorically substituting the integration of institutions as foreseen by the Brussels agreement with the preservation of Serbia-run institutions, but they are also antagonistically articulating the Kosovo Albanian threat, supposedly endangering the “Serbdom” of the Serbian-majority municipalities. In

this manner, they are supporting the Serbian Government's view of the Serb community being a part of the Serbian nation, and, by extension, of the Serbian state, embodying Serbia's claim to statehood in Kosovo. With this move, they are concealing the dislocation in terms of the existence of Kosovo state structures and the institutional integration into these structures that the very existence of Srpska lista represents. Being part of the Kosovo electoral framework, Srpska lista is dis-articulating their involvement in this framework and articulating instead how their victory will help to protect the institutions of Serbia in Kosovo.

Prime Minister Dačić was also supposed to participate in this rally, but was denied entry by the Kosovo authorities, with the justification that it is unheard of that a representative of a foreign government helps campaign for and potentially interfere in political elections of another (Dnevnik 2, 04.10.2013). Finally, after much deliberation mediated by Brussels Dačić was granted entry on religious grounds, with the justification that he wanted to visit the Serbian Orthodox medieval monasteries in Kosovo. He participated in a rally in front of the monastery Gračanica and called Serbs to participate in the upcoming local elections. Dačić said that Serbs should vote for those political representatives that would lead a unified policy with Belgrade and through this protect Serbian state and national interests in the province (Dnevnik 2, 19.10.2013, 03:52). In his address to the gathered crowd of reportedly several thousand people, Dačić drew on the well-known discourse on Kosovo as a cradle of the Serbian nation and the Serbian medieval state:

Wherever we come [referring to him only being allowed to visit the monastery, instead of participating in the rally] you know that it is a message that Serbia is here [*applause, cheering*]. Wherever we come [*applause*], Kosovo is a sacred place for every Serb! And that is why every visit to Kosovo is religious in nature, that is, a pilgrimage [*applause*]. It is a great honor for me to come here to convey to you the message of Serbia that Serbia is there for you, that it will always be there for you, but that we must be together and united if we are to win this fight! For starters, winning the local election – cheers! [*applause, cheering*] (ibid., 05:30)

This re-iteration of the established discourse of Kosovo as the heart of Serbia, which Serbian Orthodox Monasteries embody, represents a symbiosis of Serbia's symbolic claim to Kosovo through the presence of religious and cultural heritage and the hegemonic claim to statehood politically performed through the election rally in front of the monastery. The crowd, affectively supporting and being subjectivated into this discourse gives the claim to Kosovo an appearance of legitimacy on the ground. Additionally, articulating the Serb community's participation in the upcoming elections as something that the Kosovo Albanians are against can serve two, interconnected goals: firstly, it frames an entire group as the adversary of fulfilling Serbs' legitimate rights, and subsequently, serves as a way to justify the participation in elections of another state that Serbia does not formally recognize. By articulating the Kosovo Albanian opposition to Serbs' participation in the election, the only logical choice, if they are articulated as the adversary, is to do the exact opposite, and that is to participate, even though that might help the institution of Kosovo

state structures in Serb-majority communities as well. After all, Dačić claimed in the same speech that “it does not suit them [Pristina, or Kosovo Albanians] that Serbs can exercise their right! We have to do something that does not suit them! And that is, if we are offered the possibility to take power, to do it and use it for the benefit of the Serbian people in Kosovo!” (Dnevnik 2, 19.10.2013, 04:53). The drawing of political frontiers between “their” and “our” interests is quite evident, but what is important is the concealment of the fact that the very participation of Serbs in the local elections helps the institution of the opposing hegemonic project of the state of Kosovo in Serb-majority municipalities.

Creating the Srpska lista was not an easy task for the Serbian Government in the sense that the local governments in North Kosovo, for instance, were held by members of the opposition party DSS, but also members of the ruling SNS that had a different opinion than the Government. They vigorously protested against the implementation of the Brussels agreement and after meeting with the Serbian Government in Belgrade on 30 April 2013 to discuss the implementation, they called for an assessment of the constitutionality of the agreement. Their continuous unwillingness to follow the political agenda of Serbia has resulted in a hostile articulation of the relationship between these Kosovo Serb representatives and the Serbian Government, particularly those representatives from Northern Kosovo. For instance, after the 30 April meeting, Dačić claimed that the opposition to implement the Brussels agreement came mainly from the DSS members in the North, saying that he

has not noticed that the Serbs from the South are against this [the agreement]. They have been living there [in the South] for 14 years now, so how could they be against something that they have lived in for 14 years? This is a political campaign. They are not considering the interests of all Serbs [in Kosovo]. We will not participate in a political campaign. Does anyone think that they are stronger than the Government of the Republic of Serbia? They are not (Dnevnik 2, 30.04.2013, 04:33).

Dačić is claiming that the views of the representatives from the North are aligned with their political party in Serbia proper and not with the interests of all Serbs, which in this case would be the highest priority of the Serbian Government. In essence, Dačić is emphasizing divisions within the Serb community in Kosovo, on the one hand those who are supporting the Government’s political goals, and those opposing it, and on the other hand, those who are aligned with the opposition narrative of resistance in Northern Kosovo and those who are more or less already integrated into the Kosovo state structures living in the South. The only way to unify these complex relations among the Serbs in Kosovo, who are not articulated as a homogeneous whole, is to homogenize them by politically aligning them with Serbian state and national interests. Hence, the formation of a unified political list comprised of Kosovo Serbs who would follow and support the Serbian Government’s political agenda becomes the only solution to the heterogeneity of the Kosovo Serb community. Simultaneously, those Serbs that do not follow the agenda of homogenization, such

as the Independent Liberal Party (Samostalna liberalna stranka – SLS) whose leader Slobodan Petrović was the Deputy PM of Kosovo, and the Minister for Local Self-Government (a Kosovo institution) are cast aside and not constituted as part of the community, but are called “Thaçi’s Serbs.” Ultimately, the intention was for the Srpska lista to win the election, help form the new Kosovo Government and substitute these Kosovo-aligned Serbs with Serbs aligned with the Serbian agenda. This can only happen through the use of power and coercion, as evident in Dačić’s question about whether anybody thinks they are stronger than the Government of Serbia.

This demonstration of power happened at various times. Firstly, after the Government and the local representatives of the Serb community living in South Kosovo reached an agreement on the participation in the upcoming local elections (Dnevnik 2, 20.08.2013), the leaders of the local governments from Northern Kosovo still objected to participating in these elections. Subsequently, the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry determined numerous abuses in spending budget funds in Kosovo and Metohija over the past 12 years, as confirmed by the Committee Chairman Momir Stojanović (Dnevnik 2, 29.08.2013, 07:20). He confirmed that the draft report, which found that in some cases a significant amount of money was embezzled by the local governments, would soon be presented in the Committee and then the Parliament, after which a criminal investigation would be initiated. The main criminal offences concerned the way different infrastructure projects were financed and allocated, with some infrastructure objects even existing on paper but not on the ground (ibid., 07:46).

This investigation was only initiated once the local governments hampered the implementation of the Brussels agreement, after the Serbian Government had ignored it for the previous 12 years. The investigation could be seen as a practice that supported the ongoing de-legitimization of the local government representatives who are members of the opposition party DSS and as a move that would enable the installation of alternative political subjects supportive of Serbia’s policies.

Secondly, this demonstration of power against parts of the Serb community culminated on 10 September 2013 in the earlier mentioned substitution of these local government leaders in Northern Kosovo with interim governments gathering people who the Serbian Government trusted would closely follow its political agenda. This happened only a few days after Srpska lista’s (then called Građanska inicijativa Srbija) submission of registration for local elections. On the day the Government announced the replacement of leadership of the local municipalities, Dragiša Milović, then local government leader of the municipality of Zvečan, claimed that “it is clear that the Brussels agreement must be implemented, and the municipalities in the North will not do that. I fear that the current situation may lead to destabilization in Northern Kosovo” (Dnevnik 2,

10.09.2013, 08:07). The DSS, Milović's party, criticized the Government for forcibly trying to get people to participate in the local elections (ibid., 08:25).

Vulin, on the other hand, justified the Government's decision claiming that Milović knew that Serbia would do everything in its power not to let the destabilization of Northern Kosovo happen and that Milović would also do everything in his power to help defuse the situation. Vulin claimed that "the will of the state of Serbia is holy in Kosovo and Metohija" and that it must be respected (ibid., 09:35). Articulating the will of Serbia as the highest moral authority in this decision-making process makes it infallible and, subsequently, constructs everybody who questions that authority as the enemy of Serbia's "holy" intentions. This way, Kosovo Serb political subjects are divided into two opposing camps, those who are "with us" and those who are "against us". Members of the DSS were not the only "against us" subject articulated in this process (apart from the SLS, who are constituted as subjects of the Kosovo Albanian discourse on independence), but everybody who was against the implementation of the agreement. Some leadership that was replaced were members of the leading SNS, and Vulin claimed that "there is no political discrimination here" and that Serbia was making "a list comprising all Serbs, not a list comprising of this or that political party" (ibid., 07:30). Loyalty was the central signifier that determined who would be "with us" and who "against us", and this loyalty should be indisputable, since the sanctity of Serbia's will should remain unquestioned.

Substituting the local leadership in the North and supporting Srpska lista was only one way of performing the claim to Kosovo through the implementation of the Brussels agreement. Another way was economic conditioning with an undertone of emotional blackmail by virtue of personalizing the relationship between the Serbian Government and the local Serb community. For instance, during the local election campaign in Northern Kosovo, Vulin visited a construction site of apartments that Serbia was building for Kosovo Serb families, and said:

If you accept that the state of Serbia builds apartments for you, and if you accept that it gives you employment even when it is not able to employ you, and if you accept that it provides conditions for you to live here, then listen when it tells you something! Then listen when it tells you to vote, when it tells you 'I need this, it is important to me.' Well, it is important for the Government of Serbia that you vote (Dnevnik 2, 09.10.2013, 07:57).

Vulin articulates the state of Serbia as something that is not strong enough to prevail in Kosovo without the support of its people there. By personalizing this relationship and by giving agency to the local Serb community to "do something for their country", loyalty and allegiance are forged between the Government and the local leadership and the entire community. This loyalty and allegiance are then sustained through continuing the Government's economic support of the local community, something that might be put into question if the community does not choose to "do something for their country". This statement also helps forge affective attachments of the

community to the Government through guilt, since they would feel obliged to help the Government as it sustains their livelihoods.

As mentioned before, establishing mayoral offices and letting hand-picked candidates be elected in the local elections on 3 November 2013 was another way of performing Serbia's continued claim to Kosovo. For instance, during the campaign for local elections, Krstimir Pantić who was a member of the SNS and representative of the Serbian list, claimed that Serbs would have to go out and vote, because:

Those will not only be local elections, nor will the Serbs recognize Kosovo's independence [by participating in them]. On the contrary. They will finally get institutions recognized by the international community, but also institutions that Albanians will have to respect. These institutions have either way been the only legitimate and legal institutions for us, but not for the international community and the Albanians. Albanians do not want Serbs to participate in the elections and then to form the Community of Serb Municipalities, because about ten municipalities would be controlled by parties close to Belgrade and not Pristina, which would create a strong Serb identity. That is why Pristina did its best to discourage Serbs from voting (M. S. and S. Č. 2013, in Danas, 30 October).

It is essential for Serbia to have local government leaders who would "act in its stead" in conditions in which the Serbian Government is not able to exert governance over this territory. Mayors have also been essential in concealing the dislocatory effects of political practices and institutional transformations that followed from the Brussels agreement, as evident in Pantić's statement above.

A few voices that were not part of the Srpska lista but that still supported Serbia's policies in Kosovo were the people around Oliver Ivanović. As mentioned earlier, two lists registered containing "Serbia" as part of their name: one was Građanska Inicijativa Srbija (later renamed Srpska lista) and the other one was "Srbija, demokratija, pravda" led by Oliver Ivanović (later renamed Sloboda, demokratija, pravda). Ivanović supported Serbia's political agenda in terms of implementing the Brussels agreement from the start, and claimed that "we will either stand with our own country or against it, but I believe it is logical for everybody that we can work with our own country more easily, better and more successfully, and that we can deal with our problems with greater certainty" (Dnevnik 2, 27.05.2013, 03:30). He maintained that "deep down, in [the heart of] every Serb, there is one certainty: only Belgrade is our center, only the Government of Serbia is our government and only in that Government we trust" (Dnevnik 2, 07.05.2013, 09:30).

He even criticized the former North Kosovo local government leadership's decision to form the "Provisional Assembly of the Autonomous Province Kosovo and Metohija" which they announced after the Brussels agreement and formed on 4 July 2013. The Assembly gathered local representatives from a variety of political parties: the majority SNS, Dačić's SPS, and the opposition parties DSS and Radikalna Stranka (the Radical Party) – RS. This only supports the earlier elaborated argument that party-orientation was not important in the decision to replace this

leadership, but their loyalty to and support of Serbia's national and state interests. Hence, Ivanović supporting these interests is not articulated as a hostile political subject (such as the SLS), but frequently spoke in public in support of Serbia's interests. Regarding the Assembly formed on 4 July, Ivanović said that it only brings in confusion among the local Serb community and deepens the rift between the Government of Serbia and the Serb community in the North, something which he considers "absolutely wrong" (Dnevnik 2, 04.07.2013, 18:08).

Even when his party's headquarters were set on fire in April 2013, he claimed that Serbs from the North should respect Serbia's political goals, since worsening these relations would endanger the survival of the Serb community there (J. T. 2013b, in Danas, 2 April). He maintained that participating in the elections was the only way to ensure that the community stays there and that casting a vote means thinking about the future, criticizing attempts of the replaced former leaders of local governments to intimidate people to participate in the elections (Dnevnik 2, 04.09.2013). On election day, Ivanović claimed that "the main goal of my list is to cooperate with the Government of Serbia, with participation in the Community of Serb municipalities as its priority" (J. T. 2013a, in Danas, 3 November). Even though the Government of Serbia officially only endorsed Srpska lista, Ivanović was not excluded from the "legitimate" membership of the Serb community in Kosovo. This slightly changed after the irregularities during the local elections in North Mitrovica on 3 November 2013, after which they were repeated mid-November and the elections went on to a second round between Krstimir Pantić, representative of the Srpska lista, and Oliver Ivanović. During the campaign for the second round of elections, Ivanović claimed that he "expects of Belgrade to be fair and to create conditions for fair elections", as well as that he hopes Belgrade will no longer "threaten people with losing their jobs or social insurance". He did not specify who claimed that he was a candidate of Pristina and the West, but emphasized that these attacks were aimed at discrediting him and giving political credibility to Krstimir Pantić (Tasić 2013e, in Danas, 20 November). Even though Vulin maintained that the Government of Serbia "supports all Serbian lists in Kosovo and Metohija, it has the closest ties with Lista srpska and its candidates" (Stojanović 2013, in Danas, 21 November).

In summary, Serbia's claim to Kosovo is performed through and embodied in the presence of Srpska lista, through the establishment of mayors in the four municipalities in Northern Kosovo, as well as in other political subjects who are aligned with Serbia's state and national interests in Kosovo, which is preserving its institutional presence and preserving the Serb community there. Given the fact that they supported the implementation of the Brussels agreement, Serbs from Southern Kosovo are generally articulated as part of Serbia's performative claim to statehood, except the SLS which is not even considered "Serbian", but "Thaçi's". However, subjects are not mere puppets that can be manipulated without further effort and loyalty and allegiance is not a

constant fact. It has to be continuously articulated and performed, which enables spaces and opportunities for the re-constitution of these allegiances. This was the case with Ivanović, who at one point was described as supporting the Government, and at another as supporting Pristina's and the West's interests. This complex relationship between the Government of Serbia and the Serb community, particularly in the North, will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

In the following segment, I will give a portrayal of the institution of antagonistic and agonistic frontiers and how they shifted over time and with the conclusion of the Brussels agreement. Affective articulations and politics of emotion play a big role in the institution of these frontiers, as they also do for the constitution of the political "us". This is where familiar narratives of Kosovo as the heart of Serbia, and other elements of the Kosovo imaginary, play a decisive role, such as commemoration and reiteration of historical motives. One of the driving subjects behind these articulations is not only the Government of Serbia, but also other hegemonic subjects such as the Serbian Orthodox Church. Thus, in the following subchapter I am going to introduce these familiar narratives that enable their performative embodiment by different subjects and in various material forms. Subsequently, I am going to look at how these narratives are re-constituted with the adoption of the Brussels agreement and how agonistic and antagonistic frontiers are drawn between the Serb and Kosovo Albanian communities, but also within the Serb community as a whole. Finally, I am going to elaborate on how this (re-)drawing of various frontiers helps Serbia's performative claim to Kosovo be materialized and/or instituted on the ground.

5.7 Drawing Political Frontiers through Affective Articulations

In the community discourse, Kosovo has been articulated as an "emotional issue" for the entire Serb people by an array of hegemonic subjects, be it the Government of Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), or local governments in Northern Kosovo. The adoption of the Brussels agreement, being that many recognized its potential for decentering the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, something that has been re-iterated and performed in many shapes and forms so far, has spurred a wave of counter-articulations demanding it not be implemented. The main signifier around which these articulatory chains are formed is the narrative of Kosovo being a holy land for the entire Serb people and something which Serbia should never recognize as anything other than part of its territory. This iteration of sanctity of the land is performed in the territorial claim to Kosovo. It is also embodied in the very existence of Serbian medieval monasteries in Kosovo, which makes the Serbian Orthodox Church a central subject to the sustainment of these narratives of sanctity and unity of the Serb land with Serb people. The SOC gives legitimacy to the territorial claim as such, as it acts as a reminder of the historical right to this land and brings about the symbolic claim to entire Kosovo. Therefore, the SOC is intrinsically tied with the narrative

produced by the Serbian Government, who are dependent on the Church's re-production and sustainment of these narratives, and their ability to generate affective ties within the community and help sway public opinion. Through their authority, if the Church claims that a new agreement does not violate the holy principle of Kosovo as part of Serbia, then it might just be enough for some people to believe it.

As indicated above, these narratives were re-constituted with the myth of the Brussels agreement, since some recognized the decentering effect it might have on the earlier mentioned narratives. For instance, on 22 April 2013 the local Serb leadership from Northern Kosovo (before they were replaced) organized a rally in North Mitrovica which reportedly attracted 10,000 people. At that rally, they issued a declaration by the "Convocation of the Serb people" (Sabor srpskog naroda), which said:

By signing this [Brussels] agreement, Serbia renounces not only its institutions in Northern Kosovo but also its right to its Southern province. Those who have done so deserve every condemnation because they have not been mandated by anyone to hand over the holy Serbian land and the Serbian people, material goods and spiritual sanctities for their own political interests (P. D. 2013b, in Danas, 22 April).

At that moment they performatively took on the role of speaking for the entire Serb people, in Kosovo and beyond, and sedimented their claims in the affective attachment of the crowd to these claims. They used familiar discourses that many people can relate to. Recognizing this, Snežana Grubješić, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, mentioned in an interview with RTS that the Government needs to have a "serious word" with them, even though they understand why North Kosovo Serbs are against the agreement, since for them "partition" would be ideal. "Every agreement would be unacceptable to them now, but let us wait for passions to be calmed", after which they will see what benefits they get with this agreement, she said (Dnevnik 2, 22.04.2013, 06:05). Grubješić also articulated the emotional effects and resonance of the familiar discourse around Kosovo which articulates it as a holy place and an indivisible part of Serbia, anchored by love for the holy land. The Brussels agreement, given that it partially decenters this discourse (it recognizes the institutional authority of the state of Kosovo in a territory Serbia considers its own), also acts as a way of accommodating a larger dislocation, which is recognizing that Kosovo is an entirely independent state. For this to be a viable political practice that would sustain already familiar discursive structures, concealment and metaphorical moves on the discursive field would need to be practiced. First and foremost, this was done through re-drawing political frontiers between the Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo and their right to inhabit the physical place and symbolic space of Kosovo. The emphasis was on articulating agonistic frontiers: this meant recognizing the different interests of the communities, but also their equal right as neighbors to live in that same space. A re-drawing of these frontiers between the

communities from agonistic to antagonistic relations happened primarily as part of the logics of the partition discourse, something that will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

By recognizing Kosovo as a separate subject and Kosovo Albanian leadership as somebody they needed to engage with in the dialogue, the Government constituted them as a political subject in their eyes, which opened up ways to discuss their relationship to one another. As Nikolić mentioned in January 2013 when meeting with the President of Slovakia, Serbia seeks to “reach an agreement with the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija, and [by doing that] defend what every other state in this world would defend – its sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Dnevnik 2, 22.01.2013, 03:10). Even though Kosovo is articulated as part of Serbia in territorial terms (Nikolić never speaks of an agreement with Kosovo, but of an agreement with the Albanians), Kosovo Albanians are constituted as an agonistic political subject with whom Serbs need to reach a durable agreement. This is related to the earlier mentioned shift of talking about the people and with peoples, instead of the dialogue being about territories, which would imply a breach in the principle of status-neutrality of Kosovo in Serbia’s view.

During the period of “harmonizing” the Serbian Government’s approach to dealing with Kosovo once they engaged in the political dialogue, a significant parallel was drawn between Kosovo Albanians the Serbian leadership engaged with in Brussels, and Albanians living in the South of Serbia, mainly around Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac. Namely, in early January 2013, a monument was erected in Preševo dedicated to KLA fighters (more precisely the LAPMB, a faction of the KLA for Medveđa, Bujanovac and Preševo), which the Serbian Government immediately requested to be taken down, since the KLA is considered to be a terrorist organization under Serbian law. When the Government platform was adopted on 13 January 2013, Vučić visited the Serbian army base in Bujanovac and claimed: “we want peace, we want respect. We will always have to live next to our neighbors Albanians, like they will always have to live next to their neighbors Serbs” (Dnevnik 2, 13.01.2013, 06:58). It is important to draw attention to the words used here: Vučić is speaking about living “next to” each other, not “with” each other, constituting the already familiar discourse of eternal animosity and ethnic separation between the groups. The place where this statement was issued is also important, since the army base in Bujanovac is an embodiment of Serbian military might and potential threat to Albanian nationalist interest, recalling the conflict of 1998 and 1999. Dačić also brought to the fore these underlying power relations and conflicting discourses about the past between the groups in his claim that “[the state of Serbia] will certainly not allow to be provoked in this manner in its own territory. Just as I think that in New York you can never have a monument erected for al-Qaeda members, I think that a monument like this can never be erected in Serbia” (Dnevnik 2, 15.01.2013, 02:44). After the local leadership of Medveđa, Bujanovac and Preševo met with Kosovo’s PM Hashim Thaçi to discuss the

monument and decided not to take it down within the given deadline set out by the Serbian authorities, the monument was eventually brought down by force a few days later.

Whereas Albanians from the Preševo valley are presented here as a threat to Serbian national and state interests, Kosovo Albanians are articulated as a political subject with a legitimate claim to live in the territory of Kosovo. When the Parliament was in the process of adopting the Government platform on Kosovo and Metohija, Dačić stated in his address that “it is true that we do not recognize the independence of Kosovo and Metohija, but somebody else rules over the majority of Kosovo, and we have to find a solution with them. That solution should satisfy both Serbs and Albanians, and needs to be just, because only a just solution can be permanent” (Dnevnik 2, 12.01.2013). During the peak of the negotiations in Brussels to reach the First agreement, Vučić also claimed that it is “essential that we reach an agreement. We will have to live *with* these people [Kosovo Albanians] and *next* to them for the next 10, 100 and 200 years” (Cvejić 2013, in Danas, 8 April, emphasis added). It is clear that Vučić’s statement here entails the idea of living with and next to Kosovo Albanians, not merely the latter, which institutes the relationship between these two communities as agonistic, as equal parties that need to reach a common understanding of how to live together and find a durable compromise. As Dačić stated: “we need to finalize this issue [finding a compromise]. We need to return to a state of normalcy and regularity. In a nutshell, we need to enable both Serbs and Albanians to live there” (Tomić 2013, in Danas, 12 April).

Finding a compromise can only be done through re-articulating what Kosovo means semantically and emotionally to the Serb community as a whole, a meaning that relates to the mythical conception of Kosovo as the cradle of Serbdom. As Vučić mentioned just prior to the Serbian delegation leaving for negotiations in Brussels on 1 April 2013, traditionally, Serbs accept two versions of Kosovo, Prince Lazar’s and Vuk Branković’s: “Many centuries later, we are searching today for a third solution. Does it exist? [...] We *have* to reach an agreement in the upcoming period, be it 2 April or 2 September, I just think that Serbia does not have any more time to waste” (Dnevnik 2, 30.03.2013, 02:17). Prince Lazar’s conception understands Kosovo as the place and space where Serbs were ensured an eternal place in the heavenly Kingdom, which is why many consider the territory itself to be sacred. Vuk Branković’s conception refers to his betrayal of Lazar’s forces in the Battle of Kosovo, which forms the basis for a historical lesson that Serbs should never betray Kosovo again, which would constitute anybody who “gives up” Kosovo as a “traitor”. Transposed to the current situation, Vučić’s potential third solution would be finding a middle ground between entirely preserving Kosovo within Serbia and entirely giving it up (i.e., recognizing Kosovo’s independence), which would turn out to be the myth of the Brussels agreement, that conceals the earlier mentioned dislocatory effects of this independence. Articulating the Brussels agreement as the only way Serbia can “gain” something in terms of

Kosovo constitutes it as an experience of partial enjoyment (*jouissance* of the body), hailing it as a historic agreement, one that could change the way the Serbian national collective experiences its emotional ties to Kosovo. Here, it is also evident how discursivity, materiality, and the affectivity of myths work together to help institute a “new objectivity”, a “third solution” that promises the fantasy of a full closure of identity. This is a temporal endeavor bridging past, present, and future, but also a spatial endeavor, since this new objectivity is always anchored by specific signifiers. The A/CSM is one of those signifiers, never actually realized, but anchoring an imaginized discourse, a new objectivity.

As framed by members of the Serbian Government, re-articulating what Kosovo means for the Serb community should only be done on the basis of *love*: love for the land and for the people living there. As Nikolić mentioned in an interview for the *Jerusalem Post* (referenced by *Dnevnik 2*, 03.05.2013, 10:50), after the Brussels agreement was reached: “We cannot [recognize the independence of Kosovo]. It is not about nationalism, it is not about hatred, but about love – love for our own people and for our country.” Similarly, when Vučić went to Kosovo after the agreement was signed to convey its details to the Serb community there and reassure them about the continued support from Serbia, he mentioned:

I do not want to convince the people here that this is a very good agreement, because I myself am not convinced about that, but this is the only possible agreement offering the most in this moment in which we find ourselves. But I also do not want to convince them of lies and untruths that some others might convince them of, others who do not love Kosovo, who do not love Metohija, but only love their pockets. (*Dnevnik 2*, 12.05.2013, 07:42).

Betraying the Serbian people in Kosovo, which would be aligned with Vuk Branković’s conception, would be to convince them that the Brussels agreement is bad, or that it implies giving up on Kosovo entirely. Thus, through articulating himself and the Serbian Government as somebody who loves Kosovo and is devoted to fighting for it, others who might not support the Government’s politics would be traitors of the Serbian people and the representation of Kosovo as Serbian land. This move marginalizes opposing voices and institutes the Government’s hegemony over shaping Kosovo’s meaning and affective attachment to it for the Serb community as a whole in the current historical moment.

The Brussels agreement is also important because it shifts the attention from discussing Kosovo in terms of territory (physical as in place, and symbolic as in space), to discussing it in terms of people. As this focus gained traction, the relationship between the Serb and Albanian communities inevitably became the locus of meaning-making, with shifting political frontiers that would constitute these communities as separate wholes. An agonistic institution of the relationship between the communities relies on the idea of sharing the space of Kosovo, while an antagonistic

institution of it would rely on total separation between the communities. The former is characteristic of the community discourse discussed here, while the latter is characteristic of the partition discourse discussed in the next chapter.

Apart from the Government, a central subject instituting an agonistic relationship between the communities with the emphasis on sharing the place of Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians, is the SOC. This is quite evident in the following statement by the Patriarch of the Serbian Church Irinej, issued as part of the bishop's holy liturgy in Prizren, the seat of the Eparchy of Raška and Prizren: "I am praying, my Lord, that the time returns in which both Serbs and Albanians live together like brothers in these holy lands. You must know that everything you experience here, we experience as well, and we live through it as a common misfortune, but also as a common hope that this situation might end soon" (Dnevnik 2, 07.02.2013, 16:20). Serbs and Albanians are articulated as brotherly people sharing the right to inhabit the same land and co-habit in it, in which the past is underpinned by the fantasy of a golden age that supports a future vision of Albanian-Serb relations. Even after the Brussels agreement was signed, the Synod of the Church issued a statement saying that even though the Church believes that the agreement indirectly and tacitly, but nevertheless actually recognizes the existence of a state system in Kosovo and Metohija independent of the state structures of Serbia, the Church still urges the Serb people as a whole to forever consider Kosovo and Metohija as their land, without disputing in any way the fact that it is also the land of those Albanians who have lived there together with the Serbs for centuries (Dnevnik 2, 22.04.2013, 09:51). The logic of difference can be recognized here, since the very idea of sharing the place involves an acknowledgment of views different from the Serbian one and the weakening of antagonistic frontiers between the two communities. This is also a political statement since it defines the land as Serbian, even though the emphasis is on sharing Kosovo with Albanians – something that can be understood as undermining the Kosovo Albanian claim to statehood in this territory. However, because the statement also recognizes the destabilizing effect of the Brussels agreement on the representation of Kosovo as Serbia, it speaks of Kosovo as part of Serbia more in terms of Serbia's symbolic ownership of the space of Kosovo, instead of Serbia's physical ownership of the place of Kosovo (i.e., in terms of statehood or governance). This way, the Church also helps conceal the dislocation of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse by the material existence of Kosovo state structures, since it transposes Serbian ownership of Kosovo to the symbolic realm – in it, Kosovo will eternally remain Serbian, no matter if this is the case in the material world. The Church mainly does so by rearticulating a central trope of the dominant conceptions of Kosovo for the Serb community as a whole, and that is unity. Following the very well-known phrase reiterated many times in the Serbian nationalist discourse, "samo sloga Srbina spašava" (Only unity will save the Serbs), which draws inspiration from the legend of disunity and betrayal of Prince

Lazar by Vuk Branković before the Kosovo Battle, it is a citation that resonates throughout centuries and carries a lesson that only united, the Serb people can conquer all trials. As Bishop Teodosije of Vlačka and Prizren stated during Vučić's visit to Kosovo after the conclusion of the Brussels agreement:

It is not necessary to be low-spirited about this agreement, not all is over with it. If we are unanimous, if we build unity, love, and harmony here, and by doing that affirm that we are the people of St. Sava, the evangelical people of Christ, then no one can really do anything to us. It is precisely this that I am telling people, and I encourage them to stay in this area, and I urge the representatives of our country to always be with this people, to give more and to provide for them more than they did before, in order to confirm this in practice (Dnevnik 2, 12.05.2013, 07:05).

Like the well-known Christian principle that love conquers all, unity built by love is what will enable the Serb community to endure in this political moment that potentially disunites it. Here, the Kosovo myth is re-articulated as a historic lesson, a way to define future political action, and ensure that Kosovo remains Serbian also in the material world through the presence of the Serb community in that territory. At the center of this articulation lies the unity of the Serb people with the Serb land, constituting the territory as Serbian as long as the Serb people live there. It also addresses the potential fear of uncertainty in the local Serb community, uncertainty and fear that such institutional integration might bring. The message is: if we love others and one another, and if we build unity, then we can exist and remain here as part of a framework that might not be the one of the state of Serbia. This clearly underlies the agonistic construction of Serb-Albanian relations in Kosovo, even though not explicitly mentioned. The emotion of love can thus forge affective attachments not only among the Serb community and their investment in Government politics, but also among previously antagonistic groups.

As one might expect, the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone not only enables the re-drawing of political frontiers from antagonistic into agonistic relations, but also the other way around. Since political contestation is at the center of the dialogue, these frontiers are mobile and never fully stabilized. It is important to note that in this case study, agonistic relations were articulated when agreements needed to be reached (i.e., agreeing on a common understanding of conflicting issues), while antagonistic relations were articulated when one party failed to hold up its end of an agreement in the view of the other party (i.e., the same issue practiced in different ways). For instance, once the Brussels agreement was reached, re-drawing political frontiers became important again, because of differing political practices in terms of implementing the agreement. The discursive field became split between subjects articulating agonistic relations as well as antagonistic relations between the groups, as the line between those is thin and concerns an ongoing political process of meaning-making.

For instance, the first Belgrade-backed local elections in Kosovo as foreseen by the Brussels agreement in late 2013 are a good example of the re-drawing of political frontiers between the communities. Since the elections were organized under the administrative authority of Kosovo institutions, local Serb leadership in Northern Kosovo particularly objected to participating in them and called people to boycott them. As mentioned before, frontiers were drawn within the Serb community itself between those who supported Serbia's implementation of the principles foreseen by the Brussels agreement, and those who did not, independently from the fact which party they belonged to, the ruling ones or one of the opposition parties. On 31 October 2013, just four days prior to the local elections in North Mitrovica, the chairman of the municipal board and another member of the municipal assembly in Mitrovica were excluded from membership in the SNS party because they called on people in that municipality to boycott the local elections. The SNS's statement read (R. D. 2013, in Danas, 31 October) that the two former members, by calling people to boycott, "unequivocally showed that they advocate that, after the elections, local institutions should be led by Albanians, not Serbs, which is directly against the interests of all Serbs living in Kosovo and Metohija and against the interests of Serbia." Similarly, after a very low turnout in Mitrovica in the local elections on 3 November and several irregularities, a decision was made to repeat them, after which Prime Minister Dačić on multiple occasions (Tasić 2013c, in Danas, 6 November; Tasić 2013a, in Danas, 7 November; P. D. 2013a, in Danas, 10 November) called the local Serb community to participate in the elections, because "if Serbs from North Mitrovica do not turn out in sufficient numbers, the mayor will be Albanian, which could cause armed conflicts, and in such a situation, Serbia could not help much" (Tasić 2013c, in Danas, 6 November). He also mentioned that the Community of Serb Municipalities could never be established if an Albanian were to be mayor of North Mitrovica, which was supposed to be the political center of that institution (P. D. 2013a, in Danas, 10 November). Evidently, having an Albanian mayor in North Mitrovica was articulated as a threat and an obstacle to the realization of the collective political goals of Kosovo Serbs and Serbia as a state alike. Evoking an imaginization of potential armed conflicts if an Albanian were to lead the local government institutes the relationship between the two communities as antagonistic. The emphasis is laid not on cooperation and "shared" ownership of Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians, but on familiar narratives of exclusion and animosity between the communities. At that political moment, Kosovo Albanians were articulated as the enemy, since they "do not want Serbs to participate in the elections and the Community of Serb municipalities to be formed [...] because it would mean the creation of a strong Serb identity," as mentioned by Krstimir Pantić just prior to the election (M. S. and S. Č. 2013, in Danas, 30 October). Kosovo Albanians are framed as the very obstacle to the constitution of a "full Serb identity", a fantasy whose enjoyment they obstruct and aim to steal, which means that they are entirely excluded from this process of identity-building and constitute its very limits.

Another example of re-drawing political frontiers happened right after the Brussels agreement, namely when the parties discussed the practicalities of its implementation in May 2013. After the Kosovo delegation left the negotiations after the parties failed to agree on the proper sequence of events – whether Serbia-run parallel institutions should be dismantled before or after the A/CSM is established – antagonistic articulations of the Albanian side started to re-surface. One of these events concerned the integration of the police in Kosovo state structures. For instance, Vučić mentioned that the Brussels agreement ensured that “there will never be Albanian boots on the ground in Northern Kosovo, which the people there are most afraid of. You can put the police force there in whichever boots you want, but they will always be 98 percent Serbs and 2 percent Albanians. NATO guarantees that these will be the only armed formations in the North” (Dnevnik 2, 08.05.2013, 08:00). The politics of fear subjectivates Kosovo Albanians into a discourse of animosity, articulating them as a threat to the existence of the Serb community in the North. The Serbs are constituted as the majority in the North (in contrast to the Albanian majority in Kosovo generally) as a means of instituting their legitimate political (and security) control of this area. Similarly, Nikolić mentioned a few weeks later that the Brussels agreement “legalizes the fact that Pristina will never be able to rule not only in Northern Kosovo, but also the remaining four [Serb-majority] municipalities in the South” (Dnevnik 2, 31.05.2013, 04:40), which extends this claim to parts of Southern Kosovo as well. At the same time, Nikolić constitutes Pristina as a hegemonic force that unrightfully wants to rule Serb-majority areas, which is an antagonistic articulation of the Other.

This only goes to show that in an ongoing process of politically contested meaning-making, the boundaries of agonistic and antagonistic articulations of groups are very fluid and heavily depend on the shifting hegemonic status of dominant discourses. Sometimes, the discourse of joint EU integration in the spirit of normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina takes over, whereas at other moments, the well-known discourse on animosity between Serbs and Albanians is at the core of these political contestations. Additionally, as we have seen with Dačić for instance, the same subjects can articulate both of these relations in connected political moments. However, subjects do not only constitute the discursive and material reality around them, but they also constitute themselves in all of these discursive processes, by subjectivating into a number of different discourses which can sometimes also be conflicting. The next segment will address this process, namely how these hegemonic subjects constitute themselves and are constituted by others as part of different political projects, be it EU integration on the one hand, or performing the claim to Kosovo on the other.

5.8 Positionalities of Hegemonic Subjects

The various subjects I have discussed throughout this chapter subjectivate into and constitute an array of discourses and articulate themselves anew in this meaning-making process. Additionally, certain subjects are mainly re-articulating a few types of discourses and one could say that in this manner they bring different political projects further through their re-constitution. Therefore, the following segment will address two main figures of the Serbian Government that have stood behind the re-constitution of the discursive field: Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić. For instance, Prime Minister Dačić primarily constitutes (and is constituted by) the discourse on EU integration and so-called normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina: with his role as PM and leader of the Serbian delegation in the Brussels dialogue he is in a position to accommodate the dislocatory effects of external events I have mentioned throughout this chapter. Constituted by his role as PM and through the conclusion of the Brussels agreement, Dačić also embodies the past conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. Namely, Dačić was a prominent member of Milošević's SPS party and was engaged in the information and propaganda division of the party during the 1990s. When Milošević was arrested and sent to The Hague, Dačić took over the party and transformed it partially away from Milošević's convictions, incorporating a more moderate stance. By following an EU integration path as PM of Serbia and his willingness to engage with the Kosovo Albanian side in the Brussels dialogue, he acts as a figure able to overcome his past. He becomes a figure onto which people can project their hopes for a better, conflict-free future and affectively invest in him as a leader. Similarly, Deputy Prime Minister Vučić also constitutes the same discourse on EU integration, but he is the driving political subject behind connecting this discourse with the discourse on economic progress. For Vučić, under the umbrella of EU integration, finding a "solution" to the "problem of Kosovo" means economic progress and a renaissance for the entire country and its people. In this process, he positions himself and is being positioned by others as a "reasonable", "responsible" and "realistic/pessimistic" leader who will always put "tangible" results, such as economic benefit, over clinging to past wrongdoings or entrenched myths (even though he was the Minister of Information and propaganda during Milošević's regime – a fact that is often sidelined).

Dačić rarely self-articulates and is constituted mainly by other figures. This has primarily occurred since the conclusion of the Brussels agreement, when representatives of the EU started articulating both Dačić and Taçi as "great leaders", leaders with "courage", who are "breaking with the past" etc. For instance, when the First agreement was initialed on 19 April 2013, Catherine Ashton said that she "want[ed] to congratulate them [Dačić and Taçi] for their determination over these months and for the courage they have. It is very important that now we see it as a step away from the past and, for both of them, a step closer to Europe" (Dnevnik 2, 19.04.2013, 05:32). Ashton

articulated Dačić as courageous, determined and a leader, stepping away from the past towards a joint European future with its neighbors. A common European future is a strong imaginary that grips subjects affectively. It coexists with the Kosovo imaginary and particularly in 2012 and 2013, this horizon of intelligibility revolved around simultaneously preserving Kosovo as Serbian and joining the EU, which Dačić also described as not mutually exclusionary processes (Dnevnik 2, 04.09.2012, 08:10). In fact, it was underpinned by a fantasy of EU membership that would allow Serbia to have it all. A common European future was often repeated by all parties involved. For instance, on the night before the conclusion of the Brussels agreement, Štefan Füle, said that “it is time for Serbia and Kosovo to step away from their past and look ahead, into their common European future” (Dnevnik 2, 18.04.2013, 11:21), an imaginary that was also reaffirmed later, with the adoption of the EU Credible enlargement perspective from February 2018 (European Commission 2018). To realize this imaginary, strong leadership was required, making bold and sometimes unpopular decisions, and EU representatives constituted Dačić as one of such leaders. For instance, Eamon Gilmore, the then head of the FAC (Foreign Affairs Council) of the EU “praise[d] the two Prime Ministers, both Dačić and Thaçi, for the political courage they have demonstrated while leading their people towards this [Brussels] agreement” (Dnevnik 2, 22.04.2013, 02:50).

On the other hand, Aleksandar Vučić is not only constituted by others, but also frequently self-articulates as someone who is realistic and who honestly fights for preserving Kosovo within Serbia. In terms of Vučić being articulated by others, primarily EU representatives such as Catherine Ashton and representatives of Germany speak about him. For instance, just a few days after the EU decided to open EU accession talks with Serbia on 28 June 2013, Catherine Ashton flew to Belgrade and meet with the Serbian Government to discuss the implementation of the Brussels agreement as part of these talks. At the press conference after the meeting, Ashton said that the EU Council’s decision was historic and

a signal of the great achievements of the leadership of Serbia and I want to commend anew the Prime Minister [Dačić], the Deputy Prime Minister [Vučić], the Ministers and the team who have worked so hard all these last few months. All of that work has been acknowledged by every member state of the EU, and they proved it when they took the unanimous decision to open negotiations on the accession of Serbia to the EU. [...] In my meeting just now with Mr. President [Nikolić], the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, I wanted to express my great respect for your vision, your courage, and how I’ve seen you take what were often painful decisions. (Dnevnik 2, 09.07.2013, 36:50).

Ashton, in her role as the mediator in the Brussels dialogue, articulates the entire Serbian leadership as “hard-working”, “respect-worthy”, “visionary”, “courageous”, making “painful decisions” and dealing with “difficult political challenges”. By doing so, Ashton is constituting the Serbian leadership as figures that can accommodate a range of diverse political demands in the best interest of the people they lead, with full trust that they will do the best they can for them, no matter the

meanings that people may attribute to them. Ashton not only congratulated the Serbian leadership, but also “the people of Serbia, for the inspiration that [they] have given not just to the region, but all over the world.”

Apart from Ashton, German leadership and German media have put a focus on Vučić from the moment of the conclusion of the First agreement. *RTS* reported that the German agency DPA has described Vučić as the “strongest Serbian leader” and “father of the agreement” (quoted in *Dnevnik 2*, 20.04.2013, 18:26), claiming that by playing high-stakes poker he eventually won. Additionally, a few days before the EU’s decision to start accession talks with Serbia, *RTS* reported that the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) termed him a “responsible” and “realist politician”, who not only drew declarative lessons from the past, but instead succeeded to convince members of the Bundestag that he abandoned the ideas of Greater Serbian chauvinism (*Dnevnik 2*, 24.06.2013, 08:46). Of course, the selective reporting by *RTS* also articulates Vučić in this manner. Similarly, then Germany’s ambassador to Serbia, Heinz Wilhelm said that if Vučić is an optimist that the Bundestag might give its consent to begin accession talks with Serbia, he is an optimist as well (*Dnevnik 2*, 14.06.2013). Vučić was articulated as a rational political subject, who could overcome past narratives, which is particularly important when dealing with Serbia’s position towards Kosovo. His leadership skills and negotiation ability have been underlined by domestic actors in Serbia as well, such as Vulin, who praised Vučić as someone who “coped with [the pressure of negotiations with Pristina] like a real man, who knew how to respond and to defend his and our principles, and not to listen to the others’ tirades” (*Dnevnik 2*, 02.04.2013, 04:25). In this context, Vulin also emphasizes Vučić’s masculinity, his masculine leadership style that helps him defend Serbia’s interests.

On the other hand, Vučić articulated himself as a rational and compromise-oriented politician, “one of the few [at the table] who did not have *a priori* attitudes but wanted to hear what the arguments of the others were, to hear what they are offering us and see whether or not we can implement it” (*Dnevnik 2*, 03.04.2013, 19:00). He also self-articulated as a selfless, honest politician, who only had the best interests of the state and its people at heart, not his personal and political interests. After his visit to Northern Kosovo in May 2013 to convey the Brussels agreement to the local community, he said:

Yesterday’s meeting showed that they [the Serb community in Kosovo] trust their country. Being aware that I was maybe going to commit political suicide, I came in front of these people to tell them that Serbia is behind them. I was only telling them the truth no matter how painful it was. This honest approach has clearly influenced a change in their thinking. Most of them now understand that with differences amongst us, we cannot go into the future. That is why I am convinced that we will make and implement all decisions together (*Dnevnik 2*, 13.05.2013, 05:07).

In summary, if Dačić and Vučić are taken as the main figures behind the community discourse, their positionalities were altered with a change in their political role. Soon after the events described in this chapter, Serbia held its early parliamentary elections in 2014, after which Vučić took on the role of Prime Minister and Dačić became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This resulted in a changed approach towards the Brussels dialogue, especially considering other structural factors, such as the continuously failed implementation of the A/CSM. Vučić became the leading figure of a “de-mythological” approach to Kosovo in Serbia in 2017, with his call for an internal dialogue on Kosovo in which the entire Serbian society should be engaged. Emphasis was put on defining Kosovo as a problem and on finding a tangible solution that could take the place of representing a “final compromise”, instead of the A/CSM. The next chapter addresses precisely this shift in meaning-making – an increased emphasis on “myth” and “narratives of the past” as an obstacle to Serbia’s realization of its full potential: economic progress and EU membership, substituting the Kosovo imaginary with an imaginary of EU integration and economic prosperity. In this “partition discourse”, the mythology around Kosovo that supposedly steers Serbian politics is articulated as an obstacle to the fantasy of full closure of identity of the Serbian political collective and requires a re-constitution of the Serbian-Albanian relationship as a whole.

6 Partition Discourse

The partition discourse came about not as something entirely new. As we have seen, making issues political again entails a certain degree of re-activation of meaning. In Laclau's words, "reactivation does not [...] consist of returning to the original situation, but merely of rediscovering, through the emergence of new antagonisms, the contingent nature of so-called 'objectivity'" (Laclau 1990, 34-35), that is, rediscovering a specific historical alternative that was available at one point but got pushed aside and deemed illegitimate. This concrete historical alternative that was re-activated in 2017 and 2018 was the idea of partition. Even the late Prime Minister of Serbia Zoran Đinđić advocated partition in the early 2000s, although it was not a favorable option at the time (Danas 2018c, 7 August; Dnevnik 2, 31.07.2017). This was also the case in the 1990s, with the former President of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia advocating partition (which he later elaborated on in his books *Kosovo* from 2004 and *Kosovo 1966-2013* from 2013). And even in 2013, during the height of negotiations in Brussels, Dačić claimed that by engaging in the political dialogue, "Serbia has made a compromise, so they [the EU/international community] do not let me talk about partition or delineation anymore, even though I am convinced that this is the only possible solution" (Dnevnik 2, 28.02.2013, 09:00). Below, I will introduce the main points from the previous chapter in which I discussed the community discourse and relate them to the partition discourse as a re-articulation of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse due to the Brussels agreement's inability to act as a solution.

In the previous chapter I elaborated on the efforts made by the Serbian Government to re-constitute elements of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse into "Serbia in Kosovo" through acknowledging a subjectivity of Kosovo state institutions and anchoring its hegemonic claim to Kosovo through a focus on the Serbian community there. In the community discourse, territory is left relatively un-politicized (except the acknowledgement of Kosovo as a separate subject in terms of both institutional framework and its Kosovo Albanian representatives with legitimate interests) due to the still dominating articulation that Kosovo is Serbia, ensured through positioning the Brussels dialogue as status neutral. This discourse is characterized by a metaphoric move I have termed concealment, in which the dislocatory effects of Kosovo's declaration of independence (and the existence of Kosovo state structures) on the claim that Kosovo is Serbia have been concealed and not presented as a threat to the unity of that claim. The dislocation has been "sutured" by the myth of the Brussels agreement. However, even though the dislocation has been concealed, other dislocatory events have emerged since the conclusion of the Brussels agreement, the most important of which was the lack of implementation of the A/CSM. If an agreement that was supposed to conceal the dislocation and let the dislocatory events be incorporated into the

given structure is never fully implemented, if its most crucial part for suturing the dislocation – the A/CSM – is not realized, then the given structure – the “Kosovo is Serbia discourse” – can no longer incorporate it. The discourse gets de-centered again and, inevitably, its elements need to be re-constituted again.

This focus on the Serb community as embodying Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo got de-centered with the lack of A/CSM’s implementation since the Serb community could not exert power and act as an extension of the Serbian state in Kosovo without it. However, specifically because the people have become a political category, the claim to Kosovo in the absence of A/CSM’s implementation has been put into question and an alternative demand has been positioned at the center of Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo: parts of Kosovo’s territory, namely those parts majority-inhabited by the Serb community. This hegemonic claim aimed to incorporating these parts of territory into the Serbian state framework to the fullest degree. If now Serbia cannot exert governance over major parts of Kosovo and has acknowledged a certain political subjectivity of the Kosovo state framework, incorporating parts of Kosovo territory that is majority-populated by Serbs would mean a consolidation of Serbia’s statehood in these areas. It would mean that Serbia would have governance in and control of these parts that would consequently be incorporated fully into the Serbian state framework. However, since control cannot be exerted in the so-called “enclaves” in Southern Kosovo, Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo is limited to the North. Thus, the relation between the nodal points of the people and the territory is articulated as equivalential as far as North Kosovo is concerned, since the Serbian Government put physical ownership over symbolic ownership and sharing of territory at the center of contestation in 2017/2018.

The contestation in the partition discourse of 2017 and 2018 does not revolve around de-politicizing the territorial question (leaving the question of status uncontested) in favor of politicizing the people, as it was the case in the community discourse. It is the other way around: once the people have become political, their tie to territory became political as well. Hence, what becomes part of political contestation are only those parts of territory where Serbs live, and *specifically* Northern Kosovo since it enables consolidation of Serbia’s statehood there. This way, what has been termed “Serbian state and national interests” is filled with alternative content as well: while in 2013, the interests were to preserve the Serb community in Kosovo (and claim Kosovo as Serbian through this practice), in 2017 and 2018, Serbian state and national interests are to “gain something” in terms of territory. As Vučić has expressed, “if we could gain even one meter [of land] there, it would be a win, because we [Serbia] have nothing there [in Kosovo] now” (Dnevnik 2, 30.06.2018, 00:44). The fantasy of “restoring” Kosovo that is acknowledged as a lost object-cause of desire underpins political contestations incarnated in the myth of partition. Hence, the

fantasy of Kosovo (as a whole) being Serbia is substituted with a different one, namely that of finally “solving” the Kosovo issue through partition, upon which a future of economic prosperity and stability awaits as part of the EU. I will illuminate these fantasies more in the upcoming segments.

This chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, I will examine the main elements of re-articulating Serbia’s claim to Kosovo in the partition discourse, after which I will illuminate the transition towards articulating Serb-Albanian relations as antagonistic (between the two peoples across territories and throughout history) and the politicization of Northern Kosovo. Secondly, to shed light on how this transformation happened, I examined how the conflict itself is articulated, how the many antagonistic Others are articulated, and how the political “us” is articulated. All of these articulations are underpinned by different fantasies: the fantasy of “restoring” the loss of Kosovo through “gaining” the territory of North Kosovo; and the fantasy of EU integration that would solve all issues that Serbia has, including the Kosovo issue. Finally, I will demonstrate how the internal dialogue on Kosovo that started in 2017 aimed to re-articulate not only the meanings attached to Kosovo, but also the structures of feeling about Kosovo.

6.1 Main Elements of Re-constituting Serbia’s Claim to Kosovo

There are two practices that enable the Serbian Government led by SNS to carry out a re-constitution of the claim to Kosovo: 1) transforming Serbian-Albanian relations from agonism (which was characteristic of the community discourse) to antagonism and articulating them as relations between two peoples across territories, not just between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, 2) abandoning the claim to symbolic ownership of entire Kosovo as a means of holding the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse together and instead focusing on claims to physical ownership, actual ownership of a territory through the possibility of exerting control and governance. Hence, Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo is re-articulated from “Serbia in Kosovo” within the wider discourse of “Kosovo is Serbia”, to claiming the right to “consolidated” statehood in parts of territory populated by Serbs, by abandoning the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim through drawing a border between Serbia and Kosovo and mutual recognition as the possible result.

The antagonistic institution of Serbian-Albanian relations as a whole, not just between Albanians in Kosovo, and Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia drives the idea of total separation further as a means to finally solve the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo. To this end, the conflict is articulated as a historical conflict between the two peoples in their entirety, living across nation-state borders. I will elaborate on this issue specifically when I address the dominant articulation of conflicting Serbian and Albanian ideological projects, such as the creation of Greater Albania and Greater Serbia. In this context, subjects from countries in the region, such as Milorad Dodik, President of

Republika Srpska and Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania also constitute hegemonic subjects (acting as supporters or opponents of ethical ideals), due to their shaping of the discourse on antagonistic relations between the two peoples.

The antagonistic institution of Serbian-Albanian relations enables an antagonistic institution of space in terms of territory, since both sides begin to claim different territories inhabited by “their” people as theirs. For instance, the Presevo valley is articulated as “Eastern Kosovo” by the PM of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj, and Northern Kosovo as “Serbia” by Vučić. This political boundary-drawing between the peoples and territories leaves the previously dominant articulation of “sharing” of space between the communities aside, in favor of almost total separation, something that culminated in the idea of swapping territories as a means of solving the dispute: Serbia would get Northern Kosovo while Kosovo would get the Presevo valley (even though the land swap idea was one among many that circulated at the time). In the partition discourse, the symbolic representation of Kosovo as a whole does not dominate anymore: the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is carried by the symbolic claim to all of Kosovo, is abandoned in favor of “parts of Kosovo are Serbia”, specifically those parts inhabited by Serbs and exclusively Northern Kosovo, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter. The claim to Kosovo is transposed from a symbolic realm into a physical, material realm, which constituted a larger shift in the way the Serbian Government was articulating Kosovo as of 2017. Thus, it is not about metaphoric claims anymore aiming to conceal dislocations, but about drawing metonymic articulations, establishing counter-hegemonies and paradigmatically substituting one hegemonic project for another.

It is also important to emphasize once more here, as I have already indicated above with Dačić’s statement from February 2013, that the idea of partition is not something entirely new in the political dialogue and does not necessarily constitute the naming of an “unnamable object”. The claim for partition remained outside the realm of what was constituted as possible in that specific political moment. As I have mentioned in Chapter 5, the people, or the Serb community in Kosovo, was the only issue that could be discussed in the Brussels dialogue as outlined in the UN Resolution 64/298. Since political contestation centered on the people, territory was left outside of the realm of contestation, due to the prevalent articulations of status-neutrality of Kosovo as a nodal point centering the Kosovo is Serbia discourse. Without this emphasis on the people, embodied in the demand for A/CSM, the entire discourse on “Kosovo is Serbia” would fall apart, that is, it would become de-centered. This is precisely what happened with the failed implementation of the A/CSM, specifically after Kosovo’s Constitutional Court reached the verdict that it cannot be implemented fully according to the agreement from August 2015, which gave it substantial oversight over different areas of political and social life.

Since the implementation was postponed multiple times, when Vučić was elected President of Serbia in early 2017, he started his political presidency with the announcement that an internal dialogue on Kosovo in Serbia was needed, one that would engage all segments of society in dealing with the issue of Kosovo and coming up with solutions to the problem. Immediately after the internal dialogue commenced, Dačić made a statement that

under the agreement between Serbs and Albanians, this [partition] is one possible lasting compromise solution, with a special status for our churches and monasteries and with the Community of Serb municipalities in Southern Kosovo. Kosovo is our value, but only to the extent to which we regard it as such. We are the ones who determine its value and importance, with only one condition, the condition of all conditions for our future: that the future must not be bloody, and this must be our red line (Dnevnik 2, 31.07.2017, 02:17).

This illustrates quite well the contingent nature of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, since even with the most sedimented demands, there is still room for politicization. The importance which Kosovo has in Serbia as a social value is contingent on the articulations various subjects make about it, and it is precisely the discursive nature of Kosovo in Serbian politics that enables it to be re-constituted time and again. Dačić, for instance, identified the internal dialogue as a suitable political moment to re-surface the idea of partition as a viable political option in the dialogue, something that gained momentum through its appropriation by other political subjects, such as Vučić, the PM of Serbia Ana Brnabić, Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin and many more, even outside of the Serbian political discursive constellation. It seemed that many subjects from EU institutions and EU-member states have expressed their support for this idea, such as the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, who also mediated the Brussels dialogue after Catherine Ashton left office, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Johannes Hahn, and Austria’s Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, just to name a few. While not explicitly claiming to support partition, they claimed that they would not oppose any solution that Serbia and Kosovo might reach between themselves. Outside the EU framework, John Bolton, the United States National Security Advisor has openly claimed that the USA does not foreclose territorial corrections as a solution to the Belgrade-Pristina dispute and that the Trump administration would support it (Dnevnik 2, 05.09.2018). The horizon of possible meanings attached to partition, that is, what would constitute the limits of the partition discourse, would be war, or events that would result in bloodshed, as identified by Dačić above. This is something that resonated with the idea of correction of borders, exchange of territories, demarcation etc. which would all adhere to the basic principle of a peaceful solution and one which would exclude the creation of “ethnically homogeneous” states as a result of such a compromise.

Another dimension that must be considered in the quest for a final compromise within the Brussels dialogue is a temporal one. Finding a durable solution is constitutive of the imaginary of a European future for Serbia, one which entails economic prosperity above all. Maintaining the status quo, that

is choosing to leave things un-politicized, imaginizes Serbia as being stuck in the past, a past that is characterized by wars, bloodshed and economic stagnation. Thus, the myth of partition as a possible solution to the dislocations Serbia experiences around claiming Kosovo as Serbian constitutes a deeply affective discourse, a discourse that is able to grip the Serbian political collective in the most personal ways possible, as it touches upon their very livelihood: if Serbia chooses not to engage, if it chooses to put “emotion” over “rational” politics, it could find itself in another war left economically devastated. If it chooses to pursue a compromise solution through partition, Serbia could flourish economically, politically and demographically. Partition is articulated as a stepping-stone to re-capturing the lost *jouissance*, a fantasy of social “fullness” that was “castrated” from Serbia in the form of losing Kosovo due to violent events from the recent past. The temporality of myths is reflected in the workings of fantasy, in imaginizing a future state of affairs in which all problems are solved by adopting the myth.

A compromise solution because of the dialogue would tie the past and future together for the political collective in Serbia – in other words, “we” need to give up a piece of the past (our old views on Kosovo) in order to gain a piece of the future (the European Union). In this context, the temporality of the Brussels dialogue is evident in its articulation as something that inevitably has an expiration date. For instance, after Vučić became president in 2017, the EU has frequently announced a “new phase of the EU facilitated dialogue” (EU Stabilisation and Association Council 2017), which would result in a durable solution inscribed in a “legally binding normalisation agreement” (European Commission 2018). This further means that maintaining a status quo is not an option within the Brussels dialogue, leaving only some sort of a solution, possibly in terms of a compromise through partition, as a viable political option.

In sum, while the Brussels agreement was an attempt to sediment/institute an agonistic articulation of the people (in terms of the relation between the Serb and Albanian community in Kosovo) and territory (in terms of sharing the claim to inhabit the physical space of Kosovo), the internal dialogue and partition as a viable solution are an attempt to politicize a different sedimentation: the Kosovo imaginary structuring the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is sedimented in the structural logics of institutions in Serbia, and the political collective’s affective attachment to this discourse. This politicization is achieved by re-articulating the meaning of Kosovo in the internal dialogue and subsequently through the idea of partition, resulting in a re-constitution of previously fixed discursive elements. The most visible re-constitution is the changed position of the signifiers “territory” and “the people” in the partition discourse, which once stabilized the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, but now anchor the emerging hegemonizing (in Brubaker’s (1996) words, “nationalizing”) project of the Serbian state to incorporate Northern Kosovo into its framework, leaving the Serb community in Southern Kosovo outside the realm of political contestation. In

contrast with the community discourse, the main political category of the partition discourse is territory, but now referring to specific parts of Kosovo, as mentioned earlier. The people refer only to the Serb community in the North since they are part of the political contestation. A relation of exclusion (or contrariety) is articulated between the Serb community (in Northern Kosovo and elsewhere alike) and the Albanian community in general, two categories that are antagonistically opposed. Hence, the discursive limit of the emerging project to hegemonize Northern Kosovo is constituted by what lies beyond its political frontier, namely the constitution of “Greater Albania” as a counter ideological project. When the relation between Serbs and Albanians in the Balkans overall, not just in Kosovo, is antagonistically articulated, very often “Greater Albania” is presented as an obstacle to achieving the “full” constitution of the Serbian political collective as such. The hegemonic consolidation of Serbdom across nation-state boundaries acts as an umbrella-ideology that breathes life into the political project of Serbia’s consolidation of statehood across the boundaries of Kosovo and Serbia. This will be unpacked later. What will follow now is the antagonization of Serb-Albanian relations in various discursive moments, all of which politicized Northern Kosovo.

6.2 Destabilizing Political Moments: On the Train Tracks of Antagonism

Antagonistic relations between Serbs and Albanians in general are based on two moves on the discursive field: on the one hand, articulating Albanians as a threat to the very existence of Serbs in Kosovo, that is their lives and livelihood, and on the other, articulating the supposedly intended creation of “Greater Albania” as an ideological threat to whatever is considered “Serbian” in the region, be it people or territory. A central signifier in this debate is Northern Kosovo, as it is framed to represent “the last fortress” of Serbia (in terms of both people and territory) in an environment in which the Other is threatening to abolish one’s own existence. It is also articulated as standing in the way of the creation of “Greater Albania”, which makes it even more important territorially. This way, Serbian hegemonic subjects are politicizing Northern Kosovo, i.e., making it a political problem to be discussed within the Brussels dialogue. All of this is achieved through gradual political moments of destabilization that would put Northern Kosovo at the center of contestation and re-frame Serbian-Albanian relations as antagonistic. Those moments are Ramush Haradinaj’s arrest in early January 2017, the sending of the so-called “Kosovo is Serbia” train from Belgrade to Mitrovica only a few days later and the erection of the separation wall in North Mitrovica to barricade off the main bridge leading to the South.

On 4 January 2017, Haradinaj was arrested in France based on a warrant issued by Serbia in 2006 for war crimes against civilians during the Kosovo conflict of 1998 and 1999 (Danas 2017g, 5

January; Danas 2017h, 10 January).²⁰ The arrest became a showcase of boundary-drawing practices between the two communities, since representatives of Albania became involved in the debate as well. After his arrest, Haradinaj was detained facing possible extradition to Serbia and during this time, many protests of Albanians not only in Kosovo, but also in the Albanian diaspora were organized against detaining Haradinaj. For instance, on 9 January 2017, the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati asked the EU to exert pressure on Serbia for jeopardizing the process of normalization of relations with Pristina through this arrest warrant. As reported in *Dnevnik 2*, Albanian politicians in Kosovo and Albania called the Albanian diaspora to demonstrate against the arrest in front of Serbian and French diplomatic representations abroad, as they did in New York on 9 January. To this, the Serbian head of diplomacy Dačić claimed that he possessed security information that parts of the Albanian diaspora were planning to occupy certain Serbian diplomatic and consular representations in the USA and Europe in order to pressure Serbia to give up on prosecuting Haradinaj, accusing Albanian politicians of being prepared for terrorism (*Dnevnik 2*, 09.01.2017, 01:31). By naming Albanian politicians as terrorists, Dačić, through citation, constitutes the antagonistic discourse in Serbia on Albanians as terrorists, as they were framed during the conflict of 1998-1999. This is a powerful affective articulation, too. It establishes equivalence between Kosovo's political demands for independence through arguably democratic means of deliberation within the Brussels dialogue, and the historic fight for that independence through means of violence during the Kosovo conflict. It insinuates that Albanians have not changed their means of fighting for political goals and forecloses their possibility for change in the future, which makes them a legitimate threat to Serbian state and national interests. Moreover, Dačić established "Albanian politicians" in general as terrorists due to Albania's involvement in the debate, not only Kosovo Albanian politicians, which re-iterates the antagonistic relation between Serbs and Albanians as peoples.

Serbian authorities officially requested extradition on 10 January (Danas 2017h, 10 January), elaborating that "Serbia does not accept justice that involves the unpunished hunting and unpunished killing of innocent Serb civilians or civilians of any other nationality, such as those crimes perpetrated by Ramush Haradinaj and his criminal group according to our indictment", as Marko Đurić, the Director of the Office for KiM claimed (*Dnevnik 2*, 13.01.2017, 02:10). The phrase of "killing civilians", specifically Serb civilians, has been repeated often after that, and particularly in connection with the "Kosovo is Serbia" train sent from Belgrade one day later. If

²⁰ Ramush Haradinaj was not only indicted by Serbian courts, but also by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2011, among other things for the "abduction, murder, detention, and other forms of mistreatment of Serb, Kosovar Albanian and Kosovar Roma/Egyptian civilians, and other civilians who collaborated with, or were perceived to have collaborated with, the Serbian Forces or otherwise not to have supported the KLA" (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 2011).

Albanians are “killing Serb civilians”, they represent a threat to the very existence of the Serb community in Kosovo and embody their very antithesis. The politics of fear incites a visceral response and can be felt as a bodily threat to the livelihood of the Serbian people. Here, it is also evident how the “stickiness” of emotions works: through the historical re-articulation of Albanians as a threat, as the enemy, they are subjectivated into this role to which fear is attached. Articulated in this manner, in which Albanians are threatening the annihilation of Serbs in Kosovo, one additional articulation forms a chain of equivalence against the Albanian presence in areas where Serbs live: war. If “they” are killing Serbs, then “they” must want war, and “we” must respond with war.

This logic was heightened with the sending of the so-called “Kosovo is Serbia” train from Belgrade to North Mitrovica on 14 January 2017, on the celebration day of the Serbian New Year according to the Julian calendar. The Serbian authorities claimed that the promotional train line should announce the revival of the regular train line operating between these two cities prior to 1999 and is anchored in promoting the idea of freedom of movement. The train came from Russia, its exterior was colored in the colors of the Serbian flag (red, blue, white) and contained the inscription “Kosovo is Serbia” and/or “Kosovo is Serbian” in above 20 world languages. The interior of the train was plastered with posters and photographs containing images of the Serbian cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo, such as frescos from the four Serbian medieval monasteries (Gračanica, Our Lady of Ljeviš, Patriarchate of Peć and Visoki Dečani) which are under the protection of UNESCO (Danas 2017k, 13 January; P. D. 2017, in Danas, 14 January). The train was eventually stopped in Raška near the crossing to Kosovo, since allegedly and according to *Dnevnik 2*, Kosovo authorities have announced that they would “blow up” the railway tracks if the train intends to proceed to Mitrovica (*Dnevnik 2*, 14.01.2017). During the wait in Raška, the cultural-artistic society “Kopaonik” from Leposavić in North Kosovo joined the passengers on the train, wearing traditional folk costumes and Serbian flags, singing several well-known songs about Kosovo, such as “Oj Kosovo, Kosovo” (Danas 2017l, 15 January). The text of the song translates into: “The dawn rises from Kosovo, A new day dawns, Gračanica, all in splendor, Awaits Vidovdan; Oh Kosovo, Kosovo, My beloved land, Land of the famous knights, Lazar and Miloš; All heroes from Serbia, Every proud heart, Love their land, Gazimestan, Kosovo; All Serbs shout together: We are not giving you away Kosovo! It has always been ours, Through ages it has stayed ours.”²¹

The train essentially embodied Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo as a material constitution of the claim. The exterior of the train is characterized by symbols of the Serbian state and nation, such

²¹ Author’s own translation.

as the colors of the flag, as well as the inscription that “Kosovo is Serbia/Serbian”, which makes the claim not only anchored in the idea of consolidating statehood there (“Serbia”), but also in the idea that Kosovo is crucial for the Serbian nation as such (“Serbian”). The interior features the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo, which anchors Serbia’s historic claim to statehood there and Kosovo’s eternal belonging to the Serbian nation as a symbolic space. Metaphorically, the train carries the claim to statehood in Kosovo, which envelops the cultural heritage claim, making the former primary and the latter subordinate. The latter is the content that fills, or fuels, the primary claim to statehood in Kosovo. Since the destination of the train is North Mitrovica, the claim to statehood refers to Northern Kosovo, but is justified by Serbia’s historic claim to Kosovo as evident in its cultural heritage there. This example illustrates very well how different discourses intersect to form and be constitutive of hegemonic projects, such as the claim of Serbia to Northern Kosovo. It is also a citation of the Kosovo myth. The discourse on Serbia’s historic right to this territory, which is embodied by these monasteries, constitutes the current claim of Serbia to parts of that territory, since Serbian political subjects that are part of this analysis are not considering to simply “give up” on statehood in Kosovo. The claim to Northern Kosovo is hegemonic in that it refers to attempts to consolidate statehood in this area and envelop it into Serbia’s state framework, instead of focusing on the betterment of people’s lives without politicizing territory, as was the case with the community discourse. It aims to “suture” the dislocation resulting from the existence of Kosovo state structures in this territory by means of drawing political (which translates into territorial) frontiers between these two opposing projects. The result of this hegemonic project would be total separation and acknowledgement of the dislocation as such, instead of incorporating the dislocation into the given discursive structure and concealing it, as was the case in 2013. In this sense, the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse as we know it would be de-structured and paradigmatically substituted with a counter-hegemonic discourse of partition.

On 14 January, when the train was stopped in Raška, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 14.01.2017, 05:05) made it clear in an interview with RTS that the train was “harmless”, articulating it as a symbol of European and democratic values such as freedom of movement. In turn, the Kosovo authorities’ response was “dangerous”, articulating their sending of armed security forces (termed “long barrels”) to the North as an act of war:

This morning at 8:30 a train set off for Kosovska Mitrovica from Belgrade, I repeat – a train, not a tank or armored vehicle or anything like that – a passenger train, to be precise, which was to connect people, cities, in accordance with the principles of public law, the laws of all countries of the world, in accordance with the highest values and standards of the EU, namely freedom of movement, movement of people, goods, capital and services. [...] Then almost incredible things began to happen. I want to inform you that we found out tonight that Albanians, their special forces, were trying to blow up a part of the rail tracks, but they were not quite capable of doing it properly either. But what they did was send their forces, only comprised of Albanians, [...] [forces] most loyal to them in which there were no Serbs.

They were sent with long barrels to Jarinje, where they had to wait for the train [...] to arrest the passengers; [...] at first, we thought they were aiming at a political victory, but then we realized that they wanted to cause major conflicts and for what? [...] The Serbs gathered and surrounded an Albanian unit from Lužane – these are Serbs living in the area [of Northern Kosovo], since there are no Albanians living there. Only Serbs live in Leposavić municipality, less than 1% Albanians. They surrounded the Albanians, the Albanians then called for backup, without the approval of NATO or anybody else, and sent 17 Cobra armored vehicles, with special forces ROSU onboard, to Northern Kosovo, wishing to incite a conflict, to start a conflict of wider proportions tonight in a part of territory we consider our own. [...] My decision was at that moment [...] to stop our train in Raška, in order to preserve the freedom and lives of our people, to avoid conflicts and to show everyone that we want peace.

There was no mention of the provocative contents of the train, nor of the implications that such a move might have had for the dialogue in Brussels. The actions by Serbian authorities are downplayed in terms of provoking this conflict, while the response of the Kosovo authorities is exacerbated. There is a clear boundary-drawing between the Serb and Albanian community in Kosovo, in that the latter is vilified and presented as a threat to the livelihoods of the Serb community there. In turn, the Serbs are articulated as having a right to defend themselves in a territory in which the only legitimate forces can be Serbian forces. Northern Kosovo is thus defined by its absence of “Albanianness”, grounded in the re-iteration that Albanians represent a threat to the Serb community embodied by their security forces, their “long barrels” and their “Cobra armored vehicles”. Albanians are also re-iterated as infringing on human rights, specifically freedom of movement which is articulated as a nodal point of the discourse on European values – a community that “they” cannot belong to in the same manner as “we” can. While “our” train fosters the promotion of these values, constituting “us” as part of the European family, “their” acts of war do not, excluding them from membership in this family.

In the same interview, Vučić articulated the “Albanian threat” as their attempt to actually “kill Serbs”:

We only have a problem if someone thinks they can kill Serbs. We will not allow anyone to kill Serbs unpunished. That is all I have to say to them. We ask them to act responsibly. We ask them to understand that peace is in everyone’s interest. They should not play around and ruin what we have been building for a long time, which is peace and security for all citizens. A train with ordinary passengers is not a threat to anyone. [...] We have over 50 buses [from Kosovo] passing through central Serbia every day and we never made any problems, they carry black eagles and green eagles, and I don’t care what kind of eagles, but we never made any problems. [...] I just beg them not to kill Serbs. [...] It is my plea that they do not kill Serbs, we will protect our people (ibid., 11:05).

Very much related to Haradinaj and his troops articulated as having killed Serbs, Vučić’s statement establishes equivalence between the past killing of Serb civilians during the conflict and the present moment of Kosovo authorities trying to hinder an “aggressive meddling into state sovereignty of Kosovo”, as claimed by Edita Tahiri (Danas 2017k, 13 January). The current claim borrows its legitimacy from the re-iterated discourse of Serbs being the actual victims of the Kosovo conflict,

having greatly suffered by the hand of Albanian forces, who have never been punished for their crimes. The fact that former KLA members are Kosovo's leaders in that particular moment only reinforces this discourse of Serb suffering. The phrase "killing Serbs" represents the historic threat Serbs have had to face and are still facing as victims of "Albanian intrusion", particularly in territories that are not constituted as "Albanian". More importantly, if the issue at hand is about "killing Serbs", and if the train is articulated as merely a "passenger train" and it is juxtaposed with the countless busses with Albanian passengers displaying their national symbols (red eagle symbolizing "Albanianness" and green eagle symbolizing the predominantly Islamic faith of Kosovo Albanians), then the conflict is construed as being between the people, not between hegemonic attempts to consolidate statehood in a territory that is considered indisputably their own by Kosovo authorities. Similar to claims made by political subjects of Serbia about the threat of the local population faced by Albanian special forces' intrusion, the Kosovo authorities' reaction to the train can be seen in the framework of yet another attempt of Serbia to undermine Kosovo's statehood. Since Serbia is not giving up on its hegemonic claim to Kosovo, this practice can be seen as an attack on the Albanian people as such, bringing about memories of the conflict of 1998 and 1999. In the eyes of Kosovo authorities, the train would embody a continuation of previous Serbian hegemonic policy towards Kosovo and be in violation of the principles of normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, as foreseen by the Brussels dialogue, with Thaçi even calling it an "intrusion" and "extremist project" (Dnevnik 2, 15.01.2017, 07:05). Additionally, it was a train sent to their country without their consent, and thus less about the provocative decoration and more about the unilateral introduction of the train, which underlined the competing claims to sovereignty.

Since the phrase of Albanians "killing Serbs" stands in place of an entire discourse of Albanian-Serb historical animosity, it is a very emotionally powerful signifier. It was re-iterated by Nikolić in a similar manner to Đurić and Vučić, the power of which manifested itself in Nikolić's willingness to send Serbian armed forces to Northern Kosovo to "defend the Serbs" if "they [Albanians] start to kill them". He even added that, not only will Serbia send its army, but he would also go to fight in Kosovo (Dnevnik 2, 15.01.2017, 04:18). He claimed that Serbia now faces two choices: either to accept everything that Kosovo authorities are demanding, or to go to war, to which he added that as long as he is president, Serbia will not accept everything that they demand (ibid., 10:04). This iteration resonated even over a year into the future, when Pristina announced that they would form the Kosovo army out of ROSU special forces. In connection with the Kosovo Parliament's decision to form the army, Vučić said that "we will not allow anyone to expel, persecute or kill the Serb population" (Dnevnik 2, 30.10.2018, 03:01). He added: "I am not an enemy of the Albanians, on the contrary: I am an enemy to anyone who would persecute the Serbian people, who would

kill innocent people” (Dnevnik 2, 01.11.2018, 00:41). Any moment in which the Kosovo special forces ROSU would enter the North, or in which the Kosovo army would come about as an organization, is articulated as a threat to the lives of the Serb community, which inevitably must result in war between the peoples. As Nikolić said after the train incident (Dnevnik 2, 15.01.2017, 02:15): “Yesterday was on the verge of a conflict with temporary institutions in Pristina. The appearance of the ROSU special forces [in Northern Kosovo] was a sign that the Albanians wanted war.”

A nodal point already mentioned above constituting Kosovo Albanians as an antagonistic force (as well as politicizing Northern Kosovo) was “freedom of movement”, which was a right they have denied the Serb community specifically in the North. On the one hand, it was part of the contestation regarding the train, for instance when protests against the decision to avert the train were organized in North Mitrovica. At the protest, Đurić’s deputy Petar Petković said that “Pristina should know that, by trying to prevent freedom of movement of the Serbian people, they will not succeed in making the Serb-majority areas into ghettos, in which they would apparently like to see only those notorious trains that go in one direction” (ibid., 06:00). By equating the current situation in Northern Kosovo with the situation of Jewish ghettos during WWII, Albanians are affectively articulated as the ultimate incarnation of evil. This articulation also accentuates the Serbian necessity for this part of territory to be out of Pristina’s control, since Kosovo authorities cannot have the best interest of the Serb community at heart.

On the other hand, “freedom of movement” was part of the contestation regarding the main bridge in Mitrovica, in which it was articulated as a commodity that only pertains to Pristina, but not to the Serb community. A relation of equivalence was established between the train and the wall on the main bridge. The Serbian political subjects claimed that if freedom of movement for the Albanian side should be guaranteed by the demolition of the wall on the bridge, then it should also be guaranteed for the Serb community by enabling them to use the train and move freely towards Serbia. Even Milorad Dodik of Republika Srpska commented on the “hypocrisy of Pristina” asking how it was possible that freedom of movement only pertains to one community and not to the other (ibid., 08:40). The issue of the wall north of the main bridge in Mitrovica was not only compared to the train and the question of freedom of movement, but also to the question of A/CSM as an empty signifier able to fulfill all the desires and political needs of both the Serb community in Kosovo and Serbia alike. Being constituted as an “impossible object” throughout the course of the dialogue in Brussels, the A/CSM represents the belief that it can bring about the “closure” of the Serb community’s identity and through that closure, release the dialogue of any social tensions, thus solving the conflict between the two parties. After the events with the train and in order to discuss the wall on the North side of the bridge in Mitrovica, the Belgrade and

Pristina delegations met in Brussels on 1 February 2017, after which Vučić said that Serbia was experiencing pressures from Pristina and the EU to bring down the wall urgently, to which the local Serb mayor agreed. Vučić asked why such a rush and whether it was fair that the “Community of Serb municipalities has not been established for four years, but the wall needs to be brought down immediately” (Danas 2017m, 2 February). Since the A/CSM is constituted as the main political objective to be fulfilled, it lends itself easily to comparisons with other issues that have not been fulfilled or issues acting as a barrier to their fulfillment. The A/CSM is a demand that can bring together various other demands (such as the bridge, the agreement on energy as we will see later in the chapter) into a chain of equivalence in order to strengthen Serbia’s performative claim to statehood in Kosovo. However, since the A/CSM was never realized, alternative demands started to take precedence, such as a division of Northern Kosovo from the rest of Kosovo, and its incorporation into the state system of Serbia.

All these moments of destabilization contribute to performing Northern Kosovo as a “special area”. On the one hand, it is performed as special because of its majority-Serb population that denounces the legitimacy of Kosovo institutions; on the other hand, because it is constituted as a place that has an uninterrupted, continuous connection with the Serbian state framework, that is a place where Serbia can exert governance, as discussed earlier. Both of these elements institute Northern Kosovo as “Serbia” or “Serbian”, as has been demonstrated with the train sent from Belgrade or barricading North Mitrovica off from the South with the wall erected on the main bridge. The materiality of Northern Kosovo also “invites” meanings of independence and detachment from the rest of the territory to be attributed to it. It has historically resisted integration into Kosovo institutions, and the existence of the Serbia-run framework there supports such claims. Through barricades and walls, its leadership has continuously demonstrated this ability for detachment, especially because of the natural barrier of the Ibar River separating the North and the South. Throughout this subchapter, I have also suggested that Haradinaj’s arrest and Serbia’s extradition request have enabled an antagonistic articulation of Albanians as a people, which was accentuated by the train incident and the debate regarding the wall. In order to unpack the antagonistic articulation of the Other by Serbian hegemonic actors, all aiming to politicize the question of territory in Northern Kosovo, the next segment is going to address, firstly, how the conflict itself is being articulated, secondly, how the many antagonistic Others are being articulated, followed by, thirdly, how the political “us” is being articulated.

6.3 Articulations of the Conflict

First and foremost, during early 2017, even before the internal dialogue in Serbia started, there had already been a noticeable shift in the way Serbian political actors were framing their relations with

Pristina. Instead of the need for an agreement, which characterized the 2013 discourse on agonism and community, there are increasing articulations of a conflict between Serbia and Kosovo (mainly as a result of the non-implementation of A/CSM) and of the need for an alternative solution. This was elaborated above in the examples of the train and Haradinaj's arrest, in which Albanians were constituted as a threat to Serbs. Because the political events discussed above generated the momentum for finding an alternative solution to the A/CSM in the Brussels dialogue, Vučić initiated the internal dialogue on Kosovo immediately after he came to office as President of Serbia. Within this internal dialogue, which was aimed both at the Serbian public and at the EU, a meaning-making process began which re-articulated two different sedimented meanings: on the one hand, it tried to re-articulate the so-called “mythical approach to Kosovo” that characterized Serbian politics towards it, and on the other, the question of borders between Serbia and Kosovo, but also in the region more broadly.

This entire meaning-making process inevitably intersected with the meaning-making in the Brussels dialogue, since the internal dialogue was also incorporated by the EU into reports on Serbia's progress towards EU-integration (EU Stabilisation and Association Council 2017). The internal dialogue was praised, announcing a “new phase” of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. In connection to the new phase, the EU introduced the term “legally-binding agreement”, a floating signifier that did not have a fixed point of reference but suggested that it can be reached in the “final phase of dialogue”, indicating that the Brussels dialogue is not an open-ended process but that it has a clearly intended result. While the EU has substituted one agreement (the Brussels agreement) with another (the legally-binding agreement), a shift can be noticed in the discourse of the Brussels dialogue on the part of the Serbian Government, namely from reaching an “agreement”, most notably the Brussels agreement, to reaching a “compromise”, most notably the idea of partition (*razgraničenje* in Serbian). This will be addressed in detail in the second thematic segment of the chapter, namely how Serbia's hegemonic claim to Kosovo changed from symbolic ownership to physical ownership. However, this entire shift would not have been possible without Serbia's disarticulation from an agonistic construction of Albanians and the Brussels agreement embodied by its most important aspect for Serbia – the A/CSM. Instead, increasingly antagonistic articulations of the conflict between Belgrade and Pristina were practiced, and the conflict was mainly articulated in three different forms. Firstly, as a historical conflict between the two peoples, Albanians and Serbs not just confined within the borders of Kosovo or Serbia. Secondly, as a conflict of these peoples over territory, in which not only Northern Kosovo was politicized, but also the Presevo valley. Thirdly, as a conflict between two competing ideological projects, namely the creation of “Greater Albania” and the nationalist project of Serbia to consolidate its statehood in Serb-populated territories in the Balkans, which characterized the Milošević-era. The conflict between the peoples

is anchored around nodal points of ethnicity, the conflict over territory around nodal points of “Northern Kosovo”, “Presevo valley” and “Republika Srpska”, whereas the ideological conflict is anchored around the nodal points of “Greater Albania”, “The green transversal” (so-called *zelená transversála*) and “Milošević”.

In articulating the conflict as a conflict between two peoples, Vučić has been the most prominent subject behind generating this type of antagonism between Serbs and Albanians. On numerous occasions, he has emphasized that he wanted to solve the “conflict between Serbs and Albanians.” In this articulation, history is used as its central component. The conflict between Serbs and Albanians is articulated as timeless: it has been there for ages and will be there for ages to come, if we do not solve it now. For instance, when the Western Balkans Summit was held in Sofia in March 2018, Vučić said that he would attempt to “solve this historical conflict between Serbs and Albanians” through his engagement in the Brussels dialogue and his idea of a compromise (Dnevnik 2, 01.03.2018, 03:16). Additionally, when the prominent local Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović (who was also addressed in Chapter 5) was murdered in January 2018, Vučić visited Northern Kosovo and at the monastery Banjska near Zvečan said: “I came here to let the Albanians know that, even though [...] we often have opposite interests, that Serbia not only wants peace, but that we will do everything in our power to preserve that peace, and [...] to solve our quarrels that have lasted for many decades, even many centuries” (Dnevnik 2, 20.01.2018, 04:28). With this claim, Vučić is constituting the discourse on Albanian-Serb eternal animosity. The conflict is articulated as one that knows no boundaries of time and that has been going on “for centuries”. By claiming that the conflict is between “Serbs” and “Albanians” throughout “history”, these groups are constituted as spanning across current nation-state borders, as well as suggesting perennial nations. In other words, this conflict is not between Serbs in Serbia and Kosovo, and Albanians in Kosovo, but between the two peoples in general. Similarly, the historic right of both communities to live in Kosovo is articulated at the core of the problem, when Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 17.05.2018, 10:16) says that “the conflict between Serbs and Albanians – not to go into whose fault it is and for what – has lasted long before the formation of the Prizren league. That was 140 years ago, and people should know that this conflict is not one that has lasted for 140 days.” Central to articulating the conflict as between two peoples is its connection to history. On the one hand, conflict has been a central signifier of Serb-Albanian relations throughout history (“we have always had opposing interests”), and on the other, Serb-Albanian relations, being constituted by eternal conflict, cannot improve if we do not address this history as part of the solution, bearing in mind that the solution as well must be a long-term process. This form of groups-making forecloses the possibility for alternative meanings to emerge, that is, alternative solutions to the conflict, since these groups are articulated as homogeneous, with each of them having opposing interests without

the option of intersection. This move has implications for why partition has become an option in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue: if the relation between the groups is characterized by eternal conflict, and if their interests are always diametrically opposed, then it invites the possibility for solving the conflict between them in terms of separation instead of community.

A crucial aspect of performing the conflict as one between the two peoples is commemoration. By commemorating particular historic moments that incarnate the antagonistic relation between them, such as the “pogrom” on 17 March 2004, political frontiers between the communities are re-drawn time and again. This has been the case with commemorating the 17 March during the entire period of analysis (2012-2018), with hegemonic actors perpetuating the antagonism between Serbs and Albanians structurally in the Serbian political collective. The commemoration practices are materialized in festivities, such as solemn academies, Church memorial services, school classes etc. usually in Belgrade, Pristina and North Mitrovica, which are instituted as the main three sites of remembrance. Through commemoration, experiences of the discussed (partial) enjoyment of the body are generated, which grip the subjects performing commemoration affectively and help reinforce the dominant discourses of Serb-Albanian animosity. However, the memory of the 17 March is articulated with whatever political project is most dominant at a specific point in time. In 2013, for instance, Dačić (Dnevnik 2, 17.03.2013, 05:10) said at the solemn academy gathering representatives of academia and the Church in Belgrade, that “we are living in a situation in which that territory [Kosovo and Metohija] is in some way under occupation. [...] The Government of Serbia will never betray its people, it will never betray the Serbian idea of Kosovo and Metohija, but at the same time, its actions will be guided by immediate vital interests of the [Serb] people who live there.” Similarly, during his visit to Kosovo and after the Church memorial service in Pristina, Vulin asked whether the international community, in the face of what has happened on 17 March 2004, considers the Serbs as the only people in Europe who are not supposed to decide on their own fate, elect their own police and judicial institutions (ibid, 03:14). These statements are constitutive of the community discourse anchored around the nodal point of the people, and, as evident in Vulin’s statement, bringing it together with the political project of establishing the A/CSM (which was still under negotiation at that time, the Brussels agreement having been reached a month later). However, with the failed implementation of A/CSM, increasingly antagonistic and divisive articulations of the Other are produced, and sedimented in collective practices such as the school class on 17 March introduced in 2016. Across schools in Serbia, the first class on that date was dedicated to revisiting the violence of the “pogrom”, with Vulin, then Minister for Social Affairs, being present at one and talking to pupils (Dnevnik 2, 17.03.2016). The same practice of dedicating a school class to the “pogrom” was continued on 17 March 2017 (Dnevnik 2, 17.03.2017) and came at a moment when the Government in Pristina ratified the decision to

register all immovable property, currently registered under the SFRY (Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia), Republic of Serbia and AP Kosovo (Autonomous Province Kosovo) in the name of the Republic of Kosovo as the owner (Danas 2017e, 15 March). In connection to this political decision, the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija Marko Đurić said that the situation now is similar to the situation on 17 March 2004 (when the “pogrom” happened), and that it was worrying that the political climate among Kosovo Albanians has not fundamentally changed since then (Danas 2017c, 17 March). Similarly, on 17 March 2018, in a press conference dedicated to this symbolic date, Vučić claimed that “Albanians” have no obligation to establish the Community of Serb municipalities as part of their EU integration process and that this is one reason why he trusts neither Albanians nor the international community and the reason why he would seek a compromise (instead of the A/CSM). “If they do not want a compromise solution, there will be no solution at all – and that is final”, Vučić said (Dnevnik 2, 17.03.2018, 03:55). In a similar manner to Dačić tying the 17 March to the establishment of A/CSM, Vučić articulates the “pogrom” as a reason Albanians cannot be trusted. Like Đurić, who establishes a relation of continuity between the incidents of 17 March 2004 and the current political practice of Pristina authorities, Vučić anchors antagonism of Albanians towards the Serbs (as manifested in a continuous row of practices by Pristina against Serbia and the local Serb community in Kosovo) as the main characteristic of the group. Because Albanians could not be trusted then, they cannot be trusted now, meaning that Albanians as a collective, not just their political representatives, are articulated as hostile towards Serbs and Serbia. Commemorating 17 March acts as a way to establish a relation of continuity between the actions against Serbs then and those against Serbs in the current political moment – thus affectively re-instituting political frontiers between the two peoples.

By establishing the conflict at hand as a conflict between the peoples living across territories, the second articulation of the conflict becomes possible, namely as a conflict between peoples *over territory*. This territory specifically is articulated as either Northern Kosovo or the Presevo valley, something that later became known as the idea of exchange of territories. Vučić termed the conflict as a “war over territory [between Serbs and Albanians], a conflict over territory which has lasted in an intense manner since the year 1750” (Dnevnik 2, 01.09.2017, 15:17). With 1750, Vučić is probably referring to the second great migration of the Serbs from the Raška and Kosovo regions towards what is today Northern Serbia (and back then the Habsburg Monarchy), which altered the ethnic composition of these regions, decreasing the number of Serbs there and increasing the number of Albanians (see Ćirković 2004). The argument is that Albanians “flooded” into the lands that were emptied by Serbs migrating to the North. Thus, the conflict over territory has been going on for centuries, establishing a relation of continuity between these territories and peoples from 1750s and the territories of the respective nation-states and its peoples.

In his first visit to the UN after Vučić came to occupy the office of the President, he mentioned in his address to the General Assembly (Dnevnik 2, 21.09.2017, 04:12) that “Serbia has not recognized the independence of its Southern province, but it is searching for a political solution, which is currently Serbia’s national priority.” By addressing the issue of territoriality in his speech, Vučić is acknowledging that the solution has to be about the territorial status of Kosovo, something that has not been articulated in this manner within the community discourse. The community discourse was anchored around the notion of status-neutrality, which stabilized Serbia’s claim that Kosovo is Serbia. However, after Vučić came to power as President, this slowly began to change, which is especially evident in the discourse of the internal dialogue, which I will address later. However, it is not only the territoriality of Kosovo that is debated, but also that of Serbia, since Kosovo increasingly articulated its territorial claim to the Presevo valley (which is also a relatively established discourse), following the same type of articulation by Serbia and its claim to Northern Kosovo. For instance, when Isa Mustafa, during the crisis of Haradinaj’s arrest and just a day before the train incident, received the representatives of the three municipalities of the Presevo valley and called them the “three municipalities of Eastern Kosovo” (Dnevnik 2, 13.01.2017, 05:14), he politicized the issue of territory. Dačić termed this a clear sign of wanting to establish “Greater Albania” and an attempt to destabilize the region (ibid.). Hence, the conflict between Serbs and Albanians is framed as one over territory, specifically territory that is populated by the two antagonistically articulated communities. Once the conflict is framed as a conflict over a territory, partition becomes more plausible a solution, than if the conflict was framed as being between two states over the same territory. It introduces ethnicity as the main dividing principle, linking it to territorial separation more easily since the contestation is broadened to include peoples (who live across states) and not states themselves.

As mentioned earlier, history is an element that is constitutive of the antagonistic institution of the relation between Serbs and Albanians, but it is also constitutive of the relation between two antagonistically framed ideological projects of these peoples, namely “Greater Serbia” and “Greater Albania”. This is the third form of articulating the conflict, namely between ideological projects “of the past” that find their way and creep into the political projects “of the present”. “Greater Albania” is a frequently used signifier incarnating the entire Albanian “threat” to everything that is Serbian throughout history. It is not only a threat to the Serb people across the region, but primarily to the territorial integrity of Serbia and regional neighbors. For instance, articulations of Greater Albania were used to antagonize Albanians after the train incident in January 2017, claiming that the excessive force used in the form of armed vehicles and long barrels was constitutive of Kosovo’s aim to “take over” Northern Kosovo. The use of symbols of these competing hegemonic projects was thematized, such as Serbia’s use of flags, pictures of monasteries and the phrase

“Kosovo is Serbia/Serbian” being compared to a previous incident at a football match in Belgrade in October 2014. During a match between Serbia and Albania, a drone was flown over the stadium in Belgrade carrying a flag with symbols of Greater Albania, after which some fans stormed the court and caused incidents. This was termed a “diplomatic-football scandal” and it was even debated whether the Albanian President Edi Rama would visit Serbia during his planned visit with Vučić a week later (Živanović and Nonin 2014, in Danas, 15 October; Čongradin 2014, in Danas, 15 October). Vučić drew parallels between Serbia’s reaction to this incident, which did not escalate and was handled without significant physical clashes by Serbia’s security forces, and the actions of Pristina in sending their security forces to Northern Kosovo in the expectation of the train possibly entering Northern Kosovo. Vučić even asked what would be a greater insult: Greater Albania or Serbia, “regular Serbia, not even Greater Serbia?” (Dnevnik 2, 18.01.2017, 03:55). By establishing a relation of equivalence between these two incidents, Albanians are framed as “hostile” and “overreacting”, whereas the Serbs as “calm” and “responsibly” reacting to provocations, similar to the train incident. Albanians are also articulated as still pursuing “dreams” of Greater Albania, whereas Serbia is just “regular” Serbia, without pretenses to other territories. Vučić claimed that the train could not be a reason for war, and that Serbs had never threatened anybody with tanks and armored vehicles when Albanians have promoted the independence of Kosovo and the idea of Greater Albania (Dnevnik 2, 24.01.2017, 07:00).

Greater Albania is also articulated as the main threat to regional stability. For instance, during Mogherini’s visit to the Western Balkans in March 2017, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 03.03.2017, 05:10) expressed his

concerns about the fact that everyone was silent on the horrific statements [...] by Thaçi [who] told the Albanians to take matters into their own hands in Macedonia. [...] If one was to read a few more sentences after this statement it would be clear what he is talking about. If any of us had said that, they [the international community] would have officially imposed sanctions on Serbia.

The project of Greater Albania is equated with Albanian pretenses on other territories of the region, primarily Serbian, but also Macedonian territories. In this light, Greater Albania is articulated as a territorial threat, among other things. Another issue that represents a territorial threat and a threat to regional stability is the formation of the Kosovo army, something that had already been set in motion in March 2017, when Thaçi handed over a draft legislation to the President of the Kosovo Parliament on the transformation of the special forces ROSU into an army. In response to this action, Đurić said that “it is evident that the Greater Albanian project today is the main threat to stability in the region and the creation of an Albanian para-military in Kosovo would fan the flames and pose a grave and serious threat to a fragile peace” (Dnevnik 2, 07.03.2017, 02:15). When Thaçi’s draft legislation passed the parliamentary vote, and together with later statements about unification

between Albania and Kosovo, Đurić claimed that “as long as they are playing with claims about changing the borders and creating the fascist Greater Albania in the territory of our country”, the Brussels dialogue will be in danger, as well as regional stability (Danas 2017d, 20 April). The transformation of the Kosovo special forces into an army is equated with the project of Greater Albania and would constitute one step towards consolidating that project in the region. The army is also not recognized as legitimate, but only as a para-military organization, one that would pose a physical threat to the security structures of Serbia. A major aspect of articulating Greater Albania as a threat is based on politics of emotion, specifically the politics of fear. By characterizing practices by Pristina as threatening, on the one hand to regional stability, on the other to Serbia and Serbdom itself, Serbian hegemonic actors are producing an antagonistic image of Kosovo Albanians who drive the said project of Greater Albania forward. The creation of Greater Albania is articulated as something that would “consolidate” the full identity of the Albanian nationalist project in the region, and should be therefore counteracted, since this consolidation would equally jeopardize the identity of the Serbian state and Serbian people in the region (as well as potentially do bodily harm due to war).

The project of Greater Albania is dependent on the regional element, since the very idea of creating Greater Albania is articulated as the consolidation of those territories across different states in the region where Albanians constitute the majority in terms of population. This is why any form of deepened cooperation between Albania and Kosovo is met with suspicion by Serbian political actors. For instance, when Edi Rama said in an interview with *Politivo* that a union between Kosovo and Albania is possible if EU membership prospects of Western Balkan states fade (quoted in Stojanović 2017, in Danas, 19 April), Serbia reacted harshly. Dačić accused the EU and international community for the lack of appropriate reaction to and condemnation of the statements, drawing parallels between these statements by Rama and hypothetical statements of Serbian officials in regard to a potential unification between Serbia and Republika Srpska. He also articulated Rama’s statement as “jeopardizing Serbia” as a whole (Danas 2017b, 18 April). Referring to the same statement, Đurić said that “Enver Hoxha is dead” (Dnevnik 2, 18.04.2017, 01:30), constituting Hoxha as an embodiment of “old” ideas such as the creation of Greater Albania, whereas Vučić claimed that he “would be hanged on a pole like one of those flags in Brussels” if he had proclaimed the unification of the entire Serbian people in the Western Balkans (Dnevnik 2, 20.04.2017, 00:38). Whereas the idea of “Greater Serbia” (the unification of all Serbian people in the Balkans into one state) is juxtaposed with the idea of “Greater Albania”, articulating them as comparable, they are not comparable inasmuch as Serbia guarantees the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Dayton agreement. This is not the case with Albania and Kosovo, where one or the other would guarantee that they would not unify, but the principle of

not seeking a union with any state is inscribed into the Kosovo Constitution. Additionally, the principle of regional stability and good neighborly relations promoted by the EU in the EU integration process of both Kosovo and Albania is something that might foreclose a unification between them.

After Rama's statement, there was a chain of reactions to unification between Albania and Kosovo on the part of leaders from the Presevo valley, too. When Jonuz Musliu, the Mayor of Bujanovac, and the leader of the Albanian National Council in Serbia claimed that a hypothetically unified Albania with Kosovo should include the Presevo valley as well, Vulin interpreted his statement as a "call for a third Balkan war for the creation of Greater Albania" (Danas 2017f, 21 April). Dačić drew a relation of equivalence between Musliu's statement and the territorial pretenses of Albanians in the region, and claimed that such statements are "a reflection of a clear platform of all Albanians on the creation of Greater Albania. Yesterday, it was Kosovo, today, it is Niš, and tomorrow it will be Skopje and so on" (Danas 2017a, 21 April). Making Greater Albania responsible for the territorial fragmentation of not only Serbia, but also its neighboring countries, constitutes all Albanians living across different Balkan borders as antagonistic subjects. After all, Dačić and Vulin are not only speaking of Albanians in Kosovo, but all Albanians as a people, who constitute a physical threat because they are prepared to go to war in order to fulfill their old dream. This is an example *par excellence* of how politics of fear can constitute an entire group as homogeneous and as the absolute antithesis to the closure of identity of the political "us".

The discourse of Greater Albania proved to be quite a useful one in that it accommodated a range of demands for the constitution of the political "us" by the Serbian Government against the Albanian Other. Serbian political subjects kept re-articulating it even during the internal dialogue on Kosovo in Serbia, specifically when the meeting gathered representatives of the Ministry of defense and security agencies. Being primarily presented as a security threat to Serbia and the region, Vulin kept re-iterating Greater Albania as almost a conspiracy project of all Albanians in the Balkans (Dnevnik 2, 06.02.2018, 15:40):

It is indisputable that the politics of Pristina is formulated in Tirana, it is not formulated in Pristina. This is often demonstrated at the symbolic level, but it is likewise often shown at the practical and political level. Yes, the real address is essentially Tirana, because we are talking about Greater Albania here, we are not talking about solving the problem of Kosmet [Kosovo and Metohija abbreviated] alone in terms of dealing with this or that part of our territory. We are talking here about the conflict with Greater Albania, Greater Albania that is politically and geographically trying to establish its borders.

Vulin essentially articulates the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo as a conflict between Serbia and Greater Albania, claiming that the potential solution cannot only pertain to Kosovo itself, but needs to take into account Albania and possibly other territories. Politics and geography are determining factors of the potential success of such a Greater Albanian project, something that

Serbia needs to consider when trying to find a compromise. Similarly, when Edi Rama visited Kosovo and suggested in the Kosovo Parliament a unitary foreign policy of Albania and Kosovo, Vulin claimed that this is a move by Greater Albania and that it would make it difficult to explain to all the Serbs in the region that they cannot have one president as well (Dnevnik 2, 19.02.2018, 04:00). Again, the project of Greater Albania also represents an opportunity for Serbian hegemonic subjects to claim an equally destabilizing project of unification of all Serbs in the region, for instance through incorporating Northern Kosovo or Republika Srpska, constituting the element of Greater Albania as both supportive and obstructive of Serbia's hegemonic project in the region.

Another ideological project that is juxtaposed with the Serbian hegemonic project in Kosovo is the so-called *zelená transversála* (the green transversal), which as the name might suggest, constitutes Albanians as a Muslim threat, since the idea is said to represent the unification of Kosovo with Sandzak (which is a largely Muslim-populated, Slavic-speaking region of Southern Serbia), in the path of which lies Northern Kosovo. This idea dates back to the nationalist discourses of the 1990s, as will be explained below. This ideological constellation is embedded in different discourses of Albanian-Serb animosity, the Muslim unity and its threat to Serbia, as well as on the vital significance of the natural and man-made treasures and potentials of Northern Kosovo for the rest of Serbia. The discourse of *zelená transversála* illustrates very well how materiality and discourse work together to bring about and obstruct the institution of different ideological projects. On one hand, Serbia is trying to institute statehood in Kosovo in terms of territorial gain, meaning the possibility to practice governance and exert control over Northern Kosovo, which comes to embody the hegemonic claim as such. This includes a control over natural resources and energy production as well. On the other, Kosovo is also trying to consolidate its statehood in Northern Kosovo in terms of sovereignty, which would include the governance over natural resources and infrastructure such as the lake Gazivode, the mine Trepča and the main bridge in Mitrovica.

The idea of *zelená transversála* (green transversal) emerged only in June 2018, when messages came from politicians in Pristina that there will be no partition of Kosovo, but that Kosovo should get Sandzak and part of Southern Serbia (referring to the Presevo valley). The green transversal generally refers to an alleged Islamic plan or conspiracy to establish power in the Balkans, from Bihać in Croatia all the way to Albania, “cut[ting] the Christian world in half,” as Cohen (1992, *NY Times*) describes. It was prevalent during the wars of Yugoslav succession of the 1990s and was re-articulated in the context of territorial contestations of 2018. Namely, the Vice-President of Kosovo's ruling Democratic Party Rexhep Hoti claimed that no partition of Kosovo would be possible, except if Kosovo would take Sandzak, the Presevo valley and a part of Montenegro (Dnevnik 2, 18.06.2018, 5:30). The Office for KiM immediately issued an official statement saying that realizing the “fascist” ideas of “Greater Albania” and “green transversal” will only remain a

dream (Danas 2018h, 18 June). Drecun claimed that Albanians, because they have not abandoned the “Greater Albanian concept”, have been planning to destabilize the region, by claiming Sandzak “where no Albanians live” and the Presevo valley “where also Serbs and Roma live” (Dnevnik 2, 18.06.2018, 00:48 and 06:00). This all happened a few days before Vučić and Thaçi were supposed to meet in Brussels, where the energy agreement would have been discussed. Referring to energy, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 19.06.2018, 02:30) said that

[t]here is a need on the one part of Albanians to form the so-called green transversal and in its way stands Northern Kosovo. The North is exactly between Southern Kosovska Mitrovica, Vučitrn, Srbica, or Skenderaj as they call it, and Ribariće and Novi Pazar, that central part of Serbia, or the area of Raška. That is why they are bothered by the territory of Northern Kosovo. And when I talk about their hunger for occupying Northern Kosovo, I have always portrayed all these arguments: both Gazivode and Valač, and their need to maintain this kind of green line they always insisted on. As you can see, one of their politicians cannot hide it anymore.

On the one hand, the said “green line” Muslim Albanians have “always” insisted on is used to paint them as subjects that have throughout history been against the fulfillment of Serbian interests. Their current actions testify to a historic continuity of this type of politics. Additionally, in articulating the green transversal as Muslim, Vučić is constituting Muslim Albanians as an antagonistic element and a threat to Serbian interests (explicitly) and their Christian faith (implicitly). The territorial contestation around Northern Kosovo incarnates an articulation of the conflict as one between opposing ideological projects rooted in material gain. This material gain is manifested in the natural and man-made potentials of Northern Kosovo, namely its energy potential (the Valač energy station) and natural resources (Lake Gazivode and its hydropower plant). Thus, the question of energy is also politicized through its tie to the territory of Northern Kosovo.

The example of *zelená transversála* illustrates perfectly how the politics of fear operates in discourse: Kosovo Albanians are articulated as a force that has a “hunger” or an “appetite” for Northern Kosovo and wants to “consume” all the riches that North Kosovo has to offer, which are constituted as Serbian and belonging to Serbia. They are essentially articulated as the Other that is responsible for the “theft” of our enjoyment, and their hunger does not only stop with them taking Southern Kosovo – they want “our” Northern Kosovo, too. The resistance that Serbs and Serbia pose in Northern Kosovo is the only thing that stands between them being consumed by the ideological project of *zelená transversála*, which would allow Kosovo to satisfy its “thirst” for energy. What is left outside of the field of contestation is the possibility of sharing the ownership of these resources. Additionally, politics of fear is evident in Vučić’s articulation of *razgraničenje* (partition) as the only possible option for solving the “historical” conflict between Serbs and Albanians. In response to an open letter by the Bishop of Raška-Prizren Teodosije, who called on the Government to rethink the idea of partition since it would leave most Serbs South of Ibar with the

choice to emigrate and leave their ancestral homes and the holy monasteries in an ethnically homogeneous state of Kosovo, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 25.07.2018, 02:52) responded with asking:

On the one hand, we do not want ethnic borders, but on the other, we want the Albanian state of Kosovo, that non-existing state, to pay us 650,000 euros for our church! Is that what we want? Do you not want people to live normally? Do you instead want to lie to them? If you do not want ethnic borders, if you do not want partition [*razgraničenje*], then well, no problem: tell the people that we should get ready to defend Vranje [in Southeastern Serbia], in 40 or 50 years.

Kosovo Albanians are constituted as a threat to the territorial integrity of Serbia, a threat that would find a way to creep into the future because of the insatiable desire to take more and more parts of the Serbian territory. To prevent this threat, Vučić is offering partition as a way to contain it within its newly established borders. Similarly, Vulin (Dnevnik 2, 30.08.2018, 09:07) has said that “it is time for a delimitation [*da se razgraničimo*] with Greater Albania and that we say, ‘enough is enough, this is how far you have come’. As long as we don’t do that, the Albanians will have a tactical advantage to determine when they want to cause conflict and when they want to cause instability that would suit them and their allies.” Not only is Vulin suggesting a delimitation with Greater Albania instead of the request of Kosovo Albanians for consolidated statehood, he is also suggesting that things might get worse in Serbia if we do not act fast and establish clear borders between these two peoples with diametrically opposed ideologies. Fear is incited once more when Vulin claims that “if Greater Albania is created by force, the Balkans will be set on fire once again, and this fire will not only burn in the Balkans” (Dnevnik 2, 25.10.2018, 00:35), pointing to the previously established image of Albanians as “warmongers”, thirsty for territory, and wanting war with Serbia. All of these articulations institute Albanians from the region as an antagonistic force to be reckoned with, as the “thieves” of “our” enjoyment.

A third nodal point anchoring the ideological conflict between Serbs and Albanians is the signifier “Milošević”, as mentioned earlier. Milošević as an ideological construct that embodies the Serbian hegemonic pretenses towards Kosovo, a fierce discrimination against Kosovo Albanians and a disregard for human rights, is articulated in relation to Vučić and his current politics towards Kosovo. This is explicitly evident in Vučić’s speech in North Mitrovica on 9 September 2018, which the media even termed “Vučić’s Gazimestan”, referencing Milošević’s speech at Gazimestan in 1989 (Dnevnik 2, 09.09.2018). This speech acted as a “founding moment” of the Serbian hegemonic claim to Kosovo in the wake of the Yugoslav break-up, consolidating the link between Serbian nationalism and the myth of Kosovo as always having belonged to Serbia and that it always will remain Serbian (see also Bieber 2002; Čolović 2002; 2017).

In terms of comparisons between Vučić and Milošević, citationality and mimicry can be used as analytical categories: Vučić’s speech in North Mitrovica is a performative re-articulation of

Milošević's speech from 1989. Through this performative aspect, it is also a contemporary reinvention of a wider politics of Serbia towards Kosovo, issued by "great leaders" (in Vučić's words) in each respective moment in time. Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 09.09.2018, 06:15; Danas 2018s, 9 September) even cited Milošević's politics towards Kosovo during the 1990s and his Gazimestan speech from 1989 in his own speech from September 2018, claiming that:

Milošević was a great Serbian leader, his intentions were certainly the best, but our results were much worse. Not because he, or anyone else, wanted it so, but because our wishes were not realistic, and we neglected and underestimated the interests and aspirations of other peoples [*drugih naroda*], which is why we paid the highest and most serious price.

Vučić is dis-articulating his own politics towards Kosovo from that of Milošević, although not entirely distancing himself from the figure of Milošević. By claiming that Milošević's intentions were best, even though the result was not as successful, he articulates a wish to build upon Milošević's politics with other means, i.e., reinvent Serbia's political practice towards Kosovo in a more "realistic" light, keeping in mind the "interests and aspirations of other peoples", such as Kosovo Albanians, or even Western nations that support Kosovo's independence. This turn towards "realism", "pragmatism" and "rationality" is constitutive of a greater shift of Vučić's vision for Serbia's future in terms of structural change. With the internal dialogue on Kosovo and his idea of *razgraničenje*, repeated and performed in various instances, such as his speech in North Mitrovica, Vučić is also trying to re-frame the structures of feeling related to the question of Kosovo in Serbia. This is primarily done through articulating Kosovo as an emotional issue (which is "bad" for the future of Serbia) that should be viewed rationally (which is "good" for the future of Serbia). In Vučić's conception, Milošević had grand ideas, but they were not rational and realistic. Vučić's task is, consequently, to face the Serbian public with the "inconvenient truth" about how "we have lost Kosovo" (Dnevnik 2, 27.12.2018, 15:31) and should therefore abandon the "emotional approach" towards dealing with this issue. This is also in line with the earlier analyzed self-articulation of Vučić as a reasonable, responsible and honest leader (subchapter 5.8).

Apart from articulating Milošević as a reference to distance his own politics around Kosovo from past practices, Vučić is referencing Milošević's "leadership" as another issue he can build on through his own reframed approach towards Kosovo. However, Milošević's leadership is also something that frequently resurfaces in the discourse on the legitimacy of Kosovo's independence and the Kosovo Albanian suffering under Serbian rule, constituting a floating signifier. For instance, after Vučić's visit to Northern Kosovo and his speech in Mitrovica, Kadri Veseli, the Chairman of the Kosovo Assembly, accused Vučić of using the same rhetoric as Slobodan Milošević, while the opposition parties have criticized the Kosovo Government for allowing Vučić to mark the territory of Northern Kosovo as under his control (Dnevnik 2, 09.09.2018, 15:10). Similarly, before Vučić's visit to Gazivode on 8 September, Enver Hoxhaj, the Deputy Prime

Minister of Kosovo, said on his Twitter account that Vučić is following in the same footsteps as Milošević, because he wants to visit Gazivode to spread hatred “like his ideological father did at Gazimestan 30 years ago” (Danas 2018g, 08 September). On the day of Vučić’s visit to the lake, he reiterated his claim about parallels between Vučić and Milošević and added that the EEAS is promoting anti-European politics in the Balkans (ibid.). These references to the past were taken up by Serbian Prime Minister Brnabić, who accused the Kosovo political representatives of “not having peace in their interest, [that] war equals stability to them, and that they do not see a different future [for Serbia and Kosovo] from what has been our joint past” (Dnevnik 2, 09.09.2018, 16:22).

6.4 Articulations of the Antagonistic “Others”

Having discussed the way the conflict has been re-articulated (as a conflict between Serbs and Albanians as peoples, as a conflict of these peoples over territory, and as a conflict between competing ideological projects), it is now useful to look into how the antagonistic Others have been articulated. Shifting from an articulation of Albanians as a heterogeneous group in 2013, whereby they are presented as a viable political subject to negotiate with, Serbian hegemonic actors articulate the Albanian Other within the partition discourse as a homogeneous group. Whereas in 2013, Kosovo Albanians were largely differentiated from Albanians outside Kosovo (be it in Serbia or the neighboring countries), in 2017 and primarily 2018, the differences between these political subjects were disarticulated and a chain of equivalence established between the demands of Kosovo Albanians, Albanians and Muslims inhabiting the South of Serbia proper (Sandžak and the Presevo valley), as well as Albanians living in the neighboring countries of the region. More importantly, this homogeneous group has been articulated as both strong and powerful and weak and powerless at the same time.

In addition, Albanians in Kosovo are not articulated as legitimate citizens of Serbia, even though Serbia still claimed Kosovo as part of its territory. Only Serbs in Kosovo are articulated as citizens. For instance, in early 2017, in connection to the train incident and the unrests in Northern Kosovo, Taçi claimed that Serbia intended to annex Northern Kosovo in the same manner as Russia did Crimea, by using the same tactics of sending weapons and undercover military to the North (Danas 2017j, 25 January). To this, Vučić replied that the Kosovo Albanians were “spreading stupidity” about how Serbia wants to annex the North the same way Russia did, and that this analogy testifies to the fact “that they were poor pupils or have never even gone to school” (Dnevnik 2, 02.02.2017, 05:20). By calling Kosovo Albanians stupid or uneducated, Vučić is presenting them as inferior, or “lesser than” Serbs. This is constitutive of the earlier mentioned fantasy of Serb superiority over Albanians (subchapter 4.4.), in which Albanians are articulated as the radical Other – inferior, primitive, undeserving (see Salecl 1994). At the same time, when Nikolić was informing the

ambassadors of China, Russia and USA about the actions taken by Pristina against the Serbs in Northern Kosovo, he said that “endangering the security of the citizens of Kosovo and Metohija in any form should be prevented” (Dnevnik 2, 02.02.2017, 11:00). By referring to Kosovo Serbs as citizens who are threatened by the actions of Pristina, Kosovo Albanians are not treated as citizens but as an antagonistic subject who is endangering the security of the proper citizens of Kosovo and Metohija, that is Serbs. Kosovo Albanians are excluded from the discourse on Serbian citizenship, which is constitutive of the conception of Serbia as a nationalizing state with one core nation (see Brubaker 1996). On the other hand, Kosovo Serbs are explicitly articulated as citizens by the Kosovo Government. For instance, during the train incident, when Nikolić said that Serbia would go to war in order to protect the Serbs in Northern Kosovo, the Prime Minister of Kosovo Isa Mustafa (M. R. M. 2017, in Danas, 15 January) said that

Kosovo Serbs are equal citizens of our Republic. There is no need for Belgrade to protect them and to separate them from other citizens by erecting walls, because they are not in any danger and will not be in any danger. We all have a need to always communicate and work together on building a common European perspective.

Mustafa is referring to the concrete wall that the local government of North Mitrovica started building on their side of the main bridge in December 2016, which I mentioned earlier (subchapter 6.2.). The wall was justified as a necessary support wall because the bridge was being “revitalized” as part of the bridge revitalization agreement between Belgrade and Pristina concluded in August 2015 (Office for Kosovo and Metohija 2015). When the local Serbs protested about the announced demolition of the wall by Kosovo authorities and gathered in front of it, Taçi told the local Serbs that they have nothing to fear from Kosovo authorities (Dnevnik 2, 02.02.2017, 11:25), and that “the Kosovo security forces will not do them any harm, because they are there to protect the lives of all citizens of Kosovo, regardless of their ethnicity” (Danas 2017i, 2 February).

Articulating Serbs as equal citizens of Kosovo has also been part of Haradinaj’s political practice when he took office as Prime Minister, often speaking in Serbian instead of Albanian when addressing them directly. As part of this agonistic articulation of Serbs, the A/CSM is constituted as a body that Kosovo Serbs do not necessarily need to have full and equal rights in Kosovo. This left room for the A/CSM to be articulated as a hegemonic project of Serbia, not of Kosovo Serbs. In commenting on the decision of the Kosovo Constitutional Court to halt the implementation of the August 2015 agreement on the principles and elements of the A/CSM setup, Haradinaj (Dnevnik 2, 20.12.2017, 17:55) said that:

We all understand that this is not an easy situation, because the Constitutional Court is, after all, the Constitutional Court. But there is still room in our Constitution to do this [implement the A/CSM]. And I believe it will be appropriate for the needs of Kosovo Serbs who live

here. Otherwise, Kosovo Serbs are not only dependent on the Association, they are also part of Kosovo institutions: the Assembly and the Government.

By articulating Kosovo Serbs agonistically, as part of the state of Kosovo, both in terms of citizenship and institutional participation, Serbs are heterogenized: on the one hand, Serbs who want to be part of the Kosovo framework can be constituted as equal citizens, and on the other, those who do not are “Serbia’s Serbs”, constituting Serbia’s hegemonic project in Kosovo, which is in this context the A/CSM.

The A/CSM is a nodal point both in the discourse on Albanians being weak/powerless and Albanians being strong/powerful, constituting a floating signifier. In the former, the A/CSM is related to the Albanians’ “inability” to implement it properly and their patronage by “great powers” and inability to do anything without their approval. It is also about Albanians failing to join international organizations such as UNESCO or Interpol, which Serbia has successfully blocked on a few occasions. In a nutshell, local Serb resistance in Northern Kosovo and Serbia’s resistance to Kosovo joining international organizations are the main practices that constitute Albanians as weak/powerless, since this is juxtaposed with Serbia’s power. In the latter discourse on Albanians being strong/powerful, they are constituted as a threat to the lives and livelihood of Kosovo Serbs, something that has been operationalized, for instance, during the train incident, and the demolition of the bridge wall in Mitrovica. Frequently, Kosovo Albanians are articulated as wanting to “take over” Northern Kosovo. Additionally, specifically regarding the lack of implementation of A/CSM since 2013, Kosovo Albanians are articulated as powerful in their backing and support by the international community to “do whatever they want” and disrespect agreements such as the establishment of the A/CSM. This way, various members of the international community are sometimes articulated as the Other (opponents) and sometimes as supporters of Serbia. The Albanians being backed by the most powerful nations of the world is what makes them powerful as well and puts Serbia in a weakened position. Somewhat paradoxically, their support by the international community is what makes them both weak and strong at the same time.

This is evident in the incident surrounding the arrest of Marko Đurić on 26 March 2018 by ROSU in North Mitrovica and his release later the same day. Namely, Đurić was in North Mitrovica as part of the internal dialogue on Kosovo but entered the territory without the proper approval of the central authorities in Pristina. Given that Pristina saw his entry into Kosovo as illegal, the special forces ROSU were sent to Northern Kosovo to arrest him. The incident was accompanied by ROSU’s excessive use of force against the local Serb leaders who were trying to protest about Đurić’s arrest, whereby several of them were injured and ended up in hospital (Danas 2018i, 26 March; Dnevnik 2, 26.03.2018). After the incident, Srpska Lista announced that they would boycott their participation in the Kosovo Government and that they would form the A/CSM unilaterally,

as it had been several years since the Kosovo Government took on the obligation to establish it and failed (Danas 2018e, 29 March). In regard to this, the Office for Kosovo and Metohija issued an announcement that

Serbs did not recoil even when Haradinaj and Thaçi's terrorists tried to march into Northern Kosovo and Metohija in NATO tanks and transporters [referring to Đurić's arrest], and we hope that after beating up defenseless people they do not start to believe that they are very strong and that they can forcibly occupy the four municipalities North of Ibar" (Dnevnik 2, 29.03.2018, 05:46).

Clearly, the special forces that arrested Đurić are articulated as terrorists, something that has been constitutive of the discourse on Serbian-Albanian animosity since the Kosovo conflict of 1998 and 1999. In this respect, "terrorist" actions are directed towards the remaining Serb community in Kosovo, whereas other details such as Đurić breaking Kosovo law by entering the territory without permission is either omitted or negated. Đurić and other Serbian officials have claimed that he sent his request to enter Kosovo 72 hours prior, according to previously established agreements between Serbia and Kosovo, but since his request was denied (for whatever reason), he was in breach of the law. Some commentators from both Kosovo and Serbia even speculated that Đurić was deliberately sent to Mitrovica to be arrested, knowing that his entry might cause legal action by the Kosovo authorities (Tasić and Čongradin 2018, in Danas, 28 March). Additionally, these "terrorist actions" by Pristina are not only directed towards the Serb community, but also towards the territory of Northern Kosovo, constituting the Kosovo authorities as a hostile force and a threat. As such, they are portrayed as having a certain ability to exert power over the Serb community and North Kosovo, while at the same time, they are "weak" because they are "playing dirty" in using force against "defenseless people".

Apart from the A/CSM, what constitutes Kosovo Albanians as simultaneously powerful and powerless is their support by the "international community". For instance, after the abovementioned incident, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 29.03.2018, 00:29) claimed that "neither Thaçi nor Haradinaj are important here, nor do they play any games here or have any significance. All of our relations and all of our negotiations are with those who sponsor them." Those who sponsor them and "who are on Pristina's side" are members of the international community, specifically "those who have created that country [Kosovo]. It is clear that we negotiate about Kosovo and Metohija with USA, UK and a few more EU countries, and not with the Pristina authorities" (Dnevnik 2, 17.04.2018, 11:37). "When we say 'the international community', it is a euphemism for us, as we think of the Western world, who is on Pristina's side", Vučić claimed (Dnevnik 2, 16.08.2018, 03:50). In an "appeal to the international community", Vučić asked them to "not only hear but also to listen to everything the Albanians are saying, to understand well their messages and to prevent their potential attempt to invade the North and continue to attack the Serbian people" (Dnevnik

2, 01.06.2018, 02:37). Albanians are presented as a hostile force, but also as an entirely dependent force on their support by the international community, the latter of which is articulated as blindly supporting all actions of Pristina, even when they are violent and hostile. In this regard, the international community is constituted as an opponent of Serbia, seemingly always taking the Albanians' side.

Because of Serbia not only “fighting” against Pristina but also against great Western powers, in this same discourse Serbia is constituted as “weakened”, precisely because of this supposedly unfair treatment. International law and the many agreements signed thus far between Serbia and Kosovo are the nodal points that anchor Serbia's argument about unfair treatment, since even when everything is on paper, “black on white”, the international community does not seem to care about it, but simply takes Pristina's side. For instance, Vučić claimed that “our [Serbia's] problem is that we have many papers, and all these papers are on our side. But the problem is that ‘might’ [*sila*, power] is not on our side. The people in Serbia should understand this, that we are weaker. Not weaker than the Albanians, but weaker than the USA” (Dnevnik 2, 24.04.2018, 14:20). The signifier “papers” stands in place of international law, which is one of the central nodal points of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse as mentioned in Chapter 5. The many resolutions adopted by the Serbian Parliament, government decrees, the references to UN Resolution 1244, the Helsinki Final Act, as well as the discursive practice of Serbian political subjects in the international arena (particularly before the UN Security Council) testify to the centrality of “international law” as an anchoring signifier of this discourse. This signifier is juxtaposed with the “might” of great powers as its antithesis, which constitutes Serbia as weakened, but also just and righteous. Even if Serbia is “losing” in the fight for Kosovo because of the might of great powers, it will always remain the moral “winner” in its defense of international legal principles and its defense of its people. By referring to Serbia's negotiations with these great powers, Vučić claimed that

In that case, your hands are tied, you are much smaller, you are much weaker, but you fight as courageously, nobly and proudly as you can for your country and for the interests of your people, for the Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija, so that they can live, so that they can survive in their heartland, and maintain their safety. That is our goal and our interest (Dnevnik 2, 18.04.2018, 04:52).

This moral victory is also evident in the claim that Serbia is only interested in peace, only defending itself if being attacked, while Kosovo is only interested in threats and conflict. For instance, when Thaçi attended the commemoration of the Battle of Košare on 9 April 2018, honoring the fallen KLA fighters in this battle, he mentioned that in the wake of Serbia's recent threats to Kosovo and its sovereignty, “Kosovo would respond in the same manner as it did 19 years ago – with guns” (Dnevnik 2, 09.04.2018, 10:00; Danas 2018l, 9 April). To this, Đurić responded that Thaçi “is not even hiding the fact that the main goal of his political activities, both former and present, is the

creation of a Greater Albania” (Danas 2018l, 9 April), while Vučić claimed that “it was not his [Thaçi’s] guns that have devastated Serbia, but someone else’s planes [referring to NATO]. It is our obligation to respond with peace” (Dnevnik 2, 09.04.2018, 11:08). The discourse of self-victimization in Serbia, particularly the NATO bombing of 1999, is still very prevalent, but its nodal point is the moral victory of Serbia in the wake of unfair treatment, by defending international law, primarily the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It is not only the USA or NATO that are articulated as blindly taking Pristina’s side, but also the EU in broader terms. When there were talks of unification between Albania and Kosovo in spring 2017, Vučić claimed, as mentioned previously, that “he would be hanged on a pole in Brussels like one of those flags there” had he called for a unification of all Serbs in the region (Dnevnik 2, 20.04.2017, 00:38). Similarly, the EU is blamed for not applying the same standards to Serbia and Kosovo in terms of fulfilling the agreements concluded within the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. For instance, Dačić claimed that “the representatives of the EU Commission are deaf-mute when it comes to Pristina [and their non-fulfillment of the obligations from the Brussels Agreement]. I am not sure if this illness is curable. When they have to say something against Pristina, it is as if the Tibetan council of the wise is presiding” (Dnevnik 2, 25.04.2018, 12:11). Additionally, when Nataliya Apostolova, the EU Ambassador to Kosovo mentioned that Kosovo should use the momentum of the new EU strategy towards the Western Balkans (adopted in February 2018) to lobby with non-recognizing countries for recognition, since the strategy puts Kosovo as an equal partner to the EU, Đurić mentioned that “[with this statement] she has put herself on the side of Pristina and directly delimited what could have been achieved in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue” (Dnevnik 2, 26.04.2018, 04:45). This is to the detriment of the Serbian position. One of the main sources of leverage of Serbia in the dialogue has been the fact that Kosovo is not treated like a fully recognized state, as evident in the five EU non-recognizing countries and the EU’s use of the “asterisk” when referring to Kosovo (without prejudice to its status, as stipulated by UN Resolution 1244 and the ICJ decision from 2010). However, it has to be emphasized that the asterisk is a product of the Brussels dialogue (as part of the agreement on regional representation, see Chapter 5) and used in the first mention of Kosovo in any document, after which it is omitted.

The fact that Pristina has not established the A/CSM since 2013, Serbia sees as something that has happened because of the EU’s non-willingness to enforce it upon Kosovo. Vučić claimed that even though Pristina “openly admits” that it will not establish the A/CSM, “the EU and the world just keep silent [...] Is there any justice in this? No there is not!” (Dnevnik 2, 25.04.2018, 11:43). Still, the EU continues to apply pressure on Serbia in the form of a “legally-binding agreement” as a precondition for membership, asking “between the lines” for Serbia to recognize the independence of Kosovo, Vučić claims (Dnevnik 2, 16.11.2017, 06:00). The fact that Serbia is voluntarily pursuing

EU membership is omitted and Serbia is presented as a victim in this process, since the means the EU is using are unjust.

The power relation between Serbia and the EU, as well as “the international community” is only re-articulated in light of the proposed “compromise” solution that defined the scope of the Brussels dialogue primarily as of August 2018. The compromise agreement allows Serbia to be constituted as powerful both in international terms and towards the Pristina authorities, since it puts Serbia “in the good grace” of the West and subjectivates the West in the role of a supporter, instead of opponent. For instance, after Vučić and Thaçi met in Vienna with Austrian Prime Minister Sebastian Kurz and the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Johannes Hahn, the idea of a compromise solution started to circulate in the media. The President of Austria even claimed to have witnessed “a historic moment” because of the constructive tone of Vučić and Thaçi during the talks (Dnevnik 2, 26.08.2018, 03:52), with Thaçi referring to it as a “peace agreement”. Because of this, Dačić claimed that Serbia “succeeded to change the West’s attitude, we have moved them away from their entrenched position. Simultaneously, we have remained good friends with Russia and China. Hence, on the part of the international community, there is no obstacle for an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina to be reached” (Dnevnik 2, 28.08.2018, 03:10). In the wake of the formation of the Kosovo military, which was opposed by the international community without the proper constitutional changes by Kosovo, Dačić even claimed that “they [Kosovo] are not the West’s child anymore, they are a problem” (Dnevnik 2, 14.10.2018, 00:46). “They are an obstacle to a peaceful solution regarding Kosovo and Metohija, which is why the position of Serbia is getting stronger and stronger and the [international community] has more understanding for our arguments” (ibid., 13:19). The very fact that the international community, primarily USA, “is prepared to listen to the Serbian side” and not pose ultimatums in terms of recognizing Kosovo is in Vučić’s eyes a sign that the power-relations between these parties have been re-constituted (Dnevnik 2, 26.10.2018, 02:33). Discussing the possible format of talks between Belgrade and Pristina to reach such a compromise solution, Vučić claimed that “without the participation of Serbia, nobody can solve any problem” and that “great powers cannot simply decide on their own” (Dnevnik 2, 29.10.2018, 03:13).

The suggestion for a compromise in terms of partition has re-constituted Serbia as a “powerful player” in the international arena, and the unfair treatment by the international community was re-articulated into support for Serbia’s arguments in the wake of the negotiations on the scope of the compromise agreement. Additionally, after Pristina introduced a 10 percent tax on all imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina early November 2018, Serbian hegemonic actors determined that the EU’s response was appropriate and that there was no more talk of the responsibilities “of both sides” as previously (Dnevnik 2, 07.11.2018). After the tax was raised to 100 percent on 21

November 2018, Vulin, in connection with the tax being against CEFTA and Kosovo's SAA agreement, said that "we have proven ourselves to the EU enough times, it is time for Europe to prove themselves to us" (Dnevnik 2, 25.11.2018, 07:45). However, after several talks between the EU High Representative Mogherini and the representatives of Serbia and Kosovo, the EU failed to convince Kosovo to withdraw the 100 percent tax measure. Even the USA got involved in the debate, claiming that the momentum should be used to reach an agreement between the parties and even invited Vučić and Thaçi to the White House. However, they have not tried to lobby for the withdrawal of the tax measure without Serbia stopping its campaign against the international recognition of Kosovo and their membership of international institutions such as Interpol, which triggered the tax in the first place. All of this in turn led to a standstill in the Brussels dialogue altogether. In response, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 07.12.2018, 07:03) said that

no matter how many times they [Kosovo Albanians] violate public international law, Americans will always be on their side. And it is high time for us to come to terms with that and to understand that this is the final fact on the matter. They have recognized an independent Kosovo – that is the end of the story for them. Serbia cannot force them to change their minds, it is not realistic. [...] I admit, both the Albanians in Kosovo and the Americans and everyone else are very strong, and we are small, weak, but we have nothing else to do, we are cornered. We have to protect ourselves as much as we can, given our position.

In the end, given the failed attempt of the EU and USA to re-constitute the power-relations between them and Serbia, they are articulated as actors with a fixed position, one that will never change no matter what happens. They will always remain on the side of Pristina, which keeps feeding the discourse of self-victimization in Serbia in terms of its international positioning, which is determined by Kosovo. Given this situation, Serbia re-constitutes itself as "powerful" in terms of its refusal to participate in the "unfair game," even at the cost of stopping the Brussels dialogue altogether. This lets Serbia keep a morally superior discursive position, since Kosovo is clearly articulated as the actor that is in the wrong and one that has caused the halt in the negotiations in Brussels with their 100 percent customs tax.

6.5 Articulations of the Political "Us"

In comparison to 2013, the logic of drawing political frontiers between "us" and "them" becomes populist and increasingly polarizing. It is populist in the Laclaudian sense, as a "logic of articulation" (Laclau 2005) that draws affective political frontiers between an "us" and a "them" (Palonen 2020). While previously, emphasis was laid on transforming antagonistic relations into agonistic, in 2017 and 2018 there is an increased focus on re-drawing political frontiers between Serbs and Albanians as antagonistic. In this context, the political "us" is built on the one hand in relation to the Albanian Other (articulated in ethnic terms) and foreign powers aligned with

Kosovo Albanians, and on the other hand in relation to political “dissidents” within the Serbian political collective as such, be it in Serbia (the opposition, NGOs) or in Kosovo (Kosovo Serbs who are not seen as representatives of Serbia’s official policy, such as opponents of the Srpska lista). What makes these articulations populist in terms of a post-foundational understanding is that the people, the political us, is entirely defined by what and who it excludes, making polarization more visible than previously, especially within the Serb community in Kosovo. They come to be entirely defined by affiliation to and membership of Srpska lista, who embodies the Serbian hegemonic project in Kosovo and the politics of SNS. To unpack this, I will first focus on the articulations of Serbs as “defending” or protecting Serbia in Kosovo (subject role of supporters), after which I will address how the divisions among them are created and accelerated as the partition idea gains traction as a viable compromise solution to the Belgrade-Pristina dispute (subject role of opponents).

One issue that has always incited the opposition’s critique of Serbia’s policy regarding Kosovo as hypocritical is Srpska lista’s participation in the Kosovo Government, especially after Haradinaj became Prime Minister. In response to this, the Prime Minister of Serbia Ana Brnabić (Dnevnik 2, 13.09.2017, 05:02) said that

despite the entirely unfounded criticism by some parties in Serbia, the Serbs [in Kosovo and Metohija] are those people who keep Serbia in Kosovo in place, those people who have remained there and are responsibly and unitarily, without any internal divisions – which is very important –defending our interests in Kosovo and Metohija.

Brnabić is articulating Kosovo Serbs as a homogeneous group, one that is the embodiment of Serbia in Kosovo. Primarily, legitimate members of this group are those who are part of or are supporting Srpska lista, which is part of the Kosovo Government, acting as an extension of Serbia in Kosovo. Within this, it represents Serbia in Kosovo, but it also represents the idea(l) of political unity before the common enemy. Presenting Serbs as defending Serbia in Kosovo without any internal divisions marginalizes those moderate voices that might not be entirely in support of Serbia’s policy in Kosovo. Through homogenizing Kosovo Serbs around Srpska lista in this manner, divisions among Kosovo Serbs are created along the lines of who supports Serbia’s hegemonic project in Kosovo (and by extension SNS’s) and who opposes it. Those who oppose it are not constituted as legitimate representatives of the Kosovo Serbs community and because of the polarized discourse, are thus aligned with the project of the state of Kosovo. The logic follows the familiar principle “if you are not with us, you are certainly against us”.

Similarly, when the local Serb politician Oliver Ivanović was murdered in January 2018 – whose murder is still not solved at the time of writing (December 2020) – it was articulated as an attack on Serbia in Kosovo. Even though a campaign by Srpska lista was led against Ivanović and his

candidacy for mayor of North Mitrovica in 2017, when he was murdered, Ivanović was aligned with the state of Serbia in Kosovo, as the embodiment of local Serb resistance against the state project of Kosovo. This is in line with the earlier perception of Ivanović elaborated in Chapter 5. For instance, in connection to Ivanović's murder, Đurić (Dnevnik 2, 16.01.2018, 14:41) said that "this is an attempt to push the Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija into chaos, to push Serbia into chaos – this is an attack on the entire Serbian people, and it is a criminal act of terrorism that must be and will be punished." As Ivanović is presented as one of the main pillars of local Serb resistance to Pristina, his murder is articulated as an attack on the entire Serbian people, not just those living in Kosovo, and is termed an act of terrorism, something that resonates with the ongoing discourse on Albanians being terrorists.

However, it was known that Ivanović publicly stood against Srpska lista and especially their connection to the criminal elements in Kosovo and Serbia. To the accusations of the opposition in Serbia that the Serbian Government was killing political opponents, Vučić responded (*ibid.*, 07:55):

Shame on you for the most brutal and worst lies. At least somebody must stand up against your lies. And 'shame on you' is not harsh enough in comparison to what kind of damage you are inflicting upon your country. We will not allow them to use this to strengthen Kosovo security forces, and to finally put an end to the robbery of Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, because they think it should have happened much earlier, so they use this as an ideal opportunity, an ideal impetus to do so. And I will not allow the various liars in Belgrade to accuse the state, to accuse any of us in any way of killing Oliver Ivanović.

Vučić draws political frontiers in two directions: one against the Pristina authorities, who aim to control and take away Northern Kosovo from Serbia with their security forces (steal our enjoyment), and the other against domestic political opponents who do not subjectivate into the polarization of the political field along ethnic lines, in which all acts against the Serb people in Kosovo are committed by Pristina and Kosovo Albanians. This way, Vučić is articulating a political "us" that is entirely constituted by these two antagonistic camps (Kosovo authorities and the opposition in Serbia), an "us" that must support the hegemonic project of Serbia in Kosovo, since everything else would be articulated as a direct support of the opposing project of Kosovo – as evident in the above statement.

The Serbian Orthodox Church also helps polarize the field and interprets the attack on Ivanović as an attack by the Other on "us", the Serbian collective and the Serbian state. Bishop Teodosije, for instance, claimed that (*ibid.*, 12:15) "[Oliver], through his perseverance and determination to remain in Kosovo and Metohija, gave hope to the survival of all Serbs in these areas." Ivanović in these statements comes to embody the fantasy of resistance of Serbs to different challenges in

Kosovo both through history and in current times, challenges that aim to banish “Serbdom” from this area, be it in the form of statehood, or in the form of people.

On the other hand, those subjects who do not support Serbia’s hegemonic project in Kosovo in its current form, such as Rada Trajković, have articulated Ivanović as the embodiment of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, somebody who opposes the partition of territory. Trajković, one of the prominent Kosovo Serb politicians who has frequently spoken out against Srpska lista, claimed that “Oliver was one of the most powerful, authentic voices of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, who clearly and without any hesitation defended our interests and who very strongly advocated against the partition of Kosovo” (ibid., 11:40). Hence, Ivanović is not only used to foster fear and animosity between Serbs and Albanians, as is evident in Đurić’s and Vučić’s statement, but also to criticize the idea of potentially partitioning Kosovo that emerged as part of the internal dialogue on Kosovo at that time. In the former statement, Ivanović’s murder is used to articulate unity of Kosovo Serbs and all Serbs outside of Kosovo against the common enemies, be it domestic (the opposition) or foreign (Kosovo Albanians, foreign powers). In the latter, Ivanović’s murder emphasizes the heterogeneity of Kosovo Serb voices and the hegemonic project of Serbia working against its own people in Kosovo. At the same time, the latter statement builds a political “us” that is comprised of Kosovo Serbs as separate from Serbs from the rest of Serbia, those Kosovo Serbs who do not support current Serbian policies towards Kosovo. To summarize, the political “us” comes to include Vučić and his Government (and by extension his party SNS), everybody who supports the policies of this Government, and Kosovo Serbs from Srpska lista and supporting Srpska lista. The political “them” comes to include the opposition to these policies of Vučić’s Government, and Kosovo Serbs who do not support Srpska lista and said policies. Later, when the partition discourse gains traction towards the middle of 2018, Kosovo Serbs are also divided along geographic lines, in terms of North and South (those in the North are politically favored, since they back up the idea of partition).

In order to respond to the crisis as a result of Ivanović’s murder, and to consolidate the homogenization of the political “us” in Kosovo and Serbia, Vučić visited Kosovo, starting with the North, four days after the murder. Regarding his visit, Bishop Teodosije (Dnevnik 2, 20.01.2018, 05:22) said that

Today’s visit [...] of Vučić is very significant for all of us in Kosovo and Metohija. [...] All of us who currently live in difficult conditions in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija know that we cannot survive without our state. Above all, we need to have the courage, strength and endurance to survive and stay in these areas, but as I said, only with the universal help of our country, as it has been so far.

Teodosije is articulating Serbia as “our state”, not Kosovo. “We” are also the embodiment and protectors of that state in Kosovo and Metohija, an articulation that is constitutive of the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, in which as long as there are Serb people living in this area, it will be considered part of Serbia. Homogenizing the Serbian political collective occurs on two levels: on the one hand, Kosovo Serbs are homogenized with reoccurring calls for unity among them; and on the other, Kosovo Serbs are homogenized with Serbs from Serbia, constitutive of the larger narrative of the unity of all Serbian people no matter where they live (under the signifier of Serbdom).

Homogenizing Serbs in Kosovo is primarily done through calls for unity, above all political unity in supporting Srpska lista, which substitutes Serbia in Kosovo politically. In the wake of the local elections in Kosovo in October 2017, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 18.10.2017, 02:22) claimed that

There is a great deal of outside pressure from some Western embassies to break up the Serbian List and to reduce the Serbian influence in Kosovo and Metohija. Not all embassies, but some of them with great influence and who apply great pressure. They do this through individual Serbs, together with the Albanians, because they do not want the Serbs to have that key influence, that golden ticket in the [Kosovo] Government, but want to make it difficult for them by taking away the local governments from them.

The above statement illustrates perfectly Vučić’s populist meaning-making in terms of polarizing the political field around Srpska lista into “us” and “them”. Those who support Srpska lista also support legitimate state interests of Serbia and the interests of Kosovo Serbs to govern themselves against the threatening forces coming from Kosovo Albanian ranks and foreign embassies, who do not have the best interests of Serbs at heart. Only through unity of Kosovo Serbs can a victory for them be achieved, as evident in Đurić’s claim that “there should be no divisions among Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, since the matter is about their collective relationship with Pristina institutions (Dnevnik 2, 22.10.2017, 03:38). When Srpska lista won, Vučić claimed that “this is one of the greatest victories of the state of Serbia, and I am not ashamed to emphasize this – the state of Serbia and its idea of creating a unified Serbian list” (Dnevnik 2, 29.10.2017, 04:17). Here, Srpska lista is equated with the state of Serbia, since the project of creating it had as its final goal the unification of all Kosovo Serbs around a common goal – supporting Serbian state and national interests. This quest for unity was emphasized once more directly after the list won the local elections, with Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 23.10.2017, 03:12) claiming that

Serbs are more unified than ever, and for the first time, the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija are, I would say, less quarrelsome than even Albanians among themselves. This brings us another advantage, because many outside forces and Albanians as well wanted different political options to exist for the Serbs to choose from [in the elections], so that they can work with these different options and say: these people want the Community of Serb Municipalities to have these competencies, and these people want others, so that the Serbs can never really achieve their interests and never establish the Community of Serb Municipalities [ZSO].

This hegemonic collectivization of Kosovo Serbs is part of Serbia's nationalizing project in Kosovo, part of which is the establishment of the A/CSM with executive powers, as has been explained in Chapter 5. For this project to be realized, Kosovo Serbs must collectively embody this project, hence there is a need to homogenize them as a group and not let heterogeneity among them become visible. Heterogeneity in representing Kosovo Serbs politically is articulated as antagonistic to the project of fighting for the realization of their collective rights and interests through establishing the A/CSM. These interests can hence only be achieved if Serbs act as a unified whole, not a pluralistic collective.

The second aspect of homogenizing Serbs is through drawing equivalence between Kosovo Serbs and Serbs from Serbia, constitutive of a larger discourse on Serbdom, i.e., all Serbs belonging to the same nationhood no matter where they live. Vučić's earlier mentioned visit to Kosovo after Ivanović's murder performatively homogenizes both Serbs in Kosovo (disarticulating political and geographic divisions among them) and Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia alike (articulating political, historical and emotional links between them). For instance, in Laplje Selo, a Serbian-majority village next to Gračanica South of the Ibar River, Vučić held a public meeting with the townspeople to answer all their questions and help facilitate financial assistance to the residents. He "thank[ed] the people for coming out [to meet him] during the snowstorm, and for preserving their homeland and their Serbian name and surname" (Dnevnik 2, 20.01.2018, 11:25). The homogenizing signifier in his statement is "Serbian name and surname", pointing to the fact that everybody who "calls" themselves Serbian *constitutes* a Serb, someone that Serbia will inevitably protect and see as a member of the Serbian political and national collective. They are, in turn seen as "protectors of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija" (ibid., 12:00), which constitutes the people as Serbian in terms of both statehood and nationhood.

After the visit and having reportedly attempted to solve the problems of local residents for six hours, Vučić said that he considered his visit to be "very significant for the unification of all Serbian people and the position of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija" (Dnevnik 2, 21.01.2018, 02:31), whereas Đurić claimed that (ibid., 09:50)

As a consequence of this visit, Serbia is in my opinion uniting in its efforts to help our people in Kosovo and Metohija. The Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija are also uniting in their desire to fight for them staying and surviving in Kosovo together, with the support of their state. And I think with this kind of gatherings we are defeating the ideas and goals of those who wanted to divide us with their acts of terror and cause us the greatest possible harm.

It is evident that Serbs in Kosovo as well as in Serbia are homogenized and unified against the "common enemy", which is in this case the "terrorists" who have murdered Ivanović and who

want to cause us harm. It is only through unification that the Serbs can resist these attempts to split them up and deny them their right to live and remain in Kosovo.

Additionally, Kosovo Serbs are interwoven with the Serbia-run institutional framework in Kosovo, embodying it as “part of Serbia” as well. For instance, within the internal dialogue on Kosovo on 1 February 2018, when Kosovo was discussed with representatives of the healthcare sector, Đurić claimed that “Serbia should know that the white coats, along with the education sector, and all other institutions of ours, are the first line of defense of the survival of our people in Kosovo and Metohija” (Dnevnik 2, 01.02.2018, 17:20). This statement indicates that first and foremost, the people are important, in order to maintain Serbia’s hegemonic claim to Kosovo: Đurić does not say that the institutions are the first line of defense of the Serbian state in Kosovo, but that they are the first line of defense of the survival of Serbian people in Kosovo. The people come to center the entire claim to Kosovo, so much so that they are interwoven into the institutional framework and territory as such, as argued in this chapter.

A subject that is primarily important for this is Srpska lista, members of which through their participation in the Kosovo Government have been able to exert at least limited power over this framework. This is due to the political and institutional setup of the Kosovo framework, in which members of the minority communities (such as Serbs) are guaranteed a number of places in the Parliament and the Government. Srpska lista, being part of this institutional framework, has been able to boycott the Kosovo Government and freeze their participation in it on numerous occasions, which makes them a vital instrument of maintaining Serbia’s claim to Kosovo and why it is so important for the Serbian Government that every Kosovo Serb support their politics. Through homogenizing Kosovo Serbs as a political subject around Srpska lista, Serbia maintains its role as a hegemonic actor able to have a say in internal issues of the Kosovo Government, all the while negating Kosovo’s independence. In this sense, the authorities in Pristina are not considered as a legitimate political subject, but Srpska lista *is* since it is “Serbian” through and through: it is directly supported and politically backed by the governing SNS in Serbia, while at the same time being exclusively comprised of Kosovo Serbs who claim to represent legitimate Kosovo Serb and Serbian interests.

For instance, Srpska lista, with the support of Belgrade, has managed to politicize the question of the North in territorial terms, based on the failed implementation of A/CSM by Pristina. In March 2018, Goran Rakić, the mayor of North Mitrovica, announced that the mayors of the 10 Serb-majority led municipalities from the ranks of Srpska lista would form the A/CSM on their own terms, independent of Pristina: “we, as legitimate representatives of the Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija, cannot be silent and will no longer be a decoration” (Dnevnik 2, 27.03.2018, 03:20). The

leaders of the local governments announced that they would form the Community independently on 19 April 2018, on the fifth anniversary of the Brussels agreement, adding that the A/CSM was one of the preconditions for the Kosovo Serbs to participate in the Kosovo Government. The idea of forming the A/CSM was put on hold when the Kosovo Government was given a deadline of four months by the EU to form the statute, but it managed to politicize the territorial situation in the North as a “special” case. This is evident in Rakić’s statement from 25 July 2018, criticizing opposition and civil society voices against a possible partition of Northern Kosovo, in which he claimed that the options of partition and demarcation should not be criticized by those who “either way hold Kosovo identity cards” or even identity cards of countries that have “sponsored Kosovo’s independence” (Dnevnik 2, 25.07.2018, 06:00). In this manner, Rakić is helping institute a political “us” that is comprised of “real” Serbs around Srpska lista, claiming that “80 percent of Serbs [from Kosovo] have given their vote of confidence in precisely this Government and President Vučić.” These Serbs do not legitimize Kosovo’s independence, and should be left alone to solve this issue with their “own country and with President Vučić” (ibid.).

Being Serbia-run, Srpska lista is additionally articulated as an institution of the Serbian people, according to the same logic of articulation of other Serbia-run institutions. On the anniversary of forming Srpska lista (which has previously only differed in name, see Chapter 5), a solemn session was organized in North Mitrovica to commemorate its founding moment. Đurić was present at the session and said that Srpska lista was not simply a political party, but an institution that protects the interests of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija (Dnevnik 2, 08.06.2018, 09:07), adding that Srpska lista has become the bulwark of defense of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, calling for unity and perseverance (ibid., 09:43). Given that the number of Serbia-run institutions has been decreasing since the signing of the Brussels agreement, other bodies come to take their place, such as Srpska lista. By helping entrench and sediment Srpska lista as the only viable political option for Kosovo Serbs, Serbia is simultaneously instituting its foothold in Kosovo through this party. After all, sedimented institutions are much harder to remove and negotiate over, than are fleeting articulations and materialities. Through this move, Srpska lista is articulated to embody the political “us” as the last bulwark of resistance against the threatening Others, be it from the ranks of Serbs from both Kosovo and Serbia, or from the ranks of Kosovo Albanians.

Once the question of Northern Kosovo has become politicized with the idea of partition around the end of July and beginning of August 2018, an increasing number of Kosovo Serbs started to voice their concern about this idea. Apart from the Orthodox Church and the open letter of Bishop Teodosije voicing his concerns about partition and drawing of ethnic border, a number of local non-governmental organizations (with some NGOs from Serbia) have also come together and compiled a letter they sent to Federica Mogherini, the EU mediator in the Brussels dialogue, to

rethink the EU's support of re-drawing the borders of Kosovo. They warned about the "dangerous principle of ethnic ownership of territory" which could create a chain reaction in the region and an exodus of people from the "wrong ethnicity" into the newly created ethnically claimed territories (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2018, in Danas, 11 August). Apart from them, around 3 and 4 August 2018, when the deadline given to Pristina by the EU to compile a statute of the A/CSM has passed, there were increasing warnings from various hegemonic actors from Serbia and Kosovo alike about the possibility of incidents in Northern Kosovo, that would allow for partitioning the North, or for Pristina to take Lake Gazivode by force (Tasić 2018, in Danas, 2 August). For instance, the Serbian Orthodox Church warned about an "incident, either in the form of the proclamation of the alleged autonomy of the North or the takeover of Lake Gazivode by the Kosovo police" which would "directly serve to create a situation on the ground that would cement the territorial division and permanently endanger the civilian population" (Danas 2018o, 3 August). The opposition in Serbia has also issued several statements about the necessity to prevent heightened tensions between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and causing constructed conflict situations among them (Danas 2018j, 3 August). Additionally, in an open letter addressed to the Serb-led local governments and generally Serbs in Kosovo, Vučić (RTS 2018, in Danas, 3 August) stated that

While I am in charge, Serbia will not allow organized violence against Serbs and their sanctities, nor their persecution. [...] Apart from us, who are genuinely dedicated to maintaining peace in our Southern province, this is also the primary task of the KFOR and NATO missions, of which I particularly expect and demand to protect the peace by preventing any possible attempts, by anyone, and under any pretext, to seize and hijack the Gazivode hydroelectric power plant, the Valač substation or any other key infrastructure object on which your survival depends. For your sake and the future of the whole of Serbia, we will continue to strive for reaching a compromise and comprehensive solution.

Clearly, by naming Gazovode and Valač as two potential sites of "attack" by the Pristina authorities, Vučić is politicizing Northern Kosovo as particularly endangered and a place that needs Serbia's, as well as NATO's protection. The fact that KFOR was present at Gazivode from the early hours in the morning on 4 August only heightened the tensions and increased anticipations that something might happen. After the situation remained calm in terms of a potential conflict occurring, Vučić held a meeting with local Serb leaders from Kosovo to discuss next steps. In response to this, the local representatives of Srpska lista responded with unequivocal support for Vučić's politics towards a potential solution for the Belgrade-Pristina conflict, stating that no solution can ever be reached without first consulting the Kosovo Serb representatives. In an open letter to Vučić, they wrote (Dnevnik 2, 15.08.2018 04:28; Danas 2018f, 15 August):

Dear President Vučić, in the name of the Serbian people in Kosovo, who see in your politics the only hope for continuing their existence in our centuries-old heartland, please do not give up the fight for a just, sustainable and compromise solution, which will mean a better future for not only Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, but for the entire Serbian people. [...]

We urge you not to give up on your mission of rescuing Northern Kosovo and everything else that can be rescued from the clutches of Pristina.

By articulating Pristina authorities as a threat, particularly as a threat to Northern Kosovo, which is always explicitly mentioned as a special case, Srpska lista is producing the political “us” around Kosovo Serb affiliation with Serbia, particularly the Government led by Vučić. They primarily subjectivate into any solution suggested by Vučić, be it partition, delineation, or any other form of compromise, stating that “we do not know what the compromise solution is, but we conveyed a message to President Aleksandar Vučić that he has our absolute support” (Danas 2018k, 25 July). In this manner, Vučić acts as an empty signifier embodying the possible compromise solution, which in the end might mean many different things. However, the one issue in common to these various solutions is that they come from or are supported by Vučić, which for Srpska lista is enough. I will return to this point in the subchapter 6.6.

It has to be re-iterated that the entire meaning-making around a compromise solution in mid-2018 has become increasingly populist, since frontiers are drawn between everybody who supports Vučić and his Government’s solution for Kosovo and those who oppose it. Even within the Serb community in Kosovo, which was previously articulated as one whole with the same interests, there are divisions created in 2018 because of the suggested compromise of *razgraničenje*. The same logic has followed articulations of the Serbian Orthodox Church, some members of which have also voiced their opposition to the idea. On the other hand, as also elaborated previously, Kosovo Albanians are increasingly articulated as antagonistic, primarily because of the idea of partitioning Kosovo along ethnic lines. The partition discourse is thus polarizing the entire political field in Serbia and Kosovo alike.

Having extensively dealt with the shifting articulations of Albanians from agonism to antagonism by scrutinizing how the conflict has been articulated, how the antagonistic Albanian Other has been constructed in terms of power relations, and how that was constitutive of a political “us” building guided by a populist logic, the next subchapter addresses the second thematic part of this chapter, namely the re-articulation of the “Kosovo is Serbia” claim. The claim to entire Kosovo has been constitutive of Serbia’s hegemonic project there ever since the question of Kosovo Albanian independence became political during the 1990s. This claim has been sedimented in several social forms, be it the institutional and legal framework of Serbia, or the widespread affective investment of the Serbian political collective in this demand. However, with the initiation of the internal dialogue on Kosovo in 2017 and later the introduction of the idea of *razgraničenje* into the Serbian public discourse in 2018, this totalizing claim has been re-articulated in “downscaled” terms, and its focus shifted from the metaphysical, symbolic realm (entire Kosovo is Serbian, even though Serbia cannot perform sovereignty in the majority of this territory) to the

physical, material realm (only North Kosovo is Serbia, since only there can we perform our claim to sovereignty). Thus, synecdoche, i.e., substituting the claim to entire Kosovo for only one of its parts, Northern Kosovo, can be recognized. Additionally, in terms of a macro-level, paradigmatic substitution of one hegemonic project (the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse) with another (the partition discourse) can be recognized. The fantasies underpinning and imaginaries delimiting these projects are also substituted. These shifts in meaning are going to be the focus of the next subchapter.

6.6 Re-articulating Serbia’s Hegemonic Claim to Kosovo: From Symbolic to Physical Ownership

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the internal dialogue initiated a meaning-making process which aimed to re-articulate two sedimented discourses: on the one hand, the so-called “mythical approach to Kosovo” that characterized Serbian politics towards it, and on the other, the question of borders between Serbia and Kosovo, but also in the region more broadly. The former is tied to the symbolic ownership of Kosovo, in which the entire Kosovo is “Serbia/Serbian” independent of the fact whether Serbia can perform sovereignty in that territory. The latter politicizes the question of sovereignty and prioritizes the exercise of hegemony in at least a part of physical territory over the symbolic ownership of the entire space. The partition discourse renders this synecdochic substitution visible, since exercise of physical ownership in terms of controlling and nationalizing borders – which would enable Serbia to perform sovereignty in Northern Kosovo through exerting control – trumps the exercise of symbolic ownership, which in material terms does not contribute much to consolidating the nationalizing project of the Serbian state in Kosovo.

The following subchapter is divided in two parts: the first will address the internal dialogue as a destabilizing moment aiming to politicize previously sedimented meanings, that is, “de-mythologize” and “de-emotionalize/rationalize” Serbian politics towards Kosovo. The second part will address how this de-mythologization and rationalization of the Kosovo question was tied to a new fantasy of Serbia’s future, a future in which Serbia is imagined as economically prosperous and part of the EU, for the realization of which the “mythological approach” to Kosovo posed an obstacle. This vision is guided by the generation of a new myth – a “compromise” solution that would ensure that both Serbia and Kosovo are equally satisfied and dissatisfied, that would lift all the obstacles in Serbia’s path towards joining the EU, and that would ensure an economically viable future for Serbia and the coming generations. Within the Brussels dialogue, various signifiers articulated by many hegemonic subjects take the place of representing this mythical compromise, but most importantly for Serbia, this is *razgraničenje*. In the Albanian political discourse, this signifier

is predominantly “correction of borders” or “exchange of territories, and the EU’s discourse and their subject role as a mediator, it is the “legally-binding agreement” (although the EU also articulates the signifiers of “partition”, “exchange of territories” and the like). *Razgraničenje* transposes Serbia’s claim to Kosovo, as mentioned above, from a symbolic into a physical realm, and part of this transposition is temporal. The claim to Kosovo is transposed from a historical moment into a contemporary one, with increasing articulations of substituting “our past” with “our future”: the “mythological” approach to Kosovo is part of the conflict-ridden past, whereas EU membership is part of the prosperous future. This is related to my initial argument on myths as having a distinctly temporal function, grounding communities and political projects in different moments in time, anchoring imaginized alternatives to the ones already available in the social world.

The meaning-making process within the Brussels dialogue in 2017 and 2018 differs from the one in 2012 and 2013 because the horizon of possible meanings associated with such a compromise solution is broadened by the majority of hegemonic actors that are constituting this process. While in 2013 the idea of partition and *razgraničenje*, even though Dačić introduced it in the dialogue with Pristina, was immediately dismissed (Dnevnik 2, 28.02.2013, 08:53), this was not the case with 2017 and 2018. Given that the most vital agreement for the Serbian side, the A/CSM, has not been implemented during the five years of the dialogue at that time, alternative suggestions were explored and enabled by the EU as a mediator. Apart from the EU, other notable subjects got involved in the negotiations, expressing their support (USA, Austria, Russia) or disabling further talks on changing the borders (Germany). Even within the given countries, the views were polarized from one individual hegemonic subject to the next, the best example of which is the Kosovo Government, in which some subjects supported border talks (Thaçi) while others opposed them (Haradinaj, opposition parties such as Vetëvendosje). However, the expanded horizon of possible solutions to take the representation of a final compromise between Belgrade and Pristina shrank soon after, with the introduction of a 100 percent import tax on Serbian goods stopping the negotiations in Brussels altogether. At the end of 2018, the Brussels dialogue did not succeed in what it initially showed promise of: the transformation of antagonistic relations into agonistic, anchored around a mutual understanding, or reading, of the signed agreements between Belgrade and Pristina.

Internal Dialogue: De-mythologizing and Rationalizing Serbia’s Approach to Kosovo

When Vučić initiated the internal dialogue, it was envisioned as a debate that should engage the Government with all the representative segments of Serbian society, such as the civil sector, businesses, academia, media, health sector, sports and culture, legal community, religious

community and so forth. In doing this, the internal dialogue has aimed to politicize, or scrutinize, previously sedimented practices of the Serbian political collective towards Kosovo, which is evident in Vučić's opening call in the daily newspaper *Blic*, analyzed below. Since it was about politicization of sedimented meanings, the internal dialogue aimed to find a solution that might lie beyond the horizon of meanings up until that point (beyond the Kosovo imaginary) and was a practice of "naming the unnamable" in terms of a potential solution for Kosovo, specifically by engaging all aspects of Serbian society. In the end, it turned out to be merely a re-activation of an old, unpopular idea of partition, but initially, this potential solution constituted an empty signifier, which later came to be embodied by Vučić as a leader who is blindly to be trusted to find a suitable solution. His idea of *razgraničenje* first articulated in August 2018 took on the role of representing that "social fullness" that was absent because of the entrenched practices of Serbia towards Kosovo, practices that needed to be changed. What the de-mythologization discourse presented as an obstacle to achieving our "full" enjoyment was not only the radical Other, as discussed above, but also the "us". In other words, the structures of feeling about Kosovo and the sedimented political practices regarding Kosovo as they have been constitutive of the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse needed to change. Ergo, *razgraničenje* can also be read as a *counter*-hegemonic project, a proposal for substituting the hegemonic "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, even though (or precisely because) it is articulated by hegemonic actors who have the discursive power to change things.

When Vučić took office on 31 May 2017, he commenced his presidential term traditionally with an oath before the Parliament in which he stated that he would uphold the Constitution, its laws, and ensure Serbia's territorial integrity "with Kosovo and Metohija as its inherent part" (Dnevnik 2, 31.05.2017, 02:50). However, only two days later, he announced that during his presidency, he wanted to "open up a social dialogue about the Constitution, our attitude towards Kosovo and Metohija and the region", emphasizing that Serbia should renounce a mythical approach towards Kosovo and explaining what renouncing the "mythical approach" entailed (Dnevnik 2, 02.06.2017, 02:19):

Our attitude should be harmonized with the problems of daily life, with issues our people from Kosovo and Metohija are facing, with what we consider to be factual interests of our state. But let us forget that we are the only ones who can make these decisions. Let us remember what the role of the Albanians is. Let us put things into a rational perspective, on a national level, and talk about it that way.

He also explicitly brings the mythical approach to Kosovo in connection with the Serbian Orthodox Church, who has continuously maintained that Serbia's policy towards Kosovo should be directed to include Kosovo as a whole, maintaining symbolic ownership of the entire territory, as is anchored in Serbia's Constitution. Vučić claimed that he "respects the religious community,

but our [the Government's/ the state's] job is to worry about the earthly life, not about the heavenly one" (ibid., 02:50), alluding to the idea of "heavenly Serbia" as part of the Kosovo myth.

A second aspect of the internal dialogue's initiation is the intended constitutional change, specifically relating to its preamble stating that Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of Serbia. In connection to this, Vučić called for wider societal talks with the aim to reach an "agreement" that would testify to "our effort to do something for our country": "if it fails, then it means that we have once again prioritized the country of our forebears, instead of the country of our children" (ibid., 03:07). The juxtaposition between past and future, in which the Kosovo myth is articulated as part of the past, whereas renouncing it is articulated as part of the future, is a re-occurring theme in Vučić's statements as of him taking office as president. For instance, during the celebration of St Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*), a day that has great symbolic significance for the re-articulation of the Kosovo myth in the Serbian political discourse, Vučić claimed that Vidovdan should not remain a myth, but become "our clear history which will give us the material from which we can build up a better future" (Dnevnik 2, 28.06.2017, 08:45). By distinguishing between "myth" and "history", clearly prioritizing history over myth, Vučić attempts to commit the reading of Vidovdan entirely to a "factual, historic" domain, and take it as a historic lesson that can help Serbia be guided towards its future. As commemorating Vidovdan is also part of the affective calendar of the nation, it is a call to transpose the nation's feelings anchored by the myth into the realm of "history", fact, and consequently, leave them in the past. He continues by saying that:

We will never give up our fight for Serbian honor, the Serbian honorable name, Serbian history. Building up on that history, [we will continue to fight] above all for the Serbian future. We will preserve the Serbian land and the Serbian saints; we will be able to preserve our people wherever they are. The fight for freedom lasted for centuries, but Serbia has won its freedom. I deliberately say 'won' instead of 'got'.

The fight for Kosovo here is primarily not about a fight for every inch of the territory as indicated in the Constitution; it is instead a fight for the Serbian people (their honor, their name, their history, their future), and those lands where Serbs live, including the monasteries. The Serbian people are, hence, affectively constituted: whoever feels as and is named as Serb, is a Serb, and this category should not be solely defined by historically changing territories. Similarly, Đurić has also stated during Vidovdan that "the fight [for Kosovo and Metohija] is not simply a fight for territory and square kilometers, but a fight for preserving our identity" (ibid., 11:25). With the idea of partition, it becomes clear that the fight is actually about territory, basing this claim on the majority-Serb population and the materiality of Northern Kosovo. The fight for Kosovo has to continue in an active voice, instead of waiting for an impossible scenario in which Serbia would get something handed to it. Additionally, Vučić stated that he believes "even Prince Lazar would want us to fight for an earthly Serbia and not a heavenly one", an earthly Serbia that is characterized by "labor, the

number of meters we build in highways and railroads both in Serbia and Kosovo, new jobs, and especially new people we give birth to” (ibid., 10:22). This juxtaposition of “myth” on the one hand, and “reality” on the other, is part of the logic of “de-mythologizing” Serbian politics, specifically its approach to Kosovo. It is also about a transposition from the symbolic into a physical and material realm (that structures the new claim to Kosovo), in which the earthly is equated with materiality and economic progress (highways, roads, jobs, a larger national collective), and the heavenly with “overcome” ideas that should be left in the past. As mentioned earlier, part of this de-mythological approach is a temporal transposition from the past into the future, in which various articulations of the future form the fantasy of a new, economically prosperous Serbia under Vučić’s guidance, which will be elaborated later.

By using Vidovdan as a symbolic moment to initiate the politicization of the Kosovo myth in the Serbian public discourse, Vučić published an open letter to the Serbian public in the daily newspaper *Blic* (Vučić, *Blic*, 24.07.2017). Publishing this letter constituted a performative moment of initiating the internal dialogue on Kosovo in Serbia, in which Vučić calls all citizens of Serbia to reconsider their attitudes towards Kosovo. The letter states:

It is time for us as a nation to stop putting our heads in the sand, and try to be realistic, not to allow ourselves to lose, or hand over to somebody what we already have, but also not to wait to regain something that we have already lost long ago. [...] Ever since 1878, since the creation of the so-called Prizren league, we Serbs did not want to be responsible enough to understand the strength and desires of Albanians; and I consider it a big mistake of the Albanians – and thank them for that – that they misunderstood and underestimated Serbian state and national interests. [...] Serbia should not be underestimated, despite the fact that Albanians have significant support from most Western countries in implementing their national ideas. [...] The solution does not lie in our myths and conflicts, nor does it lie in denying and negating all our national and state interests.

Temporally, Vučić is situating “our myths” and “conflicts” into the realm of the past, whereas a possible solution would be part of a future in which Serbia at least maintains what it “already has” in Kosovo. This is in line with my earlier argument, that it is the collective “us” that obstructs Serbia’s progress towards the future, an “us” that needs to rethink the entrenched structures it is performing and re-articulating. Although Northern Kosovo is not explicitly mentioned, it is considered to be the only area where Serbia can perform some sort of control through its institutional framework which is still in place. Additionally, given that Northern Kosovo is directly adjacent to the Serbian border and has a history of resisting integration into the Kosovo state framework, it can be argued that he is referring to this area, specifically because “what we already have” and “what we have lost long ago” are brought in connection to Serbian and Albanian national and state interests. He might also be referring to the Serbian medieval monasteries as part of the cultural heritage in Kosovo.

Vučić is also calling for a “realistic” approach to solving the Kosovo question, which is part of the previously named attempt to “rationalize” Serbian politics towards Kosovo. As evident in the statement above, one of his main tasks as new head of state is to confront the Serbian nation with the inconvenient truth: a truth which they have chosen to ignore for a long time (by “burying their heads in the sand”), namely that the Albanians have their legitimate national and state interest in the same manner as Serbs do. This is evident historically in their quest to seek national independence and self-determination, a trend that is continuing in the present moment as well. This “truth” is what cannot be ignored by simply relying on “myths” or the conflict-ridden past: Vučić is explicitly acknowledging the dislocatory moment of Kosovo’s declaration of independence, an issue that Serbia as a country and as a nation has to deal with in order to progress. In acknowledging this dislocation, Vučić is constituting himself as a truth-teller, a leader who is not afraid to make unpopular choices and one who is realistically and cool-headedly considering the situation Serbia finds itself in by choosing to be ignorant. For instance, when the SOC issued a declaration opposing a partition of Kosovo, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 11.05.2018, 04:57) asked:

I have seen everything, and I respect all opinions. But the only thing I have not seen is what would be the solution. Is the solution to negate everything, to be against everything? Is the solution to have a frozen conflict, to wait for better times? What better times? When we are only five million people left, when we are three million left? When all people leave abroad and we lose all our citizens?

This is also evident in the effects of the internal dialogue, which spurred a process of public-opinion-making and -questioning in terms of the Serbian political collective’s stand towards dealing with Kosovo. To a survey claiming that 80 percent of people would prefer a “frozen conflict” in Kosovo instead of a solution, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 24.05.2018, 15:54) said: “I will do everything I can, without regard for my political career, to change the minds of the 80 percent of people who think that frozen conflict is the best solution. [...] I will certainly not make any decisions against our people, but I will try to convince the majority [...] that peace [and stability are] more important to us than anything else.”

By constituting himself as a *political* subject in the proper sense of the word (as a result of accommodating a dislocation), Vučić’s body as a leader, in its materiality, becomes part of these contestations about accommodating the dislocation. Vučić becomes an empty signifier able to accommodate different political demands and fantasies by offering his idea of a historic “compromise” between Serbs and Albanians, something that forms the bedrock of his vision for a better future of Serbia. This vision is a counter-hegemonic project against what he sees as the current Serbian political practice towards Kosovo, as being stuck in the past. Specifically, his counter-hegemonic project is opposed to the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse. As a way forward to realize his vision, Serbia needs to confront these ignorant assumptions about Kosovo (de-

mythologize its approach to it) and change the way it approaches this question (rationally instead of emotionally). If Serbia succeeds to change these structurally sedimented constraints, then a future of economic progress and EU-membership awaits, a fantasy that promises to restore the “lost” enjoyment of the nation due to the current situation around Kosovo. It can only be restored if “we” as a nation recognize the errors of our ways and entrust in Vučić to come up with a solution that would restore our full identity – through his project of *razgraničenje*.

When it comes to the so-called de-mythologization of Serbian politics, other hegemonic subjects are constitutive of the debate as well, such as Brnabić and Dačić, all trying to politicize the meaning of Kosovo for the Serbian political collective. For instance, Brnabić claimed in an authored piece for BIZ Life magazine that her “wish is that the Serbian society accepts a different reality and changed circumstances, and turn towards the future, while leaving the past and the myths of the 1990s in the previous century” (Dnevnik 2, 22.12.2017, 03:40). Similar to Vučić, Dačić also maintained that while it will “surely be difficult to secure the support of the citizens and the world”, he is “sure that the Serbian people will not miss this opportunity [to find a compromise], because we have to keep an eye out for a national program for the next 100 years” (Dnevnik 2, 28.08.2018, 03:51).

This politicization of Kosovo in Serbia is part of the internal dialogue’s logic of articulation, because there is an attempt to reconstitute sedimented meanings of the signifier Kosovo for the Serbian political collective. On the one hand, history and its connection to the “mythologized” view of Kosovo is problematized, while on the other, integral elements of the Kosovo myth, such as the sanctity of the territory of Kosovo, are rearticulated. The former is evident, for instance, in Vučić’s explicit distinction between the myth-laden tales of Kosovo and the “factual” historical record of Kosovo, asking (Dnevnik 2, 07.08.2018, 02:28): “We Serbs tell ourselves that for 600 years now, we keep the entire Kosovo and Metohija under our control, but my question is: how come our consul was murdered in 1890; how come Nušić, and Vojislav Ilić, and Rakić were our consuls there? Were they consuls in their own country, in their own territory?” Vučić is here referring to the Consulate of the Kingdom of Serbia in Pristina formed 1889, while the Kosovo Vilayet was under Ottoman rule, which was later integrated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes following the First and Second Balkan Wars and WWI. Vučić is establishing a historical equivalence between the Serbian and Kosovar states now and these territories in the wake of the 20th century, and by doing so, questioning the assumption that Kosovo has always been Serbian, through arguing for “factual” historical record of “our” consuls representing Serbia in what was essentially a different state/empire.

The latter, i.e., problematizing the sanctity of Kosovo as part of the sedimented mythical narrative, is evident in Vučić's increasing conflict with the Serbian Orthodox Church as the main subject behind constituting Kosovo as a holy land. Of course, the conflict is not with the entire Church, but only those representatives who oppose a possible "compromise" as envisioned by Vučić. For instance, as also mentioned above, when the Church issued a declaration opposing a partition of Kosovo, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 11.05.2018, 05:31) said: "Everyone talks about the holy land, but no one wants to live in the holy land. I am sure they [the Church] have a better vision of Serbia's future than I do. The people will certainly speak their word, and everyone will have their own cross to bear, as our Church would say – some of us today and some in the future." It is evident that the symbolic ownership of entire Kosovo loses its appeal in Vučić's attempt to institute his counter-hegemonic project. Instead, as part of the de-mythologization effort, the sanctity of the land (heavenly Serbia) is juxtaposed with the reality of life (earthly Serbia). If Serbia is fighting for a piece of land that no Serb wants to live in, then how justified is that fight for ensuring a better future for Serbia?

In terms of de-emotionalizing or rationalizing Serbia's political approach towards Kosovo, many subjects, such as members of the Serbian leadership, EU representatives, as well as participants in the internal dialogue, articulate Kosovo as being an "emotional" issue in Serbia, frequently juxtaposing it with a "rational" or "realistic" approach that is needed instead. For instance, this was the case with the fourth internal dialogue session in the form of a roundtable gathering prominent academics, former diplomats, political analysts to discuss possible solutions for Kosovo, whereby some of them put into question whether emotions should prevail when trying to find a durable solution for Kosovo (Dnevnik 2, 28.11.2017, 06:50).

The Serbian Orthodox Church has, perhaps most prominently, articulated Kosovo as an emotional issue of the entire Serbian nation, a feeling that needed to be respected and upheld by the state apparatus as well. For instance, Vladika Porfirije (Dnevnik 2, 31.08.2018, 07:24) said that the question of Kosovo and Metohija was so important and painful, that we cannot allow it to be misused for individual or political party interests, calling Kosovo the "most costly [precious] Serbian word", a saying that has resonated many times in the past in the Serbian public discourse on Kosovo. Because Kosovo is constituted as the most precious issue for Serbs, losing or giving it up would cause great pain to the entire nation.

Similarly, when Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council visited Serbia in late April 2018, he said after his meeting with Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 25.04.2018, 05:17; see also Danas 2018p, 25 April):

I know that you hate it when someone tells you what you should do. It is you – and you alone – who decide about your destiny. [...] Today it is clear to the whole world that neither Moscow, Washington, Ankara, nor Brussels will decide about the future of Serbia. Only Belgrade will decide about it. [...] Aleksandar Vučić is living proof that you can be at the same time a strong patriot and a rational pragmatist. I am not sure if you know that it is in fact he who initiated the ambitious vision of the economic integration of this region. [...] I want to thank President Vučić for his personal engagement in the dialogue with Pristina. I know this is a difficult and emotionally charged issue. But it is also a strategic choice that will pay off in the long run.

The articulation of Kosovo as an emotional issue of Serbia is evidently not only perpetuated by Serbian hegemonic actors, but it is constituted as an issue of the entire dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina by other actors involved. To this statement by Tusk, Vučić replied that Serbia would accept “every compromise, but cannot accept the humiliation of Serbia” (ibid., 09:20). Recognizing Kosovo is articulated as a humiliation, implying that *pride* and *shame* both form a constitutive part of these political contestations around Kosovo. Another constitutive emotion, one that was already mentioned earlier, is spite, or *inat*. When Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, stated that “if Serbia wants to become a member of the EU, then that country needs to find a legally-binding form of normalization with Kosovo” (Dnevnik 2, 24.02.2018, 02:43), Dačić replied that if the EU “thinks that by offering us a lollipop in the form of EU membership in return for forgetting about Kosovo, they do not know the Serbian people – we will not recognize Kosovo out of spite!” (ibid., 02:54).

These sedimented affects, or structures of feeling that are constitutive of the meaning-making process around Kosovo in the Brussels dialogue, are part of upholding the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse explained in the previous chapter. As mentioned earlier, what Vučić is attempting to do is to *dis-articulate* the meaning of Kosovo in Serbia from these structures of feeling in his attempt to institute an alternative discourse, a vision of Serbia’s future that is marked by economic progress and EU membership. For instance, he is doing that based on “rationalizing” the Kosovo question in Serbia, i.e., articulating it as something that needs to be looked at realistically and rationally, detached from emotions. For Serbia to progress into a European future, *fear* about a possible solution that would clash with the established “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse and the structures of feeling constituting it, needs to be concurred. This can only be done through a rational approach to the question of Kosovo in Serbia. For instance, Vučić expressed his concern “that the decisions we make [regarding Kosovo] are too emotional instead of rational and that we are prouder of our past instead of thinking of our future” (Danas 2018r, 17 March). In seeking to formulate a compromise solution, Vučić has always maintained that the people would decide in a referendum, constituting the solution as an issue that is *of* and *for* the Serbian political collective – an idea that is also reflected in the internal dialogue as a widespread collective endeavor that needs to involve all

segments of the Serbian society. In connection to a solution and a referendum, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 08.07.2018, 04:00) stated:

In order for the people to decide on something, we have to offer something to the people. I do not know at the moment what I would suggest. If we ever have an offer, then we will call for a referendum [...] Will my party accept this offer? Hardly. Will the public in Serbia accept it as well? Responsible people will! How many responsible people? Well, emotions have always prevailed with us instead of responsibility and a serious attitude [*ozbiljnost*].

The clear boundary-drawing between those who support Vučić's ideas and suggestions, whatever they may be, is evident in the statement above, and constitutes a populist logic of articulation in which those who are rational and responsible are part of the political "us", while those who are emotional and irresponsible are part of the political "them". A rational approach to Kosovo is articulated as something good for the future of Serbia, while an emotional approach is the complete opposite. What prevents the subjects constituting "them" to recognize and subjectivate into Vučić's rational and responsible proposal is fear, an emotion that needs to be concurred. In April 2018, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 28.04.2018, 00:34) stated that "we have to act responsibly and not simply say 'we will not accept anything [on the table]'. No, we have to participate in the negotiations, and we have to fight and try to find a solution. And we need not fear a solution."

New Vision of Serbia's Future: Kosovo as an Obstacle to EU Membership and Economization:

To politicize the meaning of Kosovo in Serbia, apart from de-mythologization and de-emotionalization, articulating Kosovo as an obstacle to EU integration and the realization of the envisioned future of Serbia is integral to this process as well. First and foremost, when discussing EU integration, other obligations following from the *acquis* are subjugated to Chapter 35, which regulates the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Such is the case with Chapters 23 and 24, which are otherwise two of the most important chapters in any country's accession process. These parallels between fulfilling obligations from Chapter 35 and other chapters are frequently drawn by Dačić, Vučić, Jadranka Joksimović (the Minister of EU Integration) and others, such as some EU member states PMs like Sebastian Kurz.

When Vučić met with Alexis Tsipras, the Prime Minister of Greece, in Thessaloniki in mid-2017, he commented on Serbia being as prepared for EU accession as Romania and Bulgaria were by claiming that "behind the various remarks regarding [Chapters] 23 and 24 – to be completely honest with the citizens of Serbia – [...] lies Kosovo. Hence, if everything were all right with regard to Kosovo, we would be champions in human rights, so at least be frank about it with us" (Dnevnik 2, 13.07.2017, 03:29). Similarly, Dačić has illustrated: "You all know how that song goes, 'wherever I go, I return to you, Kosovo!?' Whichever path we take, that [Kosovo] is the subject. That subject

needs to be resolved” (Dnevnik 2, 25.07.2017, 12:05), alluding to the popular folk song called “Vidovdan”, which thematizes the Battle of Kosovo and how Kosovo can never be taken out of the Serbian soul.

Additionally, when David McAllister, the European Parliament’s rapporteur on Serbia, visited Belgrade, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 12.08.2017, 00:46) claimed after the meeting that “the key question [in Euro-integration] is Kosovo. The second key question is our relationship with Russia. So, if you ask me whether human right are the reason my head hurts the most, [no] it hurts the most because of Belgrade-Pristina relations,” referring to Chapter 35. He added (ibid., 04:00) that this chapter,

permeates several other chapters. It is not just one chapter, because you cannot even talk about traffic without talking about Chapter 35. This is what people in Serbia need to know. That is why the internal dialogue [on Kosovo] is important to us, and that is why people should know full well that unless we make progress on this [Kosovo], there is no progress [towards the EU]. [...] The essential reason for this is Kosovo.

By articulating the current political practice about Kosovo, i.e., denial of the inconvenient truth by the nation as a whole and the previous Government, as the biggest, and perhaps only obstacle to Serbia’s progression on its EU path, the representatives of the Serbian Government are offering a discursive substitution: Kosovo for EU membership. One social imaginary is substituted for another, namely Kosovo for membership of the EU. As a way of instituting this counter-hegemonic project, based on economic progress that comes with progress on Serbia’s EU path, Kosovo is portrayed as an obstacle, something that needs to be overcome for the betterment of Serbia. Other issues that the country might be facing on this same path are dismissed, specifically because this dismissal is beneficial for the process of politicization of Kosovo in the Serbian public discourse. By articulating it as an urgent matter, without the solution of which any dreams of ever becoming a member of the EU will not be realized, Serbian hegemonic actors are inciting its deliberation, putting it in the focus of public discourse in the form of the internal dialogue.

However, by “dealing with Kosovo” as an obstacle on Serbia’s EU integration path, simply recognizing Kosovo in its current form is outside of the realm of possibilities. If something like that would be done, then only in a situation in which Serbia would “gain something”, be it EU membership or Northern Kosovo. Since instituting a counter-hegemonic project is a difficult endeavor, which would entirely de-structure the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, it has to be mentioned that this discourse is still present. Both of these discourses are performed by the Government simultaneously (the mentioned issue of self-transgression), which facilitates their contestation in the first place. In the search for a signifier that would represent a possible solution, other signifiers except Northern Kosovo or recognition are articulated, for instance “normalization of relations” (related to the signifier “legally-binding agreement”). It is often used by the Serbian

Government to refer to one solution on how to overcome the obstacle that Kosovo poses for Serbia. In the Serbian public discourse, this would primarily entail that Serbia does not recognize Kosovo formally (*de jure*) but recognizes its subjectivity in international terms (*de facto*). For instance, when the Serbian Minister for European Integration Jadranka Joksimović was asked in an *RTS* interview whether Serbia could ever join the EU without recognizing Kosovo, Joksimović (*Dnevnik 2*, 17.11.2017, 04:48) said:

Of course we can, precisely because the essence of our normalization agreements [with Pristina] is to regulate certain frameworks of normalization that will not lead us to recognize the independence of Kosovo. They do, however, mean a range of concessions we have made throughout these agreements, with the condition that Pristina fulfills their primary obligation, and that is the Community of Serb Municipalities.

The concessions refer to Serbia already having recognized with the Brussels agreement that Kosovo has a certain kind of international subjectivity – after all, the institutional integration of Serbs in Kosovo must occur under Kosovo law, and the establishment of the A/CSM has to be compatible with its legal framework. One only needs to look at the decision of the Kosovo Constitutional Court concerning the August 2015 agreement (regulating the basic principles of the A/CSM's set-up) to recognize that Kosovo as a viable political subject in Serbia's eyes does play a decisive role in how and if the agreements are implemented.

In connection to this, that is, recognizing Kosovo as a subject in international terms but not recognizing its statehood, the Serbian Government has sought ways to put this principle into practice within the Brussels dialogue. In this context, the so-called idea or model of “two Germanys” has been articulated as a possible way to bypass the recognition of Kosovo's statehood, although not a popular one. Namely, the model of two Germanys involves an agreement in which Serbia would regulate its relations with Kosovo legally, but not recognize it as an independent state – which would enable Kosovo to join the UN and receive more widespread international recognition as a state. This was also the case with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) after WWII, in which case both Eastern and Western Germany became full UN member states in 1973, without Western Germany ever *de jure* recognizing Eastern Germany.

The model of two Germanys was already circulating in the media in 2012, 2013 and 2015 as a possible way to solve the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo. For instance, in October 2012 *Danas* has received the information from “diplomatic sources” in Berlin that the “[German] authorities would not have anything against the application of the model of two Germany's” as the basis for the final agreement between Belgrade and Pristina (Diković 2012, in *Danas*, 25 October). Similarly, Enver Hoxhaj, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, claimed that the model of two

Germany's would be "interesting" for the regulation of Kosovo-Serbia relations: "If Serbia cannot recognize [Kosovo's] independence, it should bracket it and find a way to deal with Kosovo based on the reality on the ground. Kosovo's advantage in this model is not only in regulating relations of normalization, but also in the fact that both Germany's were members of the UN" (P. D. 2012, in Danas, 5 November).

During the intensified negotiations in early 2013 before reaching the Brussels agreement, Blerim Shala, the coordinator of the Pristina team in the dialogue with Belgrade, said that Catherine Ashton suggested that a final agreement between Belgrade and Pristina could have the likes of the agreement between the two Germany's. He added that such a peace agreement could be reached by April 2013, which in fact turned out to be the case (Tasić 2013b, in Danas, 24 January), only not in that form. Before Angela Merkel's official visit to Serbia in July 2015, the former President of Serbia Boris Tadić claimed that she might arrive with a proposal for Serbia in terms of "formalizing relations between two states, Serbia and Kosovo. It is a model of two Germany's, where mutual recognition never took place, but both countries had the right to be members of the UN. Such a model could lead to an independent Kosovo from the standpoint of international relations, whether Serbia recognizes it or not" (Milenković 2015, in Danas, 3 July).

Even later, during the 2017-2018 negotiations in Brussels, Tadić claimed that this particular model was suggested to him during his term, and even to his predecessor Vojislav Koštunica as part of the DSS-Government (Danas 2018n, 1 February). This was also confirmed by the head of DSS Miloš Jovanović in mid-2018, when he claimed that the Serbian Government, which was then led by his party, rejected the proposal by Wolfgang Ischinger (the EU representative in the Kosovo talks) in 2007, which had envisioned a similar agreement for Serbia and Kosovo to the one between the two Germany's (Danas 2018d, 11 June). It is evident that this model on how finally to solve the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo has been in use for quite some time, primarily to motivate the claim that EU officials have often made: Serbia does not have to recognize Kosovo in order to become a member of the EU, but it needs to comprehensively normalize its relations with Kosovo through a legally-binding agreement. Particularly in 2018, when the idea of reaching a "compromise" came into focus both in Serbia and Kosovo, many mentions of the model of two Germany's have been made in the media (see e.g., Dnevnik 2, 01.02.2018; Dnevnik 2, 18.02.2018; Danas 2018b, 22 January; Danas 2018n, 1 February; Čongradin and Stojanović 2018, in Danas, 27 February; Stojanović 2018a, in Danas, 10 May; Danas 2018d, 11 June; Stojanović 2018b, in Danas, 20 December).

However, this model has been articulated as not very beneficial for Serbia, as indicated earlier. For instance, Dačić claimed that,

those who propagate this idea do not speak of a potential re-unification of Kosovo and Serbia [which was the case with the two Germanys], but about Serbia recognizing [Kosovo's] unilateral declaration of independence. They are only interested in us recognizing Kosovo's international subjectivity, in giving them a chair at the UN, but we want a permanent solution, not to be guessing around what could happen after our recognition. That is absolutely unacceptable to us (Danas 2018b, 22 January).

He added that there are also international constraints when assessing the adoption of this model, since “it would not only be a fairytale, but a mirage, for us to suggest to Russia to let Kosovo join the UN and for them to vote for it” (ibid.). This only illustrates how complex the international recognition of Kosovo is, since the discourse is not only (re)produced by Serbia and Kosovo, but many other subjects such as the EU, individual member states, the UN Security Council, the so-called Troika group (EU, USA and Russia), and the so-called Quint states (USA, UK, France, Italy and Germany). The latter two were part of the former Contact Group mediating the UN talks on the status of Kosovo in Vienna, prior to Kosovo's declaration of independence (see Weller 2008), which only illustrates the legacies of power of certain countries over these discourses of international and mutual recognition, and why they are still involved in the negotiation process on the margins of the official Brussels dialogue. In this context, *Danas* has frequently reported that “diplomatic circles” advocate the model of two Germanys as the best and most realistic model upon which a final agreement between Belgrade and Pristina could be based (Stojanović 2018a, in *Danas* 10 May; Stojanović 2018b, in *Danas*, 20 December).

However, as mentioned above, for Serbia, the model of two Germanys essentially means something else: if Serbia recognized Kosovo *de facto*, but not *de jure*, and granted Kosovo a seat at the UN, it would practically mean the same thing as recognition. Additionally, it would eliminate any advantage that Serbia might have in the Brussels dialogue to pursue its interests: be it in the full establishment of the A/CSM or gaining something in territorial terms. It is because of this that Serbian hegemonic actors dislike this model, as evident in Vučić's statement (Dnevnik 2, 18.02.2018, 04:29): “Be it formal or informal, be it the model of two Germanys or not, in which they [Kosovo] could join all international institutions and leave us as the only ones who would not recognize them formally – well, it all ends up being the same [as recognizing Kosovo's independence].”

Instead of “conforming” to the internationally advocated model mentioned above, within the discourse of the Serbian Government, and primarily Vučić, the signifier “compromise” takes the role of stabilizing the entire discourse on negotiations with Pristina. Only through compromise could Serbia end up in a situation in which it does not simply (formally or informally) recognize Kosovo, but actually gets something in return for this “sacrifice”. What this would entail in practice is manifold: sometimes it is “*razgraničenje*”, sometimes “partition”, and sometimes “exchange of

territories”. Whatever it may be, it is something *different* than what “many in the world would want to see, [namely] their own will and their own decisions [being implemented]”, as Vučić claimed (Dnevnik 2, 04.05.2018, 00:30). In connection to this, Vučić (Dnevnik 2, 18.02.2018, 04:00) stated:

In order for [a final] agreement to be reached, we have to come to a compromise solution, and not a solution where you would say ‘Serbia must recognize Kosovo’s independence because we like it so’, and in return ‘we will guarantee Serbia the safety of their monks and nuns in the Serbian monasteries [in Kosovo].’ And otherwise, you would do what? Burn the Serbian monasteries down, like you did in 2004? [...] If we do not understand [...] that we have to make compromises, that we have to deal with certain things – and I tell you this at a moment when I should not and when I will lose political points – I know that [Kosovo] is the most important question that awaits Serbia, this year, next year and all years to come. If we do not do anything, we will drown ourselves in our own past.

By articulating Serbia’s dealing with the Kosovo issue, primarily as an issue “of the past”, Vučić is constituting his compromise solution as part of a progression towards a (more prosperous) future. A compromise also constitutes Serbia as a powerful actor, one that would not only accept everything offered by international actors or the Kosovo authorities, but one that takes its destiny into its own hands. To do this, to reach the compromise, Serbia must renounce its past approach to dealing with the Kosovo issue, which will metaphorically drown her if she does not act.

Similarly, when Vučić visited the Government in Vienna in February 2018, he was asked about the legally-binding agreement and what it would entail, to which he responded that many ideas were on the table, such as the model of two Germanys, which some countries propagate, while other countries propagate the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina even before reaching a final agreement. He added (Dnevnik 2, 01.02.2018, 04:00):

I am always in favor of not running away from solutions. I am always in favor of not maintaining a frozen conflict. I am in favor of not having problems and not leaving those problems to our children to solve in the coming 100 years. I know this is something no one likes to hear, but it is a perspective towards the future, and it is the responsible thing to do. Whether we succeed in this depends not only on us. It takes two to tango, and others need to understand that they have to compromise as well, not just Serbia.

In parallel to articulating the conflict between Serbs and Albanians as historical, which was analyzed earlier in the chapter, Vučić also articulates the solution to this conflict as a future prospect, under the condition that a compromise is reached within and outside of the Serbian political collective. A compromise that is *not* about maintaining a frozen conflict, but about finding *solutions*, actively dealing with the Kosovo question and coming up with concrete examples on how to achieve that. Additionally, by claiming that a compromise might be achieved *before* a potential legally-binding agreement based on the model of two Germanys, Vučić is suggesting that other solutions might take its place (such as the previously mentioned *razgraničenje*, partition, or exchange of territories). All these particular solutions concern *territory*. While in 2013, the central nodal point of the

community discourse was the people, in 2018 primarily, it was territory. Territorial contestation is what underpins the idea of a final compromise, precisely because these issues are being contested in the debates – the establishment of the A/CSM as a way of finally solving the conflict is articulated as impossible and thus lies beyond the horizon of meanings. Often, Kosovo politicians as well as parts of the “international community” are held responsible for this situation and are blamed for not even considering implementing it the way it was agreed upon in 2013 and primarily 2015. This was evident when the local governments in Kosovo led by Srpska lista announced that they would leave the Kosovo Government and form the Community under their own terms, since Pristina has not fulfilled their obligation to form the Community for five years (Dnevnik 2, 27.03.2018). Previously, both Vučić and Dačić have expressed their skepticism regarding Pristina’s willingness to implement the A/CSM, with Vučić claiming that he is “certain that this [the establishment of the A/CSM] is a lost cause” (Dnevnik 2, 14.03.2018, 04:20), and Dačić claiming that Serbia is “being lied to by the international community” and that they are “faking” their pressure on Kosovo to establish the A/CSM (Dnevnik 2, 09.03.2018, 03:28).

Having been declared a “lost cause” and something that might never be realized (an impossible object) – at least not in the manner the Serbian Government envisioned it, namely with executive powers – the A/CSM becomes disarticulated as an empty signifier in the partition discourse of 2017 and 2018 and is instead replaced by “compromise” as mentioned above, which is underpinned by territorial contestation. Why a compromise would be more desirable than a frozen conflict, Vučić explained through *economy* and demography: in a few years, there will be fewer than five million Serbs left, which will also mean uncertainty and the inability to attract investments (Dnevnik 2, 20.07.2018, 03:00). By shifting the focus away from the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, which is incarnated in the signifier “frozen conflict” (or keeping the status-quo), to a compromise, Vučić is in a counter-hegemonic move trying to institute a different political project than the one of the previous few years: one which would be characterized by economic progress and demographic recovery through said progress. Similarly, Ana Brnabić, the Prime Minister of Serbia, has claimed that the crucial question for Serbia will be (Dnevnik 2, 16.08.2018, 02:10)

whether we will promote outdated ideas that have been overcome by Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence – which the most powerful countries in the world consider to be a done deal – or whether we will show maturity and seek a compromise within the realm of what is possible. This [question] will directly influence what our future will be and how young generations will grow up: nurtured by myths of the past or by creating a future tailored to each citizen.

This vision of the future, which is based on renouncing the past and the myths that underpin it, as well as “outdated” claims that the entire Kosovo is Serbia/Serbian, is argued to be the responsible choice, since it will ensure that future generations grow up in prosperity. Drawing such lines

between discourses “of the past”, among which is the “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, and imaginized futures in which all obstacles are overcome for the betterment of society rely on the production of myths. This utopian vision of the future is entirely based on the generation of a new myth – reaching a final compromise through partition which will enable the Serbian nation to move forward and reinvent itself. This is also evident in the priorities articulated by the Government in 2018, compared to 2013. While the priority in 2013 (in terms of Kosovo) was to protect the people, that is the Serb community in Kosovo, and to enable them a secure life, to uphold the constitutional order, and maintain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia (as it was discussed in the analysis of the resolutions and platforms of the Government in Chapter 5), in 2018, Vučić articulates new priorities (Dnevnik 2, 16.08.2018, 05:28):

Our first goal is to preserve peace and stability, and that means the future for our children. [...] Goal number two is to protect our state interests, both territorial and property rights, and all other interests of the state of Serbia. [...] And number three is to protect the rights of our people, our people in Kosovo, their safety, security, to guarantee and ensure this to them, and that their children, the children of our people, our Serbs [in Kosovo], can attend school undisturbed, to go to the cinemas, to go out for walks.

With these new priorities, the order has changed: the vision of a peaceful and stable future envisioned by Vučić (if Serbia manages to solve the Kosovo question) takes priority, followed by Serbian state and national interests. The latter is not articulated as preserving “territorial integrity” or “sovereignty” of Serbia, which was the cornerstone of the 2013 politics towards Kosovo, but as “protecting territorial interests” and “property rights”. Preserving integrity and protecting territorial interests are two different things: while the former presupposes the protection of the status quo, the latter might point to the (future) fulfillment of territorial interests regardless of preserving territorial integrity. It is anchored around property rights, which can be the rights of the Serbian state to claim the medieval Orthodox heritage in Kosovo as Serbian, but it can also refer to the natural resources and state-owned and state-run enterprises in Kosovo, which are located in the North, Trepča and Gazivode to name a few. That is, the hegemonic nationalizing project of the Serbian state, which aims to consolidate its borders and incorporate certain territories into its “core” state is what characterizes the Serbian politics about Kosovo in 2018. It is about material gain. Only named as a third priority is the protection and preservation of the Serb community in Kosovo, which was the first priority in the community discourse of 2013, acting as its nodal point. In a nutshell, territory and all that goes with “protecting” or “preserving” it acts as a nodal point of the partition discourse, decentering the dominant “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse that has been constitutive of the politics of the Brussels agreement from 2013.

In the same interview, when Vučić was asked how Serbia could achieve these goals, Vučić responded:

Can we always keep telling ourselves that everything is ours, albeit knowing very well that we are not telling ourselves the truth? Because, you know, the definition of a state is that it has three basic elements: *territory*, *population* and a *monopoly on violence*, that is, police and military. And which of these three elements do we have in our hands in Kosovo and Metohija? Except in some parts of Kosovo and Metohija, in which we have population on our side – we have nothing else on our side. [...] Only in the North, where we have 98 percent of the population, we have *something*. In the South, we have three to four percent of the total population (Dnevnik 2, 16.08.2018, 06:41, emphasis added).

Firstly, this statement puts into question the entire “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, since Vučić claims that saying that Kosovo is Serbia is actually a lie. The only area where this claim might be true is Northern Kosovo, which comes to embody the entire claim. Northern Kosovo thus represents an area to which all nationalizing measures of the Serbian state should be directed. Secondly, by naming the three elements that make up a state in the classic Westphalian sense, Vučić is articulating these elements as the nodal points of Serbian statehood in Kosovo, of which only one is realized in the North, while the rest was lost long ago. By attributing the North such great importance in terms of possibly preserving Serbian statehood in Kosovo, this area becomes a politically contested category, one over which is negotiated within the Brussels dialogue as a wider contact zone. Although a special status for Northern Kosovo or potentially an exchange of territories between Northern Kosovo and the Presevo valley was never officially discussed in Brussels, a “bilateral” agreement between Serbia and Kosovo was, which was not supposed to be used as a precedent for other cases in the world (Dnevnik 2, 27.08.2018, 03:48). Several actors from EU institutions and EU member states have been discussing the issue of borders, with many saying that if the two parties reach an agreement (including borders), they would not object to it. This compromise agreement obviously differs from the mere implementation of the Brussels agreement and its most important provision for Serbia – the establishment of the A/CSM. By mid-2018, the implementation of the A/CSM was almost entirely substituted by the pursuit of a compromise solution, as I mentioned earlier in Vučić’s and Dačić’s statement that it was a lost cause. In terms of the international and EU support for a compromise solution, in July 2018, Serbia reportedly received its support from the PM of France Macron to pursue it (Dnevnik 2, 17.07.2018, 05:44), although it was never mentioned what “it” entailed until Vučić’s articulation of *razgraničenje* on 9 August 2018 (Danas 2018t, 9 August). By claiming that he advocates *razgraničenje* “with the Albanians” because of “having a territory of which nobody knows whom it belongs to is always a source of potential conflicts and many problems” (ibid.; Dnevnik 2, 09.08.2018, 01:58), Vučić defines his idea only vaguely. However, it implies some kind of “re-bordering” of the region in order to determine what is whose, based on ethnic affiliation by tying territory to its population. Therefore, both partition of Northern Kosovo and exchange of territories/land-swap between Northern Kosovo and Presevo valley came to represent the idea of *razgraničenje*, because they both imply a territorial division between Serbs and Albanians.

Something similar happened during the Alpbach Forum in the end of August 2018, when Vučić and Thaçi met with Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, and the Austrian PM, Sebastian Kurz, to discuss, what Vučić later called, “the common denominator of a compromise solution” (Dnevnik 2, 18.07.2018, 00:37; see also Dnevnik 2, 10.09.2018) and Thaçi called a “peace agreement” (Dnevnik 2, 26.08.2018, 03:24). Namely, after the meeting mediated by Kurz and Hahn, the Austrian president Alexander Van der Bellen said he witnessed a historic moment due to the constructive tone of Vučić and Thaçi (ibid., 03:52), and the EU Commission issued a statement that Belgrade and Pristina should be given room to reach an agreement (Dnevnik 2, 27.08.2018). The spokesperson of Mogherini, the chief mediator of the dialogue, claimed that “we are currently working on a sustainable and realistic solution in line with international law. The parties are currently defining common ground for a mutual agreement. They have already said publicly what they see as the main elements, but the EU as a mediator will not comment on how we see some elements of a potential agreement” (Dnevnik 2, 27.08.2018, 03:10). What was said publicly up to that point were the ideas of partition, *razgraničenje*, exchange of territories/land-swap and demarcation, all of which might have been on the table at some point on the margins of the negotiations in Brussels. What they all have in common is some kind of re-bordering of the territories of Serbia and/or Kosovo, primarily centered on Northern Kosovo and the Presevo valley.

To the question why Northern Kosovo is the most important issue for Serbia in this entire process, Vučić added the following statement, which I will give in full, due to its explanatory potential (ibid., 13:12, italics added):

I cannot say that it is the most important, the most important are the lives and the safety of our people, wherever they may live in Kosovo and Metohija, but in terms of territory, Northern Kosovo – and this is no secret whatsoever – of course it is important. We are talking about 1000 square kilometers. But it is not a question of kilometers or square meters, it is also a question of the *strategic importance of the territory*, it is also a question of the people who live there, 43-44,000 people live there. However, you also have Kopaonik, which today belongs half to us, and the other half does not, which people do not know about. There you have Gazivode, which is of strategic importance, both for Serbia and for Kosovo and Metohija as a whole. You also have Valač, which is also in the North, you have Banjska and Sokolica [monasteries] of course, but you also have ore, you have Trepča, and you have a very significant geostrategic position of Northern Kosovo, which I would not discuss further. But this does not mean that it [Northern Kosovo] is more important to us than Kosovo-Pomoravlje, or Gračanica, or any other part. For each of our people we will fight and win if we can. Everything else would be a disaster, a disaster for us.

This statement illustrates perfectly how and why Northern Kosovo becomes so politically contested, as mentioned previously. Even though it might seem that the people still play a central role in the discourse of preserving Kosovo in 2018, they only play a central role because they can anchor Serbia’s *territorial* claim to Kosovo in terms of the North and its geo-strategic position and

various economic and natural resources. Northern Kosovo is also economized, its material importance overemphasized. It not only comes to be articulated as the only area where Serbia has a majority Serb population in place (first element of statehood as articulated by Vučić), but also as an area where territorial consolidation (or its incorporation into the core state) might still be possible, partly due to its proximity with Kopaonik and the Serbian border, the territory's importance in terms of harboring valuable natural resources and key infrastructure. This means that the claim to having Serb people live in this territory serves to consolidate the claim to this very territory – making the people a subordinate category to the category of territory, at least in terms of Northern Kosovo. While in the South, the people still may seem to play a valuable role in anchoring Serbia's symbolic claim to entire Kosovo (Kosovo as a space), the hegemonic claim to Kosovo as a physical place is now downscaled (through synecdoche, *pars pro toto*) to include only Northern Kosovo. In terms of nationalizing Serbia's claim to Kosovo, that is expanding the hegemonic order, only Northern Kosovo is a political category, not Southern Kosovo. The South is mainly attached to the previously dominant discourse on community, which lost its momentum in 2018 and with the lack of the A/CSM's implementation. The transposition of Serbia's claim to Kosovo occurs from a symbolic realm ("our Kosovo" in its entirety) to the physical, material realm ("our Kosovo" as Northern Kosovo), since also the materiality of Kosovo, its specific makeup, lends itself to be articulated as such.

As previously mentioned, the economization of the Kosovo question is a steppingstone towards realizing Vučić's counter-hegemonic project. By articulating Kosovo as an obstacle towards economic prosperity, the current political practice towards Kosovo becomes something to be overcome or dealt with. Crucial for this is reaching a compromise solution. For instance, Vučić explicitly articulates reaching a compromise and the betterment of economy as two interdependent issues, by saying (Dnevnik 2, 28.02.2018, 03:13):

I am sure that, if we reached some kind of a compromise with the Albanians, one which we would be equally satisfied with, or equally dissatisfied with, our trade exchange with Germany would reach seven or eight billion. That would mean that we would lower unemployment by five percent in a year, a year and a half. That would mean that our salaries would be much higher. I am talking about net salaries; they would reach 500 EUR by the beginning of next year without any problems.

Part of this vision of a better future for Serbia is substituting "old" narratives around Kosovo with economic prosperity, primarily as part of Serbia's EU integration process within which it could reach a compromise with the Albanians. In a nutshell, the central elements of the fantasy (new vision) of Serbia's future anchored around the myth of a final compromise are: downscaling Serbia's hegemonic territorial claim to only Northern Kosovo, substituting the Brussels agreement with a compromise solution, articulating Kosovo (or the previous political practice towards it) as

an obstacle to realizing an economically prosperous future for Serbia, an obstacle that can be overcome by de-mythologizing and de-emotionalizing the Kosovo question.

What forms the bedrock of this new project's logic of articulation is the re-drawing of political frontiers between us and them, whereby "us" is comprised of everyone who supports Vučić's vision, and "them" of everyone who opposes it. This is illustrated by Vučić's claim that "there is no difference" between "those who are in favor of an independent Kosovo as a whole, and those who think that we should still propagate tales from the time of Dušan's Tsardom" (Dnevnik 2, 16.08.2018, 12:13). By creating a chain of equivalence between anyone who might be opposing Vučić's proposal for a compromise (which is a heterogeneous group, comprised of opposition parties, intellectuals, even members of Vučić's own party, but also some members of the so-called international community and Kosovo's political spectrum), and anyone who is supporting Kosovo as an independent state in its current borders (articulated as Albanians as a people as well as powerful Western nations sponsoring Kosovo's independence), Vučić is articulating a political "us" around himself as a political leader and the project he represents. As part of this self-articulation, Vučić acts as an empty signifier that drives this entire counter-hegemonic project further, able to unify and accommodate a range of demands: a solution for the Kosovo question, a better future for Serbia and its offspring, economic prosperity, and a better position for Serbia in terms of international relations with great powers etc. Illustrative of this argument that Vučić is constituted in this discourse as an empty signifier is the promise of the North Kosovo leaders that they would support any solution offered by Vučić. Hence, Rakić, the Mayor of North Mitrovica, claimed that "we do not know what the compromise solution is, but we conveyed a message to President Aleksandar Vučić that he has our absolute support", claiming that they would back any solution offered by him (Danas 2018k, 25 July). The trust is not articulated as being in the Serbian Government, but in Vučić as a leader. Even though no specific solution is articulated (as mentioned, *razgraničenje* can mean a variety of things), the range of possible signifiers that could take the place of representing a solution (the hailed "final compromise") is bound by one common thing, and that is Vučić as a political figure who will find the best possible solution. The demand that Vučić places on its political subjects is not to trust in an actual plan, but to trust in him and his ability to solve the issue in the best possible manner.

I argue that the "founding moment" of Vučić's new vision of Serbia's future, (re-)constituting him as the empty signifier of this entire political project, is Vučić's speech in North Mitrovica, which the media has called "Vučić's Gazimestan", as mentioned earlier in this chapter. This speech illustrates perfectly the main elements of his new counter-hegemonic project in terms of Kosovo: the de-mythologization of Serbian politics concerning Kosovo, de-emotionalization/rationalization of the Kosovo question, economization of Serbia's practice about

Kosovo, all of which are anchored around the nodal point of “final compromise” as a myth representing the unattainable social “fullness” of the Serbian political collective. In this speech, Vučić claimed that “myths, dreams and premonitions are not my job, nor is my job a lunatic vision of Kosovo without Albanians, or even worse – without Serbs. Reality is my job” (Predsednik Republike Srbije 2018), which re-constituted him and his political vision as rational, realistic and responsible, in a sharp break with previous political practice which was anchored around myths, dreams and premonitions. As an embodiment of this previous political practice, Vučić names Milošević as “a great leader”, but one whose politics failed because “our wishes were not realistic, and we neglected and underestimated the interests and aspirations of other peoples [*drugib naroda*], which is why we paid the highest and most serious price” (ibid.). In this moment, Vučić is articulating himself as another great leader who is able to accommodate realistic expectations and take into account the aspirations of Albanians as well in seeking a final compromise. His vision might even be able to transform what he has articulated as a “historical” conflict between Serbs and Albanians as peoples, into a utopian vision in which Serbs and Albanians respect each other and maintain peace:

I want ideas for a better future, how to protect our own country, our institutions, how to protect peace and build bridges of trust between us and the Albanians, so that we can strive towards an agreement even if we know that it might be impossible to have – after centuries of wars and conflicts – centuries of decent, rational and, why not, friendly relations with the Albanians (ibid.).

While peace and friendship between Serbs and Albanians have not yet been reached, they will be reached as part of his vision of Serbia’s future. All issues that are articulated as currently unattainable will be reached once a compromise solution is realized as part of his new vision, allowing for a fantasy of full constitution of Serb identity. To be able to build bridges of trust, Serbia needs to get “big” again, but not in the sense of the idea of Greater Serbia dominant during the 1990s:

Today, without spilling a drop of blood, we are getting bigger, because today, after many years, Serbia is working hard, not fighting with anyone, because it invests in life, and does not throw resources around – because our children are growing up, we are not burying them like we did after the bombing [of 1999], because we are relying on knowledge, work, not on guns. [...] My intention is for Serbia to be big, but not to conquer the Balkans and the world, but to conquer the future (ibid.).

By re-appropriating a common conception from the 1990s (that of Greater Serbia), one that characterized Milošević’s rule and its politics about Kosovo which resulted in war and Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence, Vučić is re-articulating his politics as part of his new vision as a break with previous practices. Instead of pursuing the physical ownership of entire Kosovo, which he calls mythical and unrealistic, Vučić is pursuing physical ownership of Northern Kosovo

as its most important part. The place he chose to give his speech in testifies to the performance of Northern Kosovo as an important and symbolically significant site. Through his speech in North Mitrovica and his visit to Northern Kosovo in September 2018, Northern Kosovo is *performed* as the most important part of Kosovo for Serbia, one which comes to embody Serbia's entire claim to it. In this performative move, Serbia's hegemonic claim is once again transposed from a symbolic into a physical realm, and from a historic into the present moment, *when* certain things can be achieved, such as reaching a final compromise. Through these moves on the discursive field Vučić as a leader and his vision are able to accommodate a range of different, sometimes conflicting demands, such as claiming that South Kosovo is equally important as North Kosovo (two demands that are *practiced* entirely differently). Even though the partition project promises to deliver almost a utopian vision of Serbia's future and is presented as a progressive project in terms of transforming Serb-Albanian relations and delivering economic betterment, it is deeply antagonistic. Partition managed to polarize the political field in Serbia around affiliations with the leader and his party politics, but also managed to antagonize Serb-Albanian relations further, as explained in subchapters 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5.

And while Vučić's vision has not been instituted to date (December 2020), at the time of exploring and contesting different options on how to solve the Belgrade-Pristina dispute, it gained significant traction not only within Serbia, but also abroad – gaining US support as one of its more visible traits. The realization of this project failed primarily due to Serbia's successful blocking of Kosovo from becoming a member of Interpol in November 2018, upon which Kosovo imposed a 100 percent import tariff on all goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This ultimately put a stop to the entire Brussels dialogue, which did not resume until the summer of 2020. Ultimately, the idea of *razgraničenje* is not vanished from the public discourse in Serbia yet, partly because Vučić as a political leader embodies it and, consequently, propagates it, even though not as vocally as in 2018. Due to current developments in Serbia in terms of a shrinkage of space for expressing alternatively voiced political messages to those propagated by the Serbian Government, a potential solution that might be reached sometime in the near future will likely be a solution monopolized by Vučić. As the polarization of the political discourse in Serbia continues, any solution might also be articulated following a populist logic as seen in 2018, that is, sharply polarizing the political field along the lines of who supports Vučić's visions and who opposes it. However, the concrete signifiers taking up the space of representing the possible final agreement (be it legally-binding agreement based on the model of two Germanys, be it the final implementation of the A/CSM, be it a re-bordering of the region and so on) still remain to be seen.

7 Conclusion

Having discussed the Serbian Government's attempt to find common ground with Kosovo Albanians as part of the Brussels agreement and the idea of sharing Kosovo, as well as their attempt to re-articulate old animosities between Serbs and Albanians through re-introducing the partition idea, it is necessary to conclude with how such a shift was possible and answer why it occurred. Perhaps one of the more important reasons why the boarder-changing discourse gained such traction is the stagnant implementation of the Brussels agreement and generally a lack of tangible results from Serbia's EU integration process. EU membership also became increasingly unattractive due to the EU experiencing a few crises, such as Brexit. The above not only concerns the lack of implementation of the A/CSM (although this is a major reason), but also the ever more visible authoritarian-style rule in Serbia since Vučić consolidated his power, which in turn halted EU-related reform, such as ensuring a more impartial judiciary, media freedom etc. As explained, partition was constitutive of a political community-building process around support for Vučić's ideas of a compromise, which came to be articulated as *razgraničenje*.

Secondly, perhaps partition was the ultimate goal of the dialogue for the Serbian side from the beginning, as we have seen in Dačić's attempt to re-introduce it in 2013, and all the previous prominent supporters of that idea in Serbia, such as Zoran Đinđić or Dobrica Ćosić. It was not a new idea and since it was previously part of the public discourse on possible solutions to the Kosovo question, it was a readily available option, perhaps more easily susceptible to gaining public support. Additionally, since the technical aspects of the dialogue proved always to be entangled with the political aspects, an all-in-one solution that would encompass both was favored. The guiding reasoning was that if Kosovo had been partitioned, Serbia would most likely have recognized Kosovo as an independent state and thus, the dialogue would no longer be necessary.

Thirdly, there is also a transnational aspect to seeking solutions, as we have seen in the way different local and transnational actors' claims entangle in the contact zone. Since Donald Trump assumed office, there was a visible distancing from the foreign policies of the EU and EU-member states, not the least in terms of how to solve the Belgrade-Pristina dispute. As mentioned before, the Trump administration's National Security Adviser John Bolton openly supported the correction of borders between Serbia and Kosovo, and with the increasing support of the international community (with Russia and China joining), the idea increasingly gained momentum.

What this thesis has argued is the importance of discourse for politics, in which an understanding of politics was put forward that does not advocate for a separation between "talking" and "acting" or understands speech as merely one of many social practices. On the contrary – the social is

primarily discursive, and this lens guides the understanding of materiality and affectivity in my thesis. By taking a holistic approach to analysis that looks at all three elements – language, materiality and affectivity – as discursive, I was able to focus on a narrow research question and look at it from three angles.

This thesis has primarily asked how the Serbian Government under the leadership of the SNS has re-articulated its symbolic, physical, and affective claim to Kosovo within the Brussels dialogue mainly by paying attention to the politicization of already sedimented meanings, such as the Kosovo imaginary that structures the Government's political practice towards Kosovo. I attempted to answer my initial question by pointing to the shift in meaning-making around Kosovo in relation to the Brussels agreement that has occurred in 2018, whereby Vučić comes to embody an entire counter-hegemonic project of partitioning Kosovo. This project's main elements are about demythologizing, rationalizing and economizing the Kosovo issue, by seeking a compromise instead of readily available solutions such as the “two Germanys”. I argued that to understand how sedimented practices change, we need to pay attention to the notion of myth, understood both as an ontological concept and an analytical/empirical one. Ontologically, I have argued for a conception of myth based on structure/spatialization (“new objectivity”) and change/temporality (“empty signifier”). I have also argued for an analytical division between the Kosovo imaginary, that structures the hegemonic “Kosovo is Serbia” discourse, and the Vučić-driven counter-hegemonic project in which Kosovo is articulated as an obstacle towards Serbia's future progress towards EU membership. Thus, I have operationalized in my analysis the theoretical categories that are necessary for understanding myths, such as fantasy, enjoyment (*jouissance*), empty signifiers, as well as structurally illuminated the form of myths and how they are embedded in larger discursive-material-affective structures.

I have demonstrated that the Brussels dialogue understood as a contact zone can help us flesh out the particular opportunities and constraints for action that the SNS might have had in re-articulating their claim to Kosovo. These opportunities and constraints have a transnational underpinning, since any solution to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute would need to be addressed and accepted in the international arena, having implications for the practice of legal principles such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination. In my analysis, I have also demonstrated how these transnational underpinnings work, such as the various compromise solutions offered by the international community. I have also demonstrated how the same solutions can be subverted by the SNS (such as the model of “two Germanys”) in their quest to find what they would deem the best possible solution, such as *razgraničenje*.

Having firstly explained why myths' temporal understanding is important for post-foundational theory on myth in general (as being necessary for meaning-making), and my case study in particular, I have conducted my analysis in two steps. The first step was to illuminate how the first myth, the Brussels dialogue, has managed to suture the dislocated "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse by concealing the dislocation, with the Serbian Government performing the dislocated structure as not dislocated at all (which I have recognized as a metaphor). This was achieved through re-articulating Serbia's claim from "Kosovo in Serbia" to "Serbia in Kosovo" and performing this claim through institutional integration in Kosovo (such as the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities), through the institutional framework in Serbia (such as the Constitution) and through the Serb community in Kosovo (such as the Srpska lista). These practices are part of the community discourse as a larger context of contesting meanings, which emphasized the sharing of the territory (place) of Kosovo with Kosovo Albanians and perpetuated at times an agonistic constitution of Kosovo Albanians as a community that has a right to live and stay in Kosovo, while also acknowledging that Kosovo has a certain international subjectivity. It is highlighted here that the Brussels dialogue had a transformative potential.

The second step was to illuminate why the Brussels agreement's main component for the Serbian side, the A/CSM, was never implemented and how that prompted a re-articulation of the claim to Kosovo again, this time from community to partition. While the myth of the Brussels agreement anchored the community discourse, the myth of partition anchored a counter-hegemonic project of transposing the claim to Kosovo from a symbolic/metaphysical realm into a physical/material realm, territorializing the Kosovo issue. Partition encompassed a re-articulation of the claim to Kosovo as a whole to the claim to only one of its parts, namely Northern Kosovo (which I have recognized as a synecdoche). This had a de-structuring effect on the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, by which partition did not aim to conceal the dislocation but displace the dislocated discourse with an alternative one altogether (which I have recognized as a paradigmatic substitution). This counter-hegemonic project was underpinned by a different fantasy than the "Kosovo is Serbia" discourse, namely that of economic progress and stability as part of the EU, which could only be achieved if Serbia solved the Kosovo issue. This chapter has demonstrated how the temporality of myth works to bridge past articulations of the Kosovo myth, the Kosovo social imaginary and the idea of partition through territoriality. It has also demonstrated that myths can ground other-than-national collectives, such as political communities built around the leader.

7.1 Main Contributions and Reliability of Results

Firstly, this thesis has made a significant theoretical contribution to the post-foundational literature on myth, anchored in a Laclaudian and psychoanalytic understanding. I have emphasized and

elaborated on the temporal aspect of myth, which has implications for the understanding of myth as constitutive of meaning-making per se. This perspective has been missing from post-foundational literature on this subject, which has emphasized the spatial aspect. I have bridged this gap by relying on Laclaudian discourse theory and Stavrakakian psychoanalysis, which allowed me to elaborate further on temporality through fantasies, enjoyment (*jouissance*), *objets petit a* and bring them in a dialogue with discourse-theoretical concepts such as empty signifiers and affective investment as the force of discourse. This symbiosis of concepts explains how alternative discourses (in the form of myths as new objectivity and empty signifiers) grip subjects, offer them a space for affective investment of their demands, and the fulfillment of fantasies that the hegemonic order has not delivered on.

Secondly, the combination of methodological frameworks that I used in my empirical analysis, can be claimed as a contribution as well. I have brought the three post-Laclaudian methods of analyzing discourse together: the psychoanalytically inspired analysis of fantasy that draws from traditional Essex school discourse analysis, the Brussels school and the Helsinki school. I did so by borrowing concepts from each and looking at both the form and the force of discourse, language, materiality and affectivity. This has allowed me to pay attention to the modes in which the categories of discourse, materiality and affectivity intersect, which could be used as a benchmark for other studies that aim to explore myths as constitutive of meaning-making. The framework elaborated in Chapter 3 can even be used outside of the scope of analyzing myths, whenever a research design aims to tackle the intersecting nature of language, materiality and affectivity. Thus, it contributes to further developing post-Laclaudian methodology by consolidating previously disparate frameworks and sensitizing additional concepts from cultural studies, such as structures of feeling or politics and stickiness of emotions. The combination of a Butlerian, Laclaudian and a Žižekian perspective on discourse was attempted in 2000 with the book *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, edited by Butler, Laclau and Žižek, which resulted in Laclau and Žižek not speaking to one another. Perhaps this study is also an attempt to revive the dialogue between performativity theory (underpinned by materiality), discourse theory and psychoanalysis, through particular attention to the points in which they converge, rather than diverge. Both the ontological framework and the empirical analysis of this thesis relate to the second contribution I have mentioned in the introduction (see subchapter 1.2).

Thirdly, I have made an empirical contribution as well, particularly in the field of Southeast European area studies, since this type of discursive-material-affective analysis has not been applied to the case study of Serbian-Kosovar relations. This aspect relates to the first and third contributions I mentioned in the introduction (see also subchapter 1.2), namely on the ontology of myths and the conceptualization of the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone. This perspective is

important because it allows us to move away from discussions of the “Kosovo myth”, to discussions of myths more generally and how they sustain different projects that aim to become realized. It is a macro-discursive analysis, whereby discourse analysis of this type of question has so far only occurred through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA). As CDA distinguishes between discursive and other social practices, it offers a limited and detail-oriented approach to analysis. While the macro-level approach might not be as detailed, it allows for a holistic analysis of a social phenomenon, in which both materiality and affectivity can be brought together through a discourse analysis, since this approach does not distinguish between discursive and other social practices. Materiality as well as affectivity inevitably underlie any discursive articulation (creating a “holy trinity” for discourse-theoretically inspired analysis). Additionally, understanding the Brussels dialogue through the lens of a contact zone allowed me to focus on the opportunities and constraints it offered to certain members of the SNS (and the Serbian Government more generally) as a protagonist in re-articulating the meaning of Kosovo in Serbia, which is part of a growing literature and has implications for future studies of the politics of Serbia. It discusses the transforming nature of entrenched discourses and points to the fact that even the most sedimented discourses are only contingently grounded.

As for the reliability of obtained results, it was ensured by relying on a multitude of sources, ranging from government and parliamentary documents, agreements signed (or initialed) between Serbia and Kosovo, international resolutions, to media texts portraying the most significant points of debate and the subjects behind such articulations. They are sufficient to answer my primary research questions, which is to look at the ways the Serbian Government has re-articulated its claim to Kosovo discursively, materially and affectively. Had I brought in additional sources, especially from the media landscape, I do not expect the results to have changed, since overall, there was a high degree of congruence between the messages carried by different outlets. Since I have only relied on direct statements issued by the Government representatives, a potentially ideologically colored portrayal of events by these outlets can only be mirrored in the choice of messages and statements they want to transmit or generate through interviews. This is why I have also relied on two ideologically different media outlets, one pro- and one anti-regime. Thus, I maintained a critical position towards my empirical material and attempted to strike a balance between using these ideologically colored outlets. However, this thesis does not claim to be objective, nor that the results of a discourse analysis can be objective. As mentioned in subchapter 3.4, discourse theoretical analysis relies on internal validity and the aim is not to generate “objectively valid” knowledge according to external parameters, but to critically scrutinize and reflect on the internal conditions under which the data was selected and generated and the empirical results emerged. The selected theoretical and empirical framework also enhances a critical position, since I have been

transparent about how and why I selected certain sensitizing concepts and how I operationalized them in the analysis, as well as how I systematized the vast material available in my corpus through content analysis and coding.

7.2 Significance and Limitations of Research

The significance of this thesis can be summarized on three levels. The first level relates to the theoretical contribution of the thesis. I could demonstrate how to conceptualize myths as both an ontological and ontic category, by firstly exploring what current theoretical elaborations were missing and then filling out those gaps with my borrowing from other strands of literature, such as psychoanalysis and affect theory. What followed from this was also an ontic conception of the category of myth, which I utilized as the central signifiers of my empirical analysis, the Brussels agreement and the idea of partition.

The second level relates to opening avenues for further explorations of the nexus between discursivity, materiality and affectivity, not simply as a theoretical framework, but also as an empirical gaze into the case study material. Rather than analytically focusing on one or two of the three aspects (which is how this type of analysis is usually conducted), I have considered all three, and specifically related them to the category of myth.

Lastly, the third level relates to my case study, primarily conceptualizing the Brussels dialogue as a contact zone, which has had a significant upside in allowing me to focus on certain specific actors (protagonists) and the power-relations between them, revealing broader structures that these practices are embedded in (what I have termed discursive, material and affective structures). This is a valuable perspective because it is a middle way between analyzing subjects and structures, as well as structures, affectivities and materialities, illuminating the ways in which they are intrinsically tied together rather than separate. Hence, my empirical analysis focused rather on the synergies between these three aspects, than on differences, demonstrating this particular nexus in a specific empirical analysis.

Finally, let me discuss the limitations of my thesis, that is, of my research design. This primarily relates to the general methodological framework I have chosen to apply, which follows from my ontological framework. Through this lens, the analysis remains at a macro level, which inevitably means that some micro level details get lost in the analysis. That is, the analysis does not pay particular attention to phraseology or illuminates so-called discursive strategies, but instead focuses on the interconnectedness of materiality, which subjects' bodies are part of, their discursive production (which always has material effects) and the affective sustainment of entrenched structures. In this particular nexus and following from an understanding that all social practices are

discursive practices and that the social is only contingently grounded, we cannot speak of causal relationships in meaning-making. One articulation does not inevitably follow from any other articulation, but the task of this type of analysis is to illuminate how discursive elements are connected through articulations, practices and relations between them. That is, we are looking at the logic behind certain articulatory practices, not at whether the subjects that articulate them do so intentionally or not. Intentionality is a problematic category in discourse theory as well as psychoanalysis, because it relates to issues of “freedom” of subjects, subjects that can only be truly “free” under certain conditions. As the theoretical framework has elaborated, they can be free in the moments of disarticulating from dislocated structures, but bearing in mind that such freedom is always a momentary phenomenon. Thus, freedom is not a quality that the subject possesses, but an articulation that is not constrained by the weight of the dislocated structure it aims to destabilize. Consequently, even the introduction of the idea of partition is not an entirely voluntary act, since it is based on previously available discussions on partition that circulated in the Serbian political discourse since the 1990s. Thus, this type of analysis can leave some readers dissatisfied with the way the empirical material is discussed and with the conclusions drawn from it. However, all of this follows from the theoretical framework as defined in the beginning, which is always based on certain ontological assumptions that should not be in contradiction with the methods used in empirical analysis.

Had I adopted a more traditional way of doing discourse analysis, for instance critical discourse analysis, then I would not have had to distinguish between discursive and social practices. However, this would not have allowed me to take a holistic – ontological and ontic – look at my central theoretical and analytical category, which is myth. Only discourse theory offers an ontological conception of the category of discourse, which has several implications for my study. By maintaining an ontological impetus, I was able to further develop the theory on myths by distinguishing between its ontological and ontic dimension and elaborate how it emerges from dislocations, which enabled me to claim that myths are constitutive of meaning-making. We always need myths in political discourse to make sense of crises, to imaginize alternatives and to condense affective investment in those alternatives into an empty signifier, which drives any imaginized project further. Without myths, we would be unable to escape the constraints of our social world. Additionally, by adopting discourse theory, it allowed me to analyze rhetoric/language, materiality and affectivity through the single lens of discourse, which allowed me to develop my discursive-material-affective framework of analysis. This framework does not place a significant emphasis on the agency of individual actors, so had I not adopted discourse theory, the entire framework of this thesis would have had to rethink the motivations and strategies behind certain actions, which I do not believe should be the task of discourse analysis. Rather, I

wanted to point to general regimes of practice, to sedimented discourses (be it social imaginaries, structures of feeling, or institutions) and see how they are sustained, but also look into how they can be changed through re-articulations. This inevitably involves a change of the political frontiers that constitute a given discourse, which was also demonstrated in the analysis. However, what fell out of the scope of analysis was an emphasis on the agency and intentionality of subjects, since this framework recognizes that these are not clear-cut categories and sees agency as constrained.

7.3 Avenues for Future Research

The most obvious avenue for future research starts from the elaboration of my theoretical and methodological framework on myth. The understanding of myth as an ontological category has implications for further theoretical elaborations in discourse theory, in which for instance the role of tropology or rhetoric (and later writing by Laclau (2014)) can be further explored in connection to spatiality, temporality and the Imaginary that myths are part of. I have already suggested that myths act to either metaphorically conceal or paradigmatically substitute dislocated orders, so a theoretical discussion on the broader implications of a Laclaudian understanding of rhetoric, specifically related to the three Lacanian orders (the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary), would be necessary. Through this exploration we could better understand the connection between materiality, the Real, discursivity (the Symbolic) and affectivity and imaginization (the Imaginary), which this thesis could not devote greater attention to because of the specific emphasis on myths. However, the understanding of myth as positioned in a tension between the Imaginary and Symbolic order opens up this discussion, so the logical next step is to bring in the Real more broadly, not only in terms of dislocation and temporality.

On the other hand, the methodological framework with its emphasis on the nexus between discursivity, materiality and affectivity could potentially be applicable to other cases in the world, where dislocations are evident but the dislocated orders are still maintained through various practices. This could be the Israel-Palestine conflict, or the recently revived military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The conception of a political contact zone can also be applied onto other cases in the world, whenever political talks aimed at bringing disparate and opposing discursive-material-affective structures closer together are conducted. The emphasis on cultural conceptions of the Other and the need to re-articulate sedimented notions about the Other should be inscribed into any such negotiation, since if there is anything that this thesis has demonstrated, it is that the Other can only be re-articulated agonistically long term if talks can address sedimented narratives and structures.

Another avenue for future research that this thesis has opened is the implications of the polarization of the political landscape in Serbia, specifically with the SNS gaining even more power

with the most recent election in June 2020 that the majority of opposition parties have boycotted. The opposition as well as the EU have often criticized the current regime in Serbia in terms of how they address media freedom, political critique and free contestation of opposing ideas, corruption and nepotism, as well as addressing organized crime, which is seen as a contributing factor to the power and reach of the current regime instead of an opposing one. The discussions about the murder of Oliver Ivanović have demonstrated that, because the Kosovo authorities accused one of the crime leaders from Northern Kosovo of the murder, after which he fled into Serbia proper. It is speculated that he is protected by Vučić's regime. All these issues have implications for the democratization processes in Serbia, that is, the shrinking of democratic space for debate, as well as critique of the regime. This connection to democracy is not something I have focused on in the thesis per se, apart from mentioning Castaldo's (2020) work and problematizing how myths relate to community-building following a democratic, agonistic logic. This is something that could be expanded on in the future, specifically in connection with the SNS and their way of articulating the Kosovo question in relation to EU integration and compliance with the *acquis*. After all, Vučić initially secured broad European support with his handling of the Kosovo issue, but this has had long-term implications for the state of democracy in Serbia. Hence, further exploration of SNS's Kosovo politics and its connection to democracy in Serbia is needed, as well as a broader exploration of the shrinking of democratic space in Serbia since the SNS took power in 2012, which would contribute to a growing literature on the SNS in Serbia.

A further angle that could be investigated is a detailed analysis of the Brussels dialogue discourse in Kosovo itself. Specifically, if one recognizes Northern Kosovo and its leadership's unwillingness to integrate into the Kosovo framework as a dislocation to Kosovo's claim of having consolidated statehood in the entire territory, then this could act as a fruitful comparison to the Serbian case. One could investigate what specific myths drive Kosovo's political discourse further and if they relate to the Serbian one, or how they relate to Kosovo's EU integration path (an angle I could not explore due to lacking Albanian language skills). After all, this thesis advocates for an ontological, not only ontic, conception of myth, which means that the framework could be applied anywhere where one can recognize a dislocation. In this sense, it would be useful to look at what imaginaries and structures of feeling underpin Kosovo's discourse on statehood, since it is not a typical and straightforward case of performing statehood internationally, as Visoka (2018) has demonstrated, and domestically, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Vulović 2020). Additionally, a comparison of national myths and whether they get re-articulated into current political projects aimed at the future would be fruitful, since it would not only demonstrate the similar working mechanisms of political discourses in both Kosovo and Serbia, but also potentially point to a common ground between them, showing that they might not be so different from one another as the political elites in these

two cases like to emphasize. Research has already begun to point out these underlying similarities between the Serbian and Kosovan re-articulations of their past, not describing the rivalry between them through difference, but through the sharing of common goals and desires (see Hehir and Lanza 2021).

Given that my research design articulates an ontological understanding of political discourse, it could have implication for how we do research on Kosovo-Serbia relations and national myths in general. It demystifies national myths as having great longevity and being resistant to change, since this thesis has demonstrated that, through performativity and re-articulation, even the most sedimented imaginaries, or national myths, can change by virtue of their elements being embedded into alternative discursive constellations and projects. Every sedimentation is only a contingent sedimentation, as discourse theory teaches us. Hence, this thesis might provide an impetus for researchers to go beyond historic legacies and entrenched narratives, and explore the moments of their re-constitution and de-structuration.

8 References

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