THE EASTWARD EXPANSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

PERSPECTIVES FROM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the eastward expansion of the European Union (EU) affects the lives

and identities of university students in Belgrade, Serbia, a post-socialist, post-conflict, and non-

EU country. This study involved qualitative interviews of 17 students aged 20 to 30, a generation

that grew up during the 1990s when the Yugoslav secession wars made Serbia isolated from

Western Europe politically and economically. A central question of this project is what it means

to live in a non-EU state in Europe as the EU expands to include more post-socialist and Eastern

European states. This study finds that participants tend to identify as belonging in Europe despite

Serbia's geopolitical position on the outside of the EU, and explores how the issues of

emplacement and exclusion affect participants' perceptions of everyday life in Belgrade as they

compare it to how they imagine life to be like in the EU.

DEDICATION

  I would like to dedicate this thesis the same way Leonard Cohen dedicated the song

Anthem when he played in Belgrade in 2009: "To the inhabitants of this brave city."

<center>

Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The borders of the European Union (EU) have been extending east for the last decade,

and an ever-smaller number of countries in Europe now find themselves on the periphery of this

border. While most of the focus on European integration has been about the elimination of

borders between nations and the building of a united Europe, the other side of this process is the

securing of borders outside the EU, and the creation of new borderlands within Europe

(Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Virkunnen 2001). More recently, these spaces on the EU's "immediate

outside" (Jansen 2009:819) have been receiving more academic attention, as the expanding EU

border regime is seen to affect the everyday experiences and identities of non-EU citizens

(Greenberg 2010; Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009).

This project focuses on Serbia, a recent EU-candidate state, and explores the topic of

Serbian EU accession through the perspective of university students in Belgrade. In focusing on

post-socialist youth, this project follows the lead of insightful anthropological research about

how the 'normal life' is imagined by young people in the context of democratization (Greenberg

2011; Galbraith 2003). In Serbia, youth perspectives on EU integration deserve particular

attention because young people are growing up in the legacy of the 1990s, and have a unique

perspective on this decade having experienced it as children. In choosing to focus on urban,

educated youth, I am conscious of the different social, political, and economic opportunities

afforded to urban versus rural inhabitants (Galbraith 2003). I am also aware of the class focus of

this study, insofar as formal education might signify class position (Bourdieu 1990). Urban, educated youth therefore occupy a distinct position in Serbian society. This project asks how occupying the space on the "immediate outside" of the EU is experienced by people in this group, and how they reflect on the question of Serbian EU integration in relation to their lives and their perceptions of Serbia.

Serbia's EU aspirations are being hailed as the country's "return to Europe" (Lindstrom 2003) after the isolation and violence of the 1990s, symbolizing the shifting boundaries of exclusion and inclusion in a Europe dominated by the EU. While membership in the EU remains a distant goal in Serbia, it has dominated political discussion since the overthrow of President Milošević in 2000. As a result of several decades of democratization, European integration has been linked to ideas about Serbian society reinventing itself politically, socially, and economically (Greenberg 2011, 2010; Subotić 2011; Lindstrom 2003). For youth in Belgrade who have grown up in this political climate, the question of EU integration seems to form the backdrop against which contemporary imaginings of Serbia are formed, articulated, or contested. Fourteen years after the overthrow of Milošević, it is important to explore not only what it might mean to join the EU, but also the practical and symbolic implications of what it means to be on the outside.

I argue that for participants in this study, university students in the capital city of Belgrade, the EU symbolizes a move away from Serbia's violent past, and fulfills a desire to be included in the cultural space of Europe despite Serbia's status as "outside" of the EU. Through youth, urbanity, and class position, participants mark themselves as European relative to other segments of Serbian society. Through this positioning, I show how they disassociate themselves from the legacy of the 1990s, a period for which although they experienced, they feel no

responsibility. I track the ways in which they craft identities through narration, memory, feelings, and emotion through the use of ethnographic research, specifically in-depth interviews.

Context: Place

In order to understand Serbia's position outside the EU and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion inherent in EU expansion processes, it is necessary to contextualize Serbia's EU aspirations in the context of recent history. Serbia's relationship to the EU can be best understood by examining Serbia as a post-war and post-socialist state. In the early 1990s when newly independent Eastern European states were applying for EU membership, Yugoslavia was embroiled in a violent civil war. The "enormous country, all the way from Slovenia to Macedonia," as one participant described it[1], had begun to unravel after the death of socialist leader Tito in 1980, and throughout the rise of ultra-nationalist authoritarian president Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s.

Tito's Yugoslavia was a key member of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. During this period, Yugoslavs proudly differentiated themselves from Eastern European states behind the Iron Curtain, since their softer version of socialism allowed them to enjoy relative freedom of travel and a decent relationship with Western European states (Todorova 1997; Ugrešić 1992). These "better days of Yugoslavia" (Todorova 1997:53) were a time of relative economic stability and peace between the six Yugoslav republics, as Tito enforced a politics of "weak Serbia - strong Yugoslavia" that held the country together (Crnobrnja 1996:107). This period sits in sharp contrast to the period of that followed Tito's death, when nationalist sentiments grew across the country. As each Yugoslav republic with the exception of Montenegro declared its independence, Milošević's nationalist politics (coupled with those of

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[1] All translations mine.

Croatian president Franjo Tuđman) brought Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Hercegovina into a 1991-1995 civil war characterized by war-crimes, ethnic cleansing, massive refugee flows, and genocide.

The United Nations (UN) and the EU responded to the war by imposing economic sanctions, arms embargoes, and visa restrictions. While the war was fought outside of Belgrade by both paramilitary troops and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), the city was hurt by the lasting effects of the war: economic sanctions, capital flight, hyper-inflation, visa restrictions, mafia-style corruption, and nationalist propaganda. In addition, Milošević's privatization policies in the early 1990s exacerbated the situation by creating high unemployment and putting money into the hands of a wealthy few (Gould and Sickner 2008). In 1999, the autonomous Serbian province of Kosovo declared its independence, which resulted in another war lead by Milošević. The United States intervened through the NATO bombing of Belgrade, and further sanctions were placed on Serbia by the international community.

Western media accounts supported by academic explanations of the wars depicted the Balkans as primitive, backwards, anti-Western, and non-European. Todorova (1997) shows how such a depiction taps into a long history of Balkanist discourse, characterized most notably by "the externalization of evil on an abstract Balkanness" (Todorova 1997:47). Through this discourse, which is explored in depth below, the Balkans are constructed as the 'other' of Europe, and Western Europe constructs its own superior image by opposition. For the purposes of situating Serbian EU integration into the context of recent history, being mindful of Balkanist discourse is helpful for understanding how the wars of the 1990s contributed to a lasting sense of isolation within Europe.

The "1990s" have become shorthand[2] for describing a decade marked by Milošević's aggressive politics that ravaged Serbia's economy, infrastructure, and political relationships. In a relatively short time, Belgrade went from being the capital of an internationally respected Yugoslavia, to the capital of a war-torn pariah state. This dramatic shift in geopolitical position is manifest in the popular nostalgia towards the 'red passport' of Tito's Yugoslavia, as it represents freedom of mobility and, by extension, certification of inclusion in the European community that the subsequent Serbian passport did not provide (Jansen 2009). EU visa restrictions placed on Serbia during the 1990s were kept in place until 2009, which further contributed to a sense of isolation (Greenberg 2010; Jansen 2009).

After the 1999 NATO bombing, public support for Milošević dropped dramatically, and in October 2000 he was overthrown and replaced with a coalition government. This marked a democratic turn in Serbian politics, and there was widespread optimism that Serbia would soon join the EU. However, the 2000s did not bring the quick accession people hoped for. Rather, it was a time of highly divisive politics between Western reformists, ultra-nationalists, and numerous others. Even with Milošević out of power, the legacy of the 1990s spread into the next decade in the form of a weakened economy, brain-drain, comprised freedom of press, and corruption at every level of government (Stojić 2006).

Serbia's current position outside the EU has been theorized as contributing to a self-representation of falling – or being pushed – from grace, especially as other Balkan and even former Yugoslav states have become members (Jansen 2009). Balkanist discourse continues on in contemporary Western accounts of Serbia's EU accession efforts, as European integration is framed in both academic and political discourse as a move away from the Balkans and towards

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[2] See the popular and catchy Đorđe Balašević song, "*Devedesete*" [1990s] released in 2000.

Europe (Renner and Trauner 2009; Vachudova 2005). Academic explanations of Serbia's difficulties in meeting EU accession requirements have pointed to its irreconcilably 'Balkan' identity and the supposed dichotomy between the Balkans and Europe (Subotić 2011; Lindstrom 2003). Meanwhile in Serbia, Balkanist framing can be seen in pro-EU political slogans such as "Let's go to Europe!" [*Idemo u Evropu!*], which problematically positions Serbia as backwards or inferior relative to the EU.

Fellow Balkan states Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 following the EU's enlargement policy for South-East Europe. The countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania are subject to a separate EU enlargement policy for the "Western Balkans" which involves a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) to be met prior to accession negotiations. Serbia signed the SAA in 2008, but its accession has also hinged on certain additional conditions related to its role as aggressor in the Yugoslav wars. The most notable condition has been Serbia's cooperation with the largely unpopular International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) through the extradition of war-criminals, most of whom were high-ranking political figures in Milošević's regime. Recognition of Kosovo's independence is also widely perceived as an additional condition for EU membership, and this issue takes centre-stage in right-wing anti-EU political campaigns asking voters to choose between Europe and Kosovo. Taken together, these issues contribute to a relatively high domestic opposition to Serbian EU integration. In 2012, when Serbia received official candidate status, opposition to joining the EU had climbed to 47 per cent of the surveyed population (Papović and Pejović 2012).

Contextualizing Serbia as a post-war, post-socialist, and even post-Yugoslav state is necessary for exploring the topic of EU integration for a number of reasons. First, it helps to clarify certain practical reasons why Serbia's EU aspirations have been difficult to achieve. Most

notable are the economic setbacks of consecutive wars, and the additional EU membership conditions related to Serbia's role as aggressor. Second, the imposed economic isolation of the 1990s and the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade are important for understanding Serbia's complicated and sometimes hostile relationship with Western European states and institutions, even as it works towards EU membership. And most importantly, understanding Serbia's current position outside the EU in the context of recent history is important because of the ongoing legacies of this history, both the "better days of Yugoslavia" (Todorova 1997:53) and its disintegration. This history informs our understandings of Serbia's geopolitical and symbolic position in Europe, which is important for understanding what it means to be Serbian, Balkan, or European. The relationship between these dynamic categories constitutes a "hierarchy of multiple identities" (Todorova 1997:44) that is further complicated by the eastward expansion of the EU, and the creation of new borderlands of inclusion and exclusion created by this process (Szmagalska-Follis 2009).

Participants

I interviewed 17 university students from various disciplines. The interviews were conducted in Serbian and the translations presented here are my own. In the following section, I will explore the perspectives of research participants on the topic of Serbian EU integration as it relates to their lives and understandings of Serbia. Since this project asks how occupying the space on the outside of the EU is experienced by university students in Belgrade, I will elaborate on the two most relevant characteristics that inform this group's ideas and understandings of life in Belgrade: their age and class position.

Age

Project participants ranged from 20 to 30 years old, which means they were born between 1983 and 1993. Their parents' generation grew up in Tito's Yugoslavia, but this "enormous country" exists for participants only through their parents' stories. While Greenberg's (2011:90) analysis treats Serbian youth as "former Yugoslav citizens," I think they can be better understood as belonging to a post-Yugoslav citizenship regime. Although the 'Yugoslav' nationality officially disappeared in 2003, the relative freedom of mobility and economic stability associated with the former Yugoslavia was lost in the 1990s, well before this age group could meaningfully experience losing the benefits of Yugoslav citizenship. I found that when participants spoke of the "golden years" of Yugoslavia, they spoke about the "enormous country" their parents had lived in, rather than their own experiences of having and then losing Yugoslav citizenship.

Nevertheless, the fact their parents grew up in Tito's Yugoslavia is important for acknowledging what Ghodsee (2011:xv) refers to as the "intimate legacies" of rapid and radical geopolitical changes on the level of everyday experience. As their parents' children, this group has grown up during a time of major political and economic changes, and into a future their parents could not have anticipated for them. They have been influenced by parents or other authority figures from a generation that lived in different social, economic, and value systems than those that currently dominate in Serbia.

Since they grew up in the 1990s –a period sometimes characterized as a moral vacuum without role models to look up to in the public sphere—youth in Serbia have been singled out as a unique "war generation" by studies in various fields including sociology, anthropology, psychology, policy studies, and even literature (Greenberg 2011; Vidojkovic 2007; CPA 2004, 2003). According to Greenberg (2011), a defining aspect of this generation is that it tends to

distance itself from responsibility for the violence and instability of the 1990s, since it was too young to be involved in political decision-making processes. This sense of separation from the 1990s came across in interviews, as many participants said they were too young to experience the (especially economic) hardships of the 1990s in a meaningful way. Their parents succeeded in making them feel "guarded" from the realities of war by struggling to give them a "normal life" despite the seriousness of inflations, shortages, sanctions, and so on.

The ten-year difference in the participants' age did however reveal a more meaningful divide between younger and older participants when it came to remembering the 1999 bombings, during which time participants would have been between six and sixteen years old. Younger participants tended to describe this time as a "big summer vacation" since school was cancelled for a few months and they had no obligations except to play outside. One participant born in 1989 asked me prior to our interview if she was expected to talk about how "traumatic" the bombings were, since she found this was the story that outsiders (and especially westerners) expected to hear. When I told her the research topic was Serbian EU integration, not the 1999 bombings, she casually chatted about how she experienced the bombings as a "vacation from school" and an opportunity to play with her friends. Older participants, in contrast, seemed more affected by the bombings and did not appreciate the way they tended to be trivialized through such representations. For example, one participant born in 1984 stated,

> I don't like when, out of some kind of joke, people talk about that as though it were nothing. I mean, I think it was definitely a meaningful event and that it left some catastrophic consequences. For some people more and for others less, of course. [...] I was about 14-15 years old, and my generation for example all took it as relatively carefree. My generation took it as an opportunity to hang out, to not have to go to school, to drink all day, to play soccer and basketball. [...] But I think that the older people were, the more they were aware of some real dangers which existed. I think they looked more seriously at the whole thing. [...] I think that for teenagers, that was all taken as a vacation.

This excerpt illustrates a perspective regarding the 1999 bombings that was common among the oldest participants (ages 29 to 30): although they may have trivialized the event while it was happening, they now tended to realize the seriousness of the event in retrospect. This excerpt is useful for illustrating how age (and hindsight) affects the way major events are understood or experienced, in this case affecting the perceived lightness or seriousness of a situation. Since the participants' parents successfully "guarded" them from the realities of the war, many participants who brought up the bombings stated that they thought their parents' generation "had it worse" or were more negatively affected by this event.

Regardless of their ages, most participants cited the overthrow of Milošević in 2000 as the event that made them aware of politics. From this point on, Serbian politics have been characterized both domestically and in the international community as moving along a "path to democracy" (Politika 2000) which leads to EU accession (Lindstrom 2003). Fourteen years later, Serbian politics around European integration are still focused on a recovery from the events of the 1990s (e.g. cooperation with the ICTY and the question of Kosovar independence). The continued legacy of the 1990s in Serbian politics is further compounded by the sustained presence of 1990s-era politicians in an ever-changing constellation of political parties and partnerships. For example, the current President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, was a prominent member of the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS) throughout the 1990s. Considering Serbian youth's tendency to distance themselves from the 1990s (Greenberg 2011), the past-in-the-present quality of Serbian EU politics seems to contribute to a lack of responsibility or ownership towards contemporary political outcomes and events. This was expressed in interviews through numerous participants' boredom or exasperation regarding the continued

question Kosovar independence[3], since "so much time has passed" and "nothing ever changes."

Often, participants eschewed responsibility for the current state of affairs by describing politics

as something that happens in an elite realm that "ordinary" people can neither access nor

influence, especially since many key players are 1990s-era politicians.

Age is also an important factor to consider in exploring issues of mobility connected to

Serbian EU integration. While older generations experienced the war-era visa regime as a loss of

freedom of mobility certified by the Yugoslav 'red passport' (Jansen 2009), this generation grew

up relatively immobile. When EU visa restrictions were lifted in 2009, this participant group was

16 to 26 years old. This factor is important for exploring issues of subjectification tied to

mobility: not only the making of a borderless EU-citizen (Karolewski 2011, 2009) but also the

production of "entrapped subjects" (Jansen 2009: 817) on the other side of the EU border.

Class

In exploring how participants experience occupying the space on "the immediate outside"

of the EU, class is an important factor to consider for the simple reason that this space is not

homogenous, but itself consists of hierarchies which affect how it is perceived and experienced.

Class position influences how participants reflect on life in Belgrade, especially regarding their

needs and aspirations and whether or not these are being adequately met. Insofar as Serbian EU

integration holds the potential for borderless travel, job opportunities, or graduate (or post-

graduate) programs elsewhere in Europe, the participants' class position and degree of access to

these opportunities affects how they reflect on the question of EU integration in relation to their

own lives and futures.

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[3] During my fieldwork, Serbian politicians were debating the implications of signing an EU-brokered agreement with Kosovo, and these debates were covered by national media.

Participants belonged to the middle- or upper-middle class, a position that was expressed in interviews through three main avenues: their upbringing, their education, and their travel experiences. Concerning upbringing, I would like to return to the participants' commonly expressed view that they did not truly experience the hardships of the 1990s thanks to their parents' efforts to provide them with the means for a "normal" life. This is testament not only to the participants' age, as explored above, but also to their families' class positions, since their families were able to make ends meet even in a time of economic crisis.

Concerning education, their middle- to upper-middle class position comes across in the very fact they are university students, which puts them in a relatively elite position in society (Bourdieu 1990). Since it is customary for university students in Serbia to live at home with their parents, almost all participants lived with their parents or were financially supported by them. As university students, they expect their educations to qualify and prepare them for meaningful, fulfilling, and well-paid jobs that will allow them to continue the kind of lifestyle they enjoy in their parents' homes (Galbraith 2003).

Lastly, the majority of participants had travelled to major European destinations, especially after the EU visa liberation in 2009. Since travel is still seen as somewhat of a luxury due to the low salaries and high unemployment rate in Serbia, their relatively extensive travel experience is another testament to their class position. Their exposure to lifestyles in other European capitals also informs how they perceive life in the EU, and speaks to their aspirational tendencies regarding their lives in Belgrade.

Positionality

My interest in this topic is not purely academic. I was born in Belgrade and moved away with my family at the age of three. Growing up, I visited on average every three years. At age 20,

I lived in Belgrade for five months to complete an internship and refresh my Serbian. During that stay, I fell in love with the place. I think it is a magical city, equal parts ugly and beautiful, the contradictions evident from block to block.

My choice in research topic was also influenced by practical advantages in terms of connections in Belgrade, access to potential participants, familiarity with the city, and facility in Serbian. I was very pleased with the idea of being able to conduct interviews in the participants' native tongue, allowing them to express themselves more easily and more accurately.[4] I often wondered why participants agreed to be interviewed, especially in the cases where they arrived at our meeting not knowing what the research topic was, or expecting to fill out a survey, or having travelled for over an hour in heavy traffic to meet me downtown. While one or two participants seemed to want to engage in polemics, others expressed gratitude that somebody was interested in listening to their opinions regarding political events. Others still expressed no interest in politics, but were happy to talk to me about their lives in Belgrade.

Since I was raised in Canada and speak perfect English, I think participants positioned me more often as an outsider than an insider. However, different participants positioned me in different ways, which came across in the interviews when they would either assume I already knew something that they were trying to explain (e.g. "but you know how it is"), or alternately, assume that I did not or could not know something (e.g. "you can't really understand Belgrade unless you live here"). Frustratingly, both assumptions made it difficult to get information since they tended to result in vague explanations of a given topic.

In addition to being Serbian, I shared numerous other traits with participants which made me something of an insider: age, class-position, urban identity (although not a proper

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[4] One participant insisted that we speak English since he was fluent, but switched to Serbian halfway through the interview.

'*Beograđanka*'), and university student. Taken together, I feel our shared traits helped relieve me of the position of "judging westerner" (Greenberg 2010:44) experienced by other researchers in the area. Participants generally assumed I was "on their side," and that I would write a flattering report. However, although I was not considered "judging," I was definitely considered a westerner. Participants tended to view me as rich, well-travelled, "on vacation" in Belgrade, and a citizen of a "normal," "well-functioning," and "orderly" country –if not utopia. Statements about how things do not function properly in Serbia were often compared explicitly with how the participant imagined my life in the West. Their wild imaginations about life in Canada (where there is no poverty or homelessness, and everybody lives in spacious downtown apartments and works fulfilling jobs) drove home a major point of inequality between myself and the participants: I had visited their country often, but they had never visited mine, and maybe never would. As Jansen (2009) points out regarding his fieldwork in Sarajevo, I was there by choice and could leave anytime, while participants had a much more complicated relationship with crossing the border.

Roadmap

In the next chapter, I begin with a literature review in order to situate this project within the existing scholarship on the EU's eastward expansion. Distancing myself from Europeanisation scholarship and 'transitology,' which is characterized by an evolutionary perspective of political change, I turn instead to qualitative, ethnographic, and anthropological research focusing on the everyday experiences of ordinary people. With reference to this body of literature, I build a theoretical framework in the second half of Chapter 2 that guides my analyses in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapters 3 to 5, I explore how occupying the space on "the immediate outside" of the EU is experienced by urban, educated, young people in Belgrade from a theoretical, hypothetical, and practical angle in turn. Chapter 3 has a theoretical focus: building off of the finding that participants tended to speak about Serbian EU integration in terms of hierarchies (centre-periphery; West-East; big-small), I explore the symbolic geography of the EU's eastward expansion. I focus on how participants understand their "place in the world" (Jansen 2009:824), or more specifically, their place in the hierarchies of Europe, and how they stake claim (or resist claims) to Europeanness as a symbolic or cultural designation, rather than a geographic fact (Todorova 1997; Wolff 1995).

Chapter 4 has a more hypothetical focus: I explore participants' perceptions of how things would be different if Serbia were to join the EU, and how this is connected to a discourse on normalcy through which Serbian citizens describe their state as abnormal in relation to an imagined West (Greenberg 2011; Galbraith 2003; Fehérváry 2002). In this chapter, I draw on Greenberg's (2011:90) conceptualization of Serbia as a "postdisciplinary state" to make sense of the idea prevalent among participants that while Serbian laws could be corrupted or ignored, EU laws would *have to* be followed because they would be authoritatively imposed.

Chapter 5 has a practical focus: I make a connection between the question of Serbian EU integration and the participants themselves. Since most participants stated that EU integration was significant or relevant to them, I explore *why* this topic is a factor in their lives by focusing on the ways in which occupying "the immediate outside" of the EU affects young lives on a practical level. I make use of research which theorizes the EU as a borer, and what this means for young people in Belgrade in terms of employment and mobility (Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004).

Taken together, these chapters provide a theoretical, hypothetical, and practical dimension to exploring how the eastward expansion of the EU affects the experiences and identities of urban, educated, Serbian youth who find themselves on the other side of the EU border, and how they reflect on this topic in relation to their lives in Belgrade and their perceptions of the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Part 1 – Literature Review

In this project, I am responding to two sets of literature: one from which I aim to depart, and the other to which my theoretical framework is indebted. In the following section I will elaborate on each in turn.

European Union expansion in Europeanisation literature

Much of the scholarship on European Union expansion can be categorized as transition theory or "transitology." As implied by the very word 'Europeanisation,' this literature tends to operate with the inherent assumption that European integration is both the desired and inevitable end-point of political and economic change. Although there are many facets to this literature, I think it can be subsumed under two main analytical approaches: constructivist and realist (Karolewski 2011; Vachudova 2008). In the realist approach, the process of Europeanisation is considered to be a matter of rationalist cost-benefit calculations wherein candidate states align their policies with EU standards because they realize they will benefit (most often economically) by joining the EU (Vachudova 2008). In the constructivist approach, Europeanisation involves a change in state identity, as EU identity is 'absorbed by' or 'transferred to' candidate states, resulting in changes in policy (Karolewski 2011; Checkel 2001).

Despite the differences between these two approaches, they share an evolutionary perspective of political change. The term 'transition' is not neutral, but implies progress towards a predetermined state (Buyandelgeriyn 2008). EU membership is therefore posited as the end-

point of a period of progressive change, and is justified on political, economic, social, and even moral grounds (Vachudova 2005; Checkel 2001; Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001). As an example of this evolutionary perspective, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent eastward expansion of the EU are framed in sweeping terms as "the convergence towards liberal democracy among the European Union's post-communist candidates" (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007:22). Post-socialist states are represented as staggered on a path of "convergence" towards the EU; some are faring better than others, while others are "backsliding," representing a threat to democracy promotion in the region (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007:23).

With the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004, there has been a perceived rise in opposition to EU integration in candidate states. This development has posed a theoretical and practical challenge for Europeanisation scholarship and the grand narrative of "convergence" towards a European political ideal. Previously, Europeanisation literature had tended to neglect the importance of opposition to EU integration, assuming it will eventually be overcome either through rationalist cost-benefit calculations or through the acceptance of European norms and values by social learning (Vachudova 2008; Checkel 2001; Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001). However, as a response to rising opposition, there has been a move within the scholarship towards more contextualized theories of Europeanisation that are better able to account for 'difficult' integration cases (Konitzer 2011; Noutcheva 2009; Renner and Trauner 2009; Schimmelfennig 2008).

The 'difficult case' of Serbia in Europeanisation literature

Several authors argue that the Western Balkans present a challenging case to pro-EU scholarship, and Serbia has often been singled out as an unlikely candidate for successful

European integration (Freyburg and Richter 2010; Noutcheva 2009; Renner and Trauner 2009; Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007). Researchers have looked to numerous domestic and historical factors to explain the difficulties in Serbia's EU accession efforts. These include practical obstacles such as conditions for membership (Stojić 2011; Subotić 2011), as well as identity issues such as Serbia's allegedly anti-European national identity (Subotić 2011), Serbia's antagonistic relationship with the EU (Noutcheva 2009), and Europe's paternalistic attitude towards the Balkans (Papović and Pejović 2012).

While a focus on domestic and historical factors affords for more nuanced questions about a particular country's integration experience, the evolutionary perspective and pro-EU bias characteristic of this literature has remained dominant. This is evident in the treatment of difficult integration cases as puzzles to be cracked, while EU accession remains the uncontested end-point of political progress. For example, while the issue of domestic opposition to EU integration receives more focus in this branch of Europeanisation literature, it is still only considered significant insofar as it threatens to hamper Europeanisation processes (Konitzer 2011). Opposition tends to be framed as an obstacle or even a threat to be overcome, rather than being approached as a meaningful public response to political changes or as a public discourse relating to the contested character of the EU as a political entity (Wilde and Trenz 2012; Sørensen 2008; Diez 2005). Since European integration is justified as the main goal, such a framing tends to minimize the political and social importance of opposition, hesitation, apathy, or even ambivalence towards EU integration (Greenberg 2010).

In addition, an evolutionary perspective of transition confines political discourse to a dichotomy of success and failure without leaving room for critical perspectives or the exploration of alternative political realities or possibilities (Greenberg 2010). The limits of

possibility are evident in the very language of Europeanisation scholarship, which has a tendency to frame all perspectives in the framework of Europeanisation by simply adding the prefix 'euro': political skepticism becomes euro-skepticism, political fatigue becomes euro-fatigue, and most glaringly, political apathy, the lack of interest altogether, becomes euro-apathy. The prefix 'euro' reduces political discourse to an either/or framework that closes off space for critical perspectives on EU integration politics. Understanding European integration through a success-failure dichotomy places the onus of failed or stalled integration on the political or cultural shortcomings of candidate states, rather than on inadequacies within "the normative model itself" (Greenberg 2010:46). In this model, post-socialist states can be understood as sites where normative concepts about Western European social and political values are applied, materialized, and judged not in terms of the good they bring, but in terms of a state's capacity to learn, implement, or copy them (Greenberg 2010).

The 'difficult' case of Serbia in Europeanisation literature suggests that this body of literature has poor explanatory power when it comes to understanding the events and experiences since Serbia's turn towards the goal of EU accession after the overthrow of Milošević. The evolutionary perspective dominant in this body of literature is problematic for the aim and scope of this project, which explores present-day questions about what it means to occupy the space on the outside of the EU, since an evolutionary perspective directs focus to the pre-determined future of EU accession. It is important not to assume a priori that EU accession is inevitable or desired, as these assumptions shape understandings of Serbia in particular ways, and define it as a 'transitional' space between a point A and a (superior) point B, rather than a space that is being meaningfully inhabited in its own right.

This body of literature is additionally problematic because it largely ignores the everyday experiences and understandings of people. One reason for this blind spot in the literature is that most of the research on European integration has come from disciplines such as Political Science, International Studies, and Public Policy, which tend to take either states, political parties, or the broad public as the primary unit of analysis. People are present only insofar as they express themselves through voting patterns. However, one cannot equate voting tendencies with people's personal views and understandings especially given that there is a discrepancy between party stances and voter opinions on issues surrounding European integration in Serbia (Stojić 2011). In contrast to this body of literature, sociological and anthropological approaches stand to offer a more grounded or situated perspective.

Qualitative studies on post-socialist societies and EU expansion

Recent anthropological and ethnographic research on post-socialist Eastern Europe has offered insightful critiques of transition theory or 'transitology' by taking issue with the premise that these societies are in a period of 'transition' from socialism to neoliberal capitalism (Buyandelgeriyn 2008; Humphrey and Mandel 2002). In other words, 'post-socialist' spaces are not equated with 'pre-capitalist' or 'democratizing,' but are instead treated as particular and dynamic cultures and societies in a given geopolitical context (Buyandelgeriyn 2008). Greenberg (2010) argues that the dichotomy of success and failure often applied to post-socialist and newly democratic countries closes off space for understanding these social and political landscapes in a complex or nuanced way.

I find this body of literature to be well-suited for this project because it focuses on ordinary people (Ghodsee 2011; Jansen 2009; Fehérváry 2002), for example, youth perspectives (Greenberg 2011, 2010; Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Jansen 2009) which my research examines.

This is important for understanding the effects of geopolitical changes at the level of everyday experiences, especially as these transformations may affect youth in different ways (Bucholtz 2002; Miles 2000). In addition, this research has been sensitive to issues surrounding the EU as a border, and has tended to focus on countries that find themselves on the outside (Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Galbraith 2003; Fehérváry 2002). In the following section, I will elaborate on certain concepts and approaches from this body of literature that have resonated with my own data, and have informed my theoretical framework for this project.

Part 2 – Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework can be divided into three interrelated sections, providing the theoretical basis for chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively. I will elaborate on each in turn.

Symbolic geography of Europe

The idea that Serbian EU accession signifies the country's "return to Europe" is part of a wider discourse of inclusion and exclusion within the contested space of Europe. Todorova (1997) and Wolff (1995) provide thorough historical explorations of symbolic and actual divisions within Europe, focusing on the Balkans and Eastern Europe respectively. Their research is influenced by Said's (1979) concept of Orientalism, which proposes that, as a colonial project, the Occident constructed the Orient in contrast to its own image: the Orient was endowed with qualities of backwardness and barbarianism against which the Occident defined itself as civilized and superior. Through the perpetuation of this self-gratifying division, the Occident defines, dominates, and has authority over the Orient and representations of it.

Research exploring the symbolic geography and hierarchies of Europe is important in the context of the EU's eastward expansion as mental maps of Europe are redrawn in the minds and

imaginings of European citizens (Szmagalska-Follis 2009). It is integral for exploring a central

question of this project: What does 'Europe' mean for urban, educated, Serbian youth in the

context of EU integration? As Wolff and Todorova's research has shown, 'Europe' is not a static

category defined by geography, but a culturally contested space, a shifting border that always

includes some and excludes others. As Todorova (1997:139) put it, "in the ambiguous

relationship between geography and politics within the concept of geopolitics, the latter seems to

have the upper hand. 'Europe' ends where politicians want it to end."

  Wolff (1995) takes the end of the Cold War as his starting point to discuss how Western

Europe invented Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment to serve as its contrasting half, the

'backwardness' to its 'civilization.' In spite of geography and scientific cartography, western

European explorers, writers, and poets equated Europe with Western Europe, and constructed

Eastern Europe as an ambiguous space between (Western) Europe and Asia. To western

European men and women during the Enlightenment, Eastern Europe was "Europe but not

Europe" (7), a liminal space between inclusion and exclusion both culturally and economically.

Wolff describes the invention of Eastern Europe as "an intellectual project of demi-

Orientalization," since it defined Western Europe as superior by contrast, but was also made to

"mediate" between Western Europe and the Orient (7). This powerful and lasting imagery is

found in numerous western depictions of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, for example Rebecca

West's acclaimed travel book on Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941).

  Wolff argues that the Iron Curtain was a modern geopolitical reality that seamlessly

traced this eighteenth-century intellectual division between East and West. The powerful idea of

the Eastern Bloc has persisted since the fall of the Iron Curtain because it is embedded in our

culture and "drawn on the maps in the mind" (3). Further, he argues that Eastern Europe will

continue to occupy an ambiguous space "within Europe but not fully European" (9) in the post-Cold War world, reinforced by new structures or associations. The EU can currently be considered a reinforcing structure of this kind of intellectual division, especially since the equation of Europe with Western Europe which underlay the invention of Eastern Europe finds a parallel in the contemporary equation of Europe with the EU (Szmagalska-Follis 2009). In addition, just as Eastern Europe was made to "mediate" between Western Europe and the Orient, the countries on the outside of the EU are often viewed in Western politics as a strategic buffer zone between Asia (or Russia) and 'Europe proper' (Kubicek 2005; Alexandrova 1996) .

Todorova (1997) also writes about the construction of ambiguous space between Western Europe and Asia, although her focus is on the Balkans specifically. Tracing the relationship between the Balkans as a place, a home, and an intellectual invention, she explores how 'Balkanist' discourse constructs the Balkans as the Other of Europe, the "dark side within" (53), an in-between space onto which traits of evilness and backwardness are externalized while 'Europe proper' is kept pure. The unique position of the Balkans in Europe is expressed poetically through the metaphor of bridge or crossroads: a state of permanent ambiguity and transition with one border to the East and one border to the West. Todorova writes that what is "disquieting" (58) about this metaphor –apart from the premise that East and West are fundamentally and essentially opposed—is the perception that life on the bridge is abnormal, a stigma, "an intolerable state of existence" (58).

This metaphor and the accompanying perception of abnormality or backwardness is present in the transitology and Europeanisation literature discussed above, which tends to view EU candidate-states not as meaningfully inhabited spaces but as transitioning zones staggered on a path towards full accession. In fact, as Wolff (1995) points out, the perceived backwardness of

Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century gave rise to Western Europe's first model of underdevelopment. This representation continues on in contemporary democracy promotion rhetoric and policy, for example in the threat of "backsliding" common in Europeanisation literature.

Todorova's research is particularly important in the context of the Yugoslav wars. As mentioned in chapter 1, Balkanist discourse was evident in Western media accounts and academic explanations of the wars, which depicted the violence in the Balkans as "more violent" than other violence in Europe because of its uniquely 'Balkan' character: it was primitive clan violence, only to be expected from a "powder keg" (45) of ancient ethnic hatreds. For example, such a representation is put forward by Robert Kaplan (1993) in his popular book, *Balkan Ghosts,* which received critical acclaim from the New York Times and the Boston Globe. In this book, he describes the Balkans as a wild land of ancient and eternal ethnic violence, mired in history. The prevalence of Balkanist discourse surrounding the Yugoslav wars is important because it has contributed to a derogatory definition of the category 'Balkan' and to a lasting sense of isolation within Europe that is still felt by project participants today.

Todorova notes that while Balkan nations have not been agents in the construction or spread of Balkanist discourse, the Balkan peoples are not "passive recipients" (39) of the label. Rather, they are conscious of their outsider image and engage with it in various ways. An important insight of her research is the way that these representations are internalized by Balkan peoples themselves in processes of subject-formation. Bakić-Hayden (1995) extends this insight with her concept of "nesting orientalisms" in the former Yugoslavia. She argues that since the former Yugoslavia encompassed the traditional dichotomies of East and West within a single political entity (e.g. Europe/Balkans, Christian/Muslim), the disintegration of the country gave

rise to the phenomenon of "nesting orientalisms" as actors attempted to shift the essence of 'otherness' to fractal divisions in the same group. In this way, Yugoslavs themselves used Balkanist or Orientalist discourse in competition against each other, whether by aligning themselves with 'Europe proper' or simply distancing themselves from "the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans" (Bakić-Hayden 1995:922).

Todorova (1997), Bakić-Hayden (1995), and Wolff (1997) provide an excellent theoretical foundation for exploring the symbolic power of Europe to stand for civilization and progress, and the various internal hierarchies this symbolism constructs and reinforces. As Balkanist discourse continues on in contemporary accounts of Serbia's EU accession efforts, it contributes to Serbians' understandings of where their country is located in the hierarchies of Europe, and how it is being represented by those who have the power to shape representations.

As a complement to the ideas elaborated above, Jansen's (2009:824) concept of "everyday geopolitical discourse" is very useful for showing how these expansive ideas about symbolic geography come across in the level of everyday speech. Jansen (2009) discusses how Serbians represent and understand their collective place in the world, and argues that this understanding matters because it affects and influences subject-formation. He notes that everyday geopolitical discourse functions on the basis of the assumption that collective places in the world are arranged in a "spatiotemporal hierarchy of movement forward" (824). This is to say that collectivities are not statically superior or inferior to one another, but are always in a process of forward-movement in which they find themselves 'advanced' or 'behind' in relation to one another. Through everyday geopolitical discourse, people express their collectivity's position in the ever-shifting hierarchies of Europe.

Jansen argues that Serbians resent being "mis-stratified" (829) in the rankings of post-Cold War Europe, since they find themselves on the outside of the EU even as other Balkan and former Yugoslav states have become members. He argues that this resentment reveals a fear of not being recognized as having a 'place in the world,' of being excluded to the point of literally 'falling off' of the world. This sentiment stems from the isolation of the 1990s, but the imagery of falling off the world also resonates with the symbolic geography of Europe elaborated by Todorova (1997) and Wolff (1995). Since Serbia occupies an ambiguous space between inclusion and exclusion in Europe, the edge of Europe can in a sense be perceived as the edge of the world: beyond its borders lies the ultimate zone of exclusion: the Orient. 'Falling off' the world is therefore a fear associated with living on the periphery of Europe.

For this project, the concept of everyday geopolitical discourse helps me to make sense of how participants positioned themselves and Serbia in relation to Europe as a symbol or an idea. I draw on this concept in chapter 3 to discuss how participants perceive the EU's eastward expansion in terms of hierarchies, and how they position and shuffle themselves within these hierarchies as they stake claim (or resist claims) to Europeanness as a symbolic or cultural designation.

Normalcy and abnormalcy discourse in post-socialist Eastern Europe

Anthropological research on everyday life in post-socialist Eastern Europe which explores how 'normal' life is defined and perceived has been particularly influential on the theoretical framework for this project (Greenberg 2011; Galbraith 2003; Fehérváry 2002). A common insight in this research is that the discourse about what constitutes a 'normal' life in post-socialist contexts is constructed in relation to how people imagine life to be in the West. Everyday aspirations of 'the good life' are influenced by Western European consumer lifestyles

that are not only idealized but largely unachievable given post-socialist conditions, making the 'normal' life accessible to only an elite few. Galbraith (2003) points out that discourse on the normal life can be read a commentary on the existing state of affairs, and a means by which to contrast the everyday with the ideal or the anticipated.

Discourse on the normal life in post-socialist contexts provides a unique insight into how identity is shaped by shifting social, political, and economic relations associated with globalization and marketization, as new everyday aspirations are created or adopted. It is also a good vantage point from which to explore issues of agency that arise as people feel they are unable to turn their Western-influenced aspirations into realities, or as they realize that life after socialism does not resemble what they had anticipated (Ghodsee 2011; Greenberg 2011). Normalcy is not only a "diagnostic category" (Greenberg 2011: 89) expressing the way things should be, but is also wrapped up in agentive capacity, or the ability to translate aspirations into actions. When people talk about a wanting to live a 'normal' life, they are pointing to a discrepancy between their aspirations, desires, or views of themselves, and the material conditions which make them unable to fulfill these views. The difficulty and frustration of achieving a 'normal' life in post-socialist conditions leads to the perception that everyday life is 'abnormal,' constraining, and dissatisfying. While individuals may recognize that things are not as they 'ought to be,' responsibility for the 'abnormalcy' of the situation is placed on larger social or political institutions beyond their control that constrain their actions and make them unable to fulfill their everyday aspirations (Fehérváry 2002).

The idealized or exaggerated image of the West in normalcy discourse is important to consider because it contributes to the dramatic discrepancy between the way things are and the way things should be. For countries that were behind the Iron Curtain, idealized and exaggerated

stories of what life was like in the West reinforced the sentiment that "real life was elsewhere" (Szmagalska-Follis 2009: 388), and that life was better, easier, and more fulfilling on the other side of the Curtain. In the context of contemporary Serbia and this project, idealizations about Western consumerist lifestyles stem partially from limited travel experience to the EU, and are further reinforced by pro-EU political platforms and ad campaigns which portray the EU as a "land of milk and honey."

While Fehérváry (2002) and Galbraith (2003) have focused mainly on normalcy discourse as it relates to post-socialist consumer aspirations (in Hungary and Poland respectively), Greenberg (2011) takes an explicitly political focus in her research on Serbia. Greenberg's research shows that perceptions of abnormality in Serbia are inextricably connected to the atmosphere of corruption stemming from the 1990s, and the experience of feeling isolated from Europe. The difference in their analyses may also stem partially from the timing of their research: Fehérváry and Galbraith conducted their research as Hungary and Poland were on the verge of EU accession, which suggests that fulfilling Western-influenced consumer desires was a more immediate anticipation for Hungarian and Polish citizens. Greenberg's research on the other hand took place while EU accession was a distant idea for Serbian citizens, still obscured by political obstacles.

In the Serbian context, the discourse on the 'normal life' is connected not only to people's anticipations of a consumerist future, but also to the loss of material standards, social welfare, and citizen agency that characterized the former Yugoslavia (Greenberg 2011). This is to say that a 'normal' life is perceived as something that Yugoslav citizens once had, then lost through the chaos of the 1990s, and now need to re-gain through a 'return to normalcy'. Jansen (2009) makes a similar connection between normalcy discourse in Serbia and the more 'normal'

Yugoslav past when he argues that 'normal' lives are associated with the feeling of having 'a place in the world' that characterized socialist Yugoslavia.

As a corollary to normalcy discourse, Greenberg (2011) focuses on 'abnormalcy' discourse among youth in Serbia, which describes a society with no firm rules or systems of value. Through a focus on abnormalcy, she explores the moral dimension of normalcy discourse. She finds that many young Serbian citizens perceive Serbia to be in a state of crisis, moral chaos, and international isolation in which 'abnormality' thrives. She argues that the sense of lacking agency to realize goals regarding a 'normal' life was attributed not only to the constraining political and economic conditions characteristic of post-socialism, but also to a sense of moral decay that emerged in the 1990s with the disintegration of value systems and the rise of organized crime and state corruption. In contrast to the experience of Yugoslav citizenship, Greenberg found that young people in Serbia perceive themselves as no longer being 'normal' agents capable of effective or moral action in the world due to the "corrupting environment" (94) around them.

Greenberg addresses these ideas in her conceptualization of Serbia as a "postdisciplinary state" (90): a state that is unable to produce agentive subjects capable of moral action or of making a 'normal life' for themselves. Through the concept of a postdisciplinary state, she makes a connection between having a sense of agency and being subject to disciplinary regimes of power. She argues young people in Serbia feel that Serbia does not provide the conditions for them to realize their agentive capacities in a meaningful way. Through talk about wanting a 'normal life,' young people in Serbia express a desire to be part of "a state that works" (90): a functioning, regulated, and disciplinary state which would give them a moral compass for action.

Since the EU represents a disciplinary regime through which Serbian citizens can experience a sense of agency through stability, international respect, and high standards of living, the 'return to normalcy' in Serbia is linked to the political goal of a "return to Europe" through EU accession. Accordingly, Greenberg found that young people in Serbia made use of symbols of European belonging to separate themselves from the violent 1990s, and the continued 'abnormality' of everyday life in Serbia. Considering Greenberg's (2010) earlier argument that post-socialist states are sites where normative concepts about Western European social and political values are applied, materialized, and judged, the normative model of democratization can be understood as the idealized standard of 'normalcy' against which Serbia falls short. The state's lack of ability, will, or resources to 'democratize' successfully are depicted through abnormalcy discourse as moral failure and even pathology.

Greenberg's discussion on abnormalcy discourse and her conceptualization of Serbia as a 'postdisciplinary state' resonates strongly with my own research, especially since she also focuses on the perspectives of urban youth. Participants often stated that Serbia did not respect its own laws and was unable to enforce them. Serbia was consistently depicted as a lawless, corrupt, even wild state, where nothing 'functioned' the way it was supposed to. Most participants explained to me that the system was full of cracks to slip through, that you could get away with anything if you knew how to navigate these cracks. In contrast, the EU was often portrayed as unquestionably authoritative: EU laws would *have to* be followed, while Serbian laws could be ignored without reprimand.

In chapter 4, I draw from research on normalcy discourse in post-socialist contexts and Greenberg's (2011) conceptualization of Serbia as a 'postdisciplinary state' to explore participants' perceptions of Serbia as abnormal in relation to an imagined West. I focus on their

perceptions of how things might be different (or alternately, how things might stay the same) if Serbia were to join the EU.

The EU as a border

An growing body of literature has rejected the grand narrative found in Europeanisation scholarship which posits EU expansion as the building of a united and borderless Europe, and has instead approached this topic from the perspective of the spaces which are left on the outside (Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004). For example, Szmagalska-Follis' (2009) research on the Poland-Ukraine border explores the expanding EU border regime and finds that exclusion is always the other side of inclusion: the construction of "unbordered space" (395) within the EU requires the construction of secure external borders. I find that approaching EU expansion as the shifting of a secure external border rather than the expansion of internal borderless space is helpful for theorizing Serbia's current (and longstanding) position outside of the EU, and resisting falling into the tempting narrative that candidate countries are on a path of transition towards a pre-determined future. Two concepts in this literature have been very helpful: Szmagalska-Follis' (2009:397) concept of "new borderlands" and Jansen's (2009:824) concept of "the immediate outside."

Szmagalska-Follis (2009) uses the concept of 'new borderlands' to explore how the securing of the Poland-Ukraine border in anticipation of Poland's EU accession affected Ukrainian people's identities and everyday experiences, especially considering that Ukrainians had previously enjoyed visa-free travel to Poland. The simultaneous construction of borderless internal space and secure external borders involved in EU expansion makes mobility an important marker of a collectivity's position in the new hierarchies of Europe. As the EU extends eastward, the associated extension (and revocation) of mobility privileges across the EU border

draws a dividing line that departs from the traditional East-West division embedded in mental

mappings since the eighteenth century and reinforced by the Iron Curtain (Wolff 1995). As the

hierarchies of Europe shift in relation with EU mobility privileges, new borderlands are created

that are characterized by a tense interplay between proximity and distance, affecting experiences

and identities on an everyday level (Szmagalska-Follis 2009).

Contrasting the EU border regime with the Iron Curtain[5], Szmagalska-Follis (2009)

argues that while the socialist border regime was designed to keep ordinary citizens *in*, the EU

border regime is focused on keeping non-EU citizens *out*. Because Eastern Europe occupies an

ambiguous position between East and West, she argues that the eastward expansion of the EU

border and the associated revocation of mobility privileges give rise to a fear of marginalization

and exclusion among those left outside. Similar to Jansen's (2009) discussion of Serbian

citizen's fear of 'falling off' the world, she explores the "dread of being walled off and

unwanted" (398) that characterizes the experience of being on the outside.

Of course there are many differences between the case of Ukraine and the case of Serbia,

although the construction of secure external EU borders is evident in both cases, as the EU

invested 10 million euro in a control-point at the Serbian-Hungarian border in 2006 (Jansen

2009). The most notable difference between the two cases is that Serbia is currently an official

EU candidate state while Ukraine is not, which puts Serbian citizens in a different position than

Ukrainian citizens in relation to the EU. Jansen's (2009) research focuses in on Serbia's relative

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[5] The term 'Golden Curtain' has been used by some in Political Science and International Relations (Wiarda 2002) to group successfully democratizing European states, or to separate "countries that are 'making it' into the European community" (World Affairs Institute 2002: 157) from those that are not. Thankfully, this term has not seen the light of day in Sociology or Anthropology.

proximity to the EU through his concept of the "immediate outside" (824), which he describes as

the EU's "waiting room" (828), or an outside zone that is intended to become an inside.[6]

The metaphor of 'waiting room' resonates with Wolff (1995) and Todorova's (1997)

depiction of Eastern Europe or the Balkans as an ambiguous, not 'fully' European space, since

inclusion is conditional on a number of political, economic, and cultural factors entirely separate

from geography. The 'waiting room' metaphor is also apt for capturing the feelings of

resentment involved in the experience of being on the periphery of Europe (Jansen 2009;

Szmagalska-Follis 2009). The resentment of occupying a peripheral position in Europe has been

depicted by Eastern European writers as being the black sheep in a family: its "moronic relative"

(Ugrešić 1992:254) or "poor relation" (Miłosz 1968:2).

Looking at the EU as a border from the perspective of those excluded is important for

exploring theoretical issues such as subjectification. For example, Jansen's (2009) research

suggests that a person's subjectification is affected by their ability to cross their country's

borders. Since the time of Jansen's fieldwork in Serbia, the EU has relaxed visa restrictions for

Serbian citizens, which is important to note since he conceptualizes the 'immediate outside' as a

zone of "humiliating entrapment" (830), and focuses on the role of documentation and regulation

in the production of entrapped and immobile subjects. Despite the increase in mobility privileges

to Serbian citizens, I think Jansen's research remains relevant given Serbia's long history with

visa restrictions and the direct connection between entrapment and the 1990s. Looking at young

people in Serbia who grew up relatively immobile, the past experience of entrapped subjectivity

is interesting to explore alongside the relatively new phenomenon of visa-free travel in Europe.

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[6] This intention is evident in the EU's language of 'candidates' and 'potential candidates,' where countries in the Western Balkans that are not yet recognized as official candidates (Bosnia-Hercegovina, Albania, Kosovo) are considered 'potential' candidates because of their involvement in the EU's Stabilization and Association Process. [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/potential-candidate-countries_en.htm]

In chapter 5, I draw on research that approaches the EU as a border in order to explore the effects of the EU border regime on the experiences and endeavors of young people in Serbia, especially as this issue is connected to the practical issues such as travel and mobility. Taken together, the ideas and approaches elaborated in the above sections have given shape to the following chapters of this project by helping me to make sense of my data, and to find patterns, parallels, or discrepancies through which I can bring this research into conversation with other questions being asked about everyday life in Europe's peripheries.

CHAPTER 3: SYMBOLIC GEOGRAPHY AND SERBIA'S POSITION IN THE

HIERARCHIES OF EUROPE

At the beginning of my fieldwork in Belgrade, the Serbian and Kosovar governments

signed an EU-brokered agreement aimed at normalizing relations between the two countries, and

enabling the conditions for future EU membership for both. For Serbia, signing the agreement

meant securing a date on which EU accession talks could begin, while for Kosovo it meant

opening negotiations for a possible Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU.

A few protests sprang up around the city in the days surrounding the signing, led by parties who

saw 'giving up' Kosovo as too drastic a concession to make for EU accession, but the protests

seemed relatively small, hardly filling the main squares. On the first day of interviews, one such

protest was happening at the Students' Square. From the tiny office on the third floor of the

Philology Faculty where I was conducting interviews, the sound of nationalist folk songs

serenading Kosovo as the heartland of Serbia came in through the windows and onto the tape.

In interviews with participants, and in everyday speech with friends in Belgrade,

discussion about Serbian EU integration seemed to centre on this date [*datum*] for commencing

accession negotiations. This was the main political event happening at the time of my fieldwork,

and it featured prominently in newspapers and televised political debates. In terms of Jansen's

concept of 'everyday geopolitical discourse,' an everyday, casual representation of one's

collective "place in the world" (2009:824), discussion about the *datum* seemed to concisely

evoke Serbia's geopolitical position in Europe and its relationship to the EU: it described Serbia

as positioned on the outside of the EU, waiting to be allowed closer. Since securing the *datum* depended directly on signing an agreement between the Serbian and Kosovar governments, the term also encompassed what many participants perceived as an additional accession condition related to the violence of the 1990s: that Serbia 'give up' any remaining hold on Kosovo.

Perhaps because the *datum* was coming after thirteen years of political reforms, it was aptly described by participants as something that people were always waiting for, and were unable to speed along. If Serbia, as a candidate country, is in the "waiting room" of the EU (Jansen 2009:828), securing the *datum* was like being moved into another, smaller waiting room. *Datum* was therefore used in everyday speech as a marker of political 'progress' wrapped up in conditions and waiting, a tiny victory that almost could not be celebrated because it promised so little. Some participants spoke about the *datum* with relief ("maybe things will finally get moving now") and some with bitterness ("once we give up Kosovo, another condition will surely appear"), but in all cases, discussion about the *datum* evoked a clear hierarchy of power in which the EU had authority over Serbia in the most basic sense of the term: the power to give orders, to enforce obedience. Serbia was consistently described as being subordinate to the EU since it had to comply with the EU's specific conditions for membership. The words "peripheral," "small," and "marginal" came up often to express how participants perceived Serbia's position as a non-EU state in Europe.

In this chapter, I begin with the premise that participants generally spoke of Serbian EU integration in terms of hierarchies. I draw on the symbolic geography of Europe elaborated by Todorova (1997) and Wolff (1995) to explore how participants perceive Serbia's position in these hierarchies, and how the question of EU integration affects these perceptions. I then turn more directly to the participants themselves – their ages, class positions, and urban identities—in

order to explore issues of emplacement among this participant group, specifically the ways in which they make or resist claims to Europeanness as a symbolic or cultural designation, and what this can tell us about the meanings of 'European' and 'Serbian' markers for young people in Belgrade today. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss the role of Bulgaria and Romania's recent EU accessions in shaping the participants' understandings of the EU as a hierarchical space. Although I did not ask any direct questions about Bulgaria or Romania in the interviews, their recent EU accessions were frequently brought up by participants and proved to be an important insight into how they view the phenomenon of EU expansion from the outside looking in.

Peripheries in Europe

Almost all participants spoke about Serbia's relationship to the EU in terms of hierarchies, suggesting they perceived there to be a hierarchy in Europe between EU states and non-EU states which was expressed in terms of: centre-periphery; West-East; big-small. Interestingly, participants made use of these same hierarchies to describe not only Serbia's relationship to the EU, but the structure of the EU itself. This is to say that while Serbia was consistently described as peripheral (or Eastern, or small) relative to the EU, the EU was also characterized as being composed of a Western centre of economically strong and influential states, and an Eastern periphery of "followers" with less economic and cultural power. When speaking about what it might look like if Serbia were to join the EU, most participants readily acknowledged that Serbia would attain only a peripheral position within the EU. For example, it was commonly expressed that Serbia could never expect to be as influential or economically productive as a "core" state like Germany. Instead, Serbia would be a peripheral member, a "follower" with little to no cultural or economic influence, like Bulgaria or Romania.

As participants evoked these two interrelated sets of hierarchies in Europe, I noticed that the common denominator between these two peripheries seemed to be a lack of agency or ability to define one's own rules of the game. For example, states in the periphery of the EU such as Bulgaria and Romania were commonly described as having to "follow" rules established by the EU, whether or not these rules were best for their own national interests. Similarly, states on the outside of the EU, and therefore on the periphery of Europe, were described as having no effect on "the European story," in the words of one participant, which seemed to go on writing itself without their input.

Participants' perceptions of the advantages or disadvantages of Serbian EU integration varied from ambivalence, to enthusiasm, to disillusionment, to political agnosticism, and I found that their stances affected how they perceived or evoked these two interrelated hierarchies. For example, joining the EU could be described as an undesirable or subordinating event that would assign Serbia to a peripheral position in the EU, or alternately, joining the EU could be described as an improvement from Serbia's current geopolitical position, since it meant climbing the ranks of a broader hierarchy in Europe.

Through the participants' discussion about Serbian EU integration and the various hierarchies involved, I saw that what was at stake were not only the pragmatics of inclusion in the EU, but broader ideas about inclusion in Europe itself. As Todorova (1997), Wolff (1995), and Bakić-Hayden (1995) have all shown, the idea of Europe has long had a symbolic power to stand for civilization and progress, creating various internal hierarchies within the space of the continent. Numerous participants complained that in everyday speech and political discourse, the EU was being equated with Europe. Take for example the prominent political slogan "We Are Going to Europe!" [*Idemo u Evropu!*] used by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) in

their campaign to overthrow Milošević in 2000, and still utilized by pro-EU parties today. In this slogan, the EU is equated with Europe in a way that suggests that countries left outside the EU are not truly or fully European. Ivan[7], a 29 year old student who has "all-but-thesis" status (*apsolvent*[8]*)* expressed this vehemently,

> Where are we, then? In Australia? Floating in the middle of the Pacific? It bothers me because it's nonsense. Europe! Europe! –that's not Europe. But people here talk like that quite often: 'We are going to Europe.' It's not Europe! You are going to the European Union. You are going to join a partnership. You are going to join a firm, basically.

In this excerpt, Ivan takes issue with the equation of the EU with Europe because it introduces a set of symbolic, economic, or cultural criteria for inclusion that redefines who counts as 'European' in non-geographic terms, and in doing so excludes Serbia. Ivan compares the feeling of exclusion to being outcast "in the middle of the Pacific," a metaphor which echoes Jansen's (2009) argument that not having a place in the world amounts to a fear of literally falling off of the world. Ivan's comments are effective in demonstrating how EU values and accession criteria are coming to define what being 'European' means in everyday speech in Belgrade. Europe is not a geographic entity but a contested cultural space, since to be outside of the EU means to be perceived as not being truly or fully European.

Consistent with the equation of the EU with Europe that so bothered Ivan, many participants positioned Serbia as being not only outside of the EU, but on the edge of Europe itself. For example, Milica, a 24 year old student, said,

> I think that for an undeveloped and peripheral[9] country like Serbia, the European Union is necessary in order to connect ourselves to some kind of centre and not constantly be on the periphery of everything that is happening.

In this excerpt, Milica expresses her perception of Serbia's geopolitical position or 'place in the world' by bringing into play the layered hierarchies in Europe: the hierarchy within the EU

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[7] All participant names have been changed. Their ages and majors have not been changed.
[8] In the Serbian university system, a student holds *apsolvent* status if they have passed all the required exams for their degree but have not yet submitted their thesis. A student can theoretically remain an *apsolvent* indefinitely.
[9] *Zaostala* – literally 'residual.'

structure, and the broader hierarchy within Europe as a whole. She acknowledges that if Serbia were to join the EU, it would be in a peripheral position, connecting itself to "some kind of centre." Meanwhile, she describes Serbia's current position outside of the EU as the being "on the periphery of everything that is happening." By evoking two parallel sets of hierarchies, Milica represents Serbian EU accession as a move from one peripheral zone to another –perhaps more prestigious—peripheral zone.

Old peripheries, new peripheries

The equation of the EU with Europe in Serbian political discourse and everyday speech is all the more meaningful in the context of Wolff (1995) and Todorova's (1997) research on symbolic divisions within Europe. Wolff (1995) argues that Western European travelers and poets "discovered" and ultimately invented Eastern Europe as an ambiguous space between Western Europe and Asia during the 18th century, and that this symbolic division was later reinforced by the Iron Curtain. Similarly, Todorova (1997) argues that the Balkans were constructed by the West, and serve as a mental border between Western Europe and Asia. Serbia, as an Eastern European and Balkan country, has therefore long been classified in the West as a peripheral or buffer zone separating Europe proper from Asia.

The equation of the EU with Europe has a parallel in the axiomatic equation of Western Europe with Europe that underlies both the invention of Eastern Europe and the rise of Balkanist discourse. What is most interesting about the eastward expansion of the EU is how the dividing line drawn by the ever-changing EU border differs from the dividing line "drawn on the maps in the mind" according to Wolff (1995:3), or the rhetorical dividing line between the Balkans and Europe according to Todorova (1997). The eastward expansion of the EU has therefore blurred and complicated these historical and imagined dividing lines. For example, the EU has

encompassed states such as Poland and Hungary that were considered 'Eastern' since the 18th century and were under the Iron Curtain in more recent history, as well as states that have historically been labeled 'Balkan,' such as Bulgaria and Romania. As the EU expands eastward, the equation of the EU with Europe suggests a new division between EU states and non-EU states that coexists with or perhaps challenges previous mental divisions of Europe. One site where this shift has been articulated is EU enlargement policy and discourse: the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania are grouped under a policy for the "Western Balkans" while the Balkans states Romania and Bulgaria have been accepted to the EU following an enlargement policy not for the "Eastern Balkans" but for "South-East Europe," suggesting a shift in the traditional dividing line between the Balkans and Western Europe.

Todorova (1995) and Bakić-Hayden (1995) have shown that Balkan peoples internalize or engage with the derogatory 'Balkan' label in various ways, making it a meaningful part of their own identities. The internalization of the supposed dichotomy between the Balkans and Europe was particularly evident in the years leading up to Croatia's EU accession, where Croatia's image had to be "thoroughly de-Balkanized" in order to "become European" (Subotić 2013:322), a process which involved deflecting Balkan qualities onto its neighbours, especially Serbia (Lindstrom 2003). As another example of the ways in which the symbolic divisions of Europe have been internalized by those on the peripheries, Szmagalska-Follis' (2009) research on the Poland-Ukraine border has shown that the inclusion of Poland in the EU disrupted Ukrainian people's long-time perception of the European continent as being composed –however unjustly—of two halves: a Western half and an Eastern half. Since the space left outside the EU has historically been constructed as a border between Western Europe and Asia, Szmagalksa-

Follis (2009) argues that the inclusion of Poland in the EU created feelings of marginalization and fear among Ukrainian citizens as they felt they were being pushed further into exclusion.

While I would not say that project participants exhibited 'fear' about the expanding EU border regime, I would argue that the eastward expansion of the EU affects participants' everyday understandings about Serbia's 'place in the world,' as well as their understandings about what it means to be Serbian, Balkan, or European. While the participants' frequent characterization of the EU as being composed of a Western core and Eastern periphery suggests that the old dichotomies elaborated by Wolff are still alive and well, the eastward expansion of the EU and the equation of the EU with Europe reminds us that identity categories are always dynamic, shifting, and interacting. The eastward expansion of the EU creates new borderlands of inclusion and exclusion, and introduces a new set of hierarchies for constructing what it means to be 'European' and what it means to be "within Europe but not fully European" (Wolff 1995:9).

As new countries are accepted into the EU, the space on the outside of the EU shrinks and the exclusion becomes more evident, theoretically leading to increased resentment as was found by both Szmagalksa-Follis (2009) and Jansen (2009). The new hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion in Europe may lead to issues in the areas of identity and representation for those left on the outside of the EU, as they shift to re-position themselves in these new hierarchies. This is perhaps most poignant in the countries of the Balkans or Eastern Europe, since they have long been represented as culturally dichotomous to Western Europe (Todorova 1997; Wolff 1995). Based on my limited sample of participants, I think the eastward expansion of the EU, particularly the inclusion of fellow Balkan states, affects the dynamic relationship between certain identity categories such as 'Balkan' or 'Eastern European' by which participants understand and define their place in Europe.

In the following section, I focus on the research participants as a distinct demographic group in Belgrade society in order to explore why the contested label of 'European' is meaningful to them, and how the experience of being on the outside of the EU challenges or complicates their claims to 'Europeanness' as a symbolic or cultural designation based on age, class position, or urban identity.

Participants

Most if not all participants identified with the label 'European,' although it is important to remember that this label may hold different meanings for each participant. Nevertheless, given the equation of Europe with the EU discussed above, the participants' self-understanding as European comes into tension with Serbia's symbolic and geopolitical position outside of the EU. For this reason, I think it is important to remember that the participants' claims to Europeanness explored in the section below are made in the context of the EU's eastward expansion and Serbia's exclusion to date from this process. In exploring how self-identifying as 'European' is meaningful to this group, it is important to remember that identity categories are dynamic, and to delve into a deeper understanding of what the marker 'European' means to this particular group at this particular time. Not only is the "immediate outside" of the EU growing smaller as other Balkan or Eastern European states are admitted into the EU, but participants have also grown up in a period of economic and physical isolation from the EU and from the West more generally, which affects how they perceive their relationship to the rest of Europe.

While in most interviews this tension between inclusion and exclusion in Europe came across in the way certain words were stressed (e.g. "we *are* a part of Europe" or "I *consider* myself to be European"), some participants expressed this tension more explicitly. Take for example the following excerpt from Marija, a 29 year old *apsolvent*,

> I consider myself a part of European culture a priori. For me, there is no doubt that we are Europe. But I want to know how we would live alongside those other nations if we were to enter into an economic union. I insist on the fact that it is an economic union before anything else.

In this excerpt, Marija insists on treating the EU as a primarily economic union, suggesting that other symbolic aspects associated with "European culture" are obscuring the EU's main function. This perspective was relatively common among participants: often when I asked what the EU represented for them, they dryly described it as being first and foremost an economic union between states. For example, Goran, a 30 year old *apsolvent* described the EU this way:

> It's economic. That's it. All the other stuff is just nice little things. Yay! Thumbs up! But, basically it's all about economics, and if there were no economics in it, no one would care about it. They don't give a fuck about culture. Just show them the money and then they will play along and be cultural and all that –if you show them the money. Too many barbarians live here in these strange woods of Europe.

Like Marija, Goran suggests that the EU is a primarily economic union, and that the cultural aspects of the EU come second. These excerpts demonstrate a common view among participants: that Serbia does not need to be included in the EU in order to be considered European, and that this designation should be granted *a priori* by geographic rather than cultural qualifications. This view goes against and in fact may be a response to the equation of the EU with Europe in Serbian political discourse which tells citizens that they are on the "path" towards Europe, and therefore implies that they are somewhere outside. I found that through various methods associated with age, class position, and urban identity, participants positioned themselves or their demographic as European despite the fact that Serbia is not part of the EU. I will explore each of these methods in turn.

Youth and Europeanness

Insightful qualitative research has pointed to the disconnect between how history is interpreted by youth who grew up in a post-war or post-socialist setting and how it is interpreted by older generations who lived through or directly experienced this history (Schwenkel 2011;

Shore 2009; Marada 2007). Marada (2007) has argued that the end of communism was an event that intensified if not constituted a generational cleavage between those who experienced it directly and those who experienced it second-hand. Similarly, Shore (2009) has argued that "a few years suddenly mattered very much" (110) in shaping youth perspectives or understandings of intense historical events and changes such as the end of communism.

As mentioned in chapter 1, participants belong to Serbia's "war generation," which Greenberg (2011) argues is characterized by a tendency to distance itself from responsibility for the violence and instability of the 1990s since it was too young to be involved in political decision-making processes during this time. In a similar vein, Shore (2009) argues in her research on generational cleavages after the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and Poland, that age affects who is perceived as "old enough to be held responsible" (327) for harmful communist legacies. She further argues that youth who had no direct memories of the communist regime tended to discuss its negative qualities with an unfounded sense of self-confidence that they or their generation would not have made the same moral compromises as the previous generations had.

Consistent with Greenberg (2011) and Shore (2009), I found that participants tended to use their youth to mark themselves as separate from 1990s-era politics. However, I found that there was a slight separation between younger and older participants in terms of how seriously they reflected on the experience of growing up in the 1990s. As mentioned in chapter 1, it was common for younger participants to not acknowledge the impact of the 1999 bombings, while the oldest participants (ages 29 to 30) tended to realize the seriousness of the event in retrospect even though they seemed to not be negatively affected at the time. Many of the younger participants (ages 20-26) said they were too young to experience the hardships of the 1990s in a

meaningful way, telling me that their parents succeeded in making them feel "guarded" from the realities of war by struggling to give them a "normal life" despite the chaos that prevailed. They therefore remembered the 1990s differently or "less seriously" than their parents' generation, according to Bojana, a 26 year old graduate student. In the following excerpt, she discusses growing up in the 1990s through the wars and the 1999 bombings:

> We didn't have a dishwasher, for a while we didn't have a washing machine, we washed everything by hand. For a time we didn't have a vacuum cleaner, so we used a broom! You know? We didn't have money. Your vacuum dies and you don't have money to buy a new one. But I guess I kind of forgot about that stuff because it all got better for us in the last 10 years. We didn't have our own apartment, we didn't have a car, you know? So, you forget those things a bit, you do! Just yesterday I was talking with this German guy, and there was one more girl from Belgrade with us, and he was asking us about our experiences during the bombings and the 1990s, and he was a bit shocked that we weren't making a big deal of it. And this girl said something about how that's the way it is with Serbs, we have a quality about us where we try to make the best out of every situation. And at first I thought, "Oh come on, that's not true, I don't think Serbs are like that." But then again, maybe it's true. I don't know. Now, when I'm telling you about it in detail, someone listening might think that we really didn't have anything, that we didn't have anything to eat. And there really was a period when it was really scary, you know, when we didn't know if we could pay the electricity bills. But somehow… I don't know. It's just not the first thing that comes to my mind when I think about my childhood. It wasn't a highlight of any kind. Who knows, maybe it's just me that's like this.

Bojana's comments are illustrative of the younger participants' tendency to speak about the negativity of this era through stories their parents had told them, as opposed to speaking from personal experience. For example, her comments about growing up in the 1990s suggest that she experienced the economic hardships of this decade less seriously than her parents, and that she has learned about this period through her family's stories. For example, she lists a dishwasher, a washing machine, a vacuum cleaner, a car, and money to pay the electricity bill as the things her family was lacking –none of which would directly concern a middle-class Serbian child, which suggests that the struggles and hardships of this era were experienced "more seriously" by her parents, who have passed these stories on to her. In contrast, the oldest participants shared personal stories from the 1990s. For example, Ivan, the 29-year-old *apsolvent* quoted earlier told me about growing up afraid of street gangs that would beat him up and steal his shoes, a risk his

mother minimized by only letting him wear worn-out sneakers. This discrepancy between older and younger participants' stories of the 1990s suggests that a few years' difference in age affects how participants' perceive the experiences of growing up in the 1990s. This echoes Shore's (2009) finding that "a few years" really do make a difference when interpreting past events.

However, even the oldest participants' stories about the 1990s exhibit a sense of feeling "guarded" from real life. For example, Lazar, a 29 year old *apsolvent* told me the following story about going to the grocery store with his elementary school teacher after class: during the rations, you were only allowed to buy one loaf of bread. His teacher gave him money and told him to pretend he was buying a loaf for himself so that she could take both loaves home to her family. In his story, he didn't understand what was going on, or why people weren't allowed to buy more than one loaf of bread –he just wanted to please his teacher and was embarrassed when the cashier figured out their trick.

While participants used their age to distance themselves from the violence and instability of the 1990s (Greenberg 2011), I found that this also translated into separating oneself from responsibility for contemporary political outcomes and events that are connected to the legacy of the 1990s. This is important to consider since Serbian EU accession politics are still focused on making a recovery from this period. For example, most participants attributed Serbia's slow-moving EU aspirations to the additional and specific accession conditions related to Serbia's role in the Yugoslav wars, including the extradition of high-profile war criminals to the ICTY and official recognition of Kosovar independence[10]. These conditions, which many participants said seemed to form a never-ending list that increased as soon as an old condition was fulfilled, were a point of resentment in most of my interviews since they were the main obstacle that kept Serbia

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[10] Although official recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is not technically a requirement for Serbian EU membership, many participants viewed this as a de facto condition.

out of the EU. I think these conditions were resented because they were a sign of the EU's

unwillingness to recognize Serbia as 'truly' European. By assigning the problems keeping Serbia

out of the EU and the responsibility for their resolutions strictly to their "parents' generation,"

participants were able to position themselves as belonging to Europe regardless of whether

Serbia had met EU accession conditions.

In other more explicit (and literal) instances of distancing oneself from 1990s era political

legacies and positioning oneself as belonging in Europe, several participants told me they

planned to move to the EU after graduating university, describing Serbia as a country that they

did not want to grow old in. For example, Milica, the 24 year old student quoted earlier

discussing her feeling of being excluded from Europe, went on to say:

> I feel bad that I will most likely be one of those people who leave, but I really don't plan to spend
> the next 10 years waiting for Godot, for something to change—and then to end up sounding like
> my dad when I'm 50, living in the past. I mean, not so much anymore. He really is much better
> now. But for a time he really spoke about how things were better before and nothing is worthwhile
> anymore. And I don't want to be like that. To be that kind of old person, unhappy and bitter, only
> complaining about how pensions never come. […] Honestly, I hope that one day I will come back
> and be part of a Serbia that is prospering, not a Serbia that is stagnating.

In saying that she hopes to "come back and be part of a Serbia that is prospering," Milica

suggests that Serbia's 'stagnation' is not her or her generation's problem to resolve. She brings

up her father's complaint that "things were better before and nothing is worthwhile anymore,"

which implies that the deteriorated or stagnant situation in Serbia became a problem in her

father's time, and she was merely born into it. By making the decision to relocate to the EU,

Milica positions herself as belonging in Europe despite Serbia's geopolitical position outside the

EU. She reconciles this tension between where she is and where she sees herself as belonging by

referring to the phenomenon of brain-drain, thereby aligning herself with a critical mass of

people who have left before her and who will leave after her.

As evidenced by the above excerpt, distancing oneself from 1990s-era politics may lead to ambivalence or apathy towards the current political situation insofar as it continues to bears the legacy of the 1990s. However, as Schwenkel's (2011) research on youth in post-war Vietnam shows, youth groups' perceived ambivalence may be much more nuanced and expressive than it appears. Schwenkel (2011) focuses on the growing disconnect and historical distance between youth in Vietnam growing up in a time of peace and prosperity and their country's experience of socialist revolution and war. She writes that older generations suspect that youth do not understand or appreciate the sacrifices made to reunite and liberate the country. However, she maintains that while youth did not experience the war directly, they continue to experience its "severe and enduring aftermath" (127) which influences their everyday experiences and shapes their aspirations for the future. She argues that youth are therefore affected by their nation's history despite the disconnection and apathy they are perceived to be exhibiting by older generations. Read in this way, the participants' tendency to evoke a sense of separation from the 1990s and to position themselves as belonging in Europe (or the EU) may actually stem from an intimate connection to the stories of 1990s-era isolation told to them by their parents or other older generations. For example, Bojana, the 26 year old graduate student quoted earlier, said,

> My dad's a little, you know… bitter. And if you mention, I don't know, Americans or something to him, he goes crazy. He's very sensitive about those things: the war in Croatia, the bombings, the 1990s. I mean, if you mention Milošević –pfft! You'll be hearing about it for the next half hour, how he ruined everyone's lives. So, ever since I'm living on my own, I talk about that stuff [the topic of Serbian EU integration] way less. Maybe I should be more interested, but to be honest, I'm not terribly interested. I mean… I know a bit. I know that Croatia's going to get into the EU in a couple months now, right? In July or something?

In this excerpt, Bojana makes a connection between her disinterest in Serbian EU integration politics and her father's excessive stories about the 1990s. While she separates herself somewhat from the 1990s by referring only to her father's experiences as opposed to her own, it is clear that her disinterest in contemporary politics stems not from being too far removed from the

1990s by her young age, but from a rather intimate knowledge of the 1990s akin to post-memory (Schwenkel 2011; Hirsch 2008). Having moved out of her parents' house, Bojana seems relieved to not hear her father's stories on a regular basis.

Taking another example, Dragana, 23, spoke at length about her father's experience of struggle in the 1990s, and then said,

> I was probably too young then to look at it that way, so it wasn't too bad for me. I mean, it wasn't exactly ideal –I remember that you would go to the store and there's just nothing, and that my father baked bread because you would go to the store and they don't have bread, or there's like a 30km line-up outside the store[11]. I was saying to my sister—where did we buy make-up before Lilly[12] opened up? And I was thinking about it, and then it hit me—at the flea market! And really, I'm not kidding, we would go to the flea market! They'd bring things in from Macedonia. […] And I guess you just kind of forget about those kinds of things, and so to me growing up here wasn't something traumatic.

Born in in1989, Dragana positions herself as "too young" to have experienced the 1990s in a "traumatic" way. It seems from her account of her father baking that her knowledge about her father's experience of struggle comes from stories her family has told her. Although she distances herself from the 1990s due to her age, ("it wasn't too bad for me"), she nevertheless, she points out that things she would find ridiculous now (like buying make-up at a flea market full of Macedonian 'imports' instead of a Western-style cosmetic shop) are things she actually experienced but "kind of forgot about" since she experienced them as a child. In this way, a forgotten memory of the 1990s influences her understanding of everyday life, in this case delineating where it is normal or reasonable to buy make-up. Through this rather mundane example, we can see a similar situation to the apparent disconnect shown by Schwenkel's (2011) Vietnamese youth: the participants' tendency to push the 1990s further into the past comes not from apathy or ambivalence towards this time, but from an intimate knowledge of it that continues to influence their everyday understandings and ideas about their futures.

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[11] She is exaggerating. The Serbian language has a flair for the dramatic.

[12] Lilly Drogerie was actually founded in Serbia in the 1950s, but after the 1990s was privatized and re-opened as a Western-style cosmetic franchise and pharmacy in 2003.

Dragana's comments are also reminiscent of several participants' use of the phrase "a return to the 1990s[13]" to elicit mock panic about the re-institution of visa regimes or economic isolation policies if Serbia does not join the EU. To take a sinister but poignant example, Anica, a 26-year-old post-graduate student, said,

> The alternative [to joining the EU] would be… I don't know, for us to continue to fall apart. Because that's all I knew growing up: that Serbia is slowly becoming smaller and smaller, that they're always taking some regions off of us, and that it's only going to continue to, how would I say this, to fall apart.

Although Anica stated elsewhere in our interview that she considers herself to be "part of Europe," Serbia's lack of progress towards EU integration lags behind her self-understanding or self-positioning as European. Like other participants who joked about "a return to the 1990s" if Serbia does not join the EU, I would suggest that the participants' memory (or post-memory) of the 1990s strongly informs how they currently understand the marker 'European.' In pinning together the threat of the 1990s and the threat of exclusion from the EU, they are evoking an idea of 'Europe' or what it means to be 'European' that is constructed in contrast to their ideas about the 1990s. Being "part of Europe" is therefore expressed by separating oneself from the this era: being connected rather than isolated, shopping at modern stores like "Lilly" rather than make-shift flea markets, and moving forward in time rather than "living in the past" or "stagnating" along with their parents' generation, or those "old enough to be held responsible" (Shore 2009:327). Simply put, being 'European' can be read as being included in "the European story," and no longer being associated with the chaos of the 1990s through a never-ending list of accession conditions.

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[13] I like to think this phrase is a mocking inversion of the "return to Europe" discourse that filled newspapers (Politika 2000) and academic articles (Lindstrom 2003) after the 1990s, but I'll never really know.

Urbanity and Europeanness

Most[14] of the project participants were born and raised in Belgrade and were self-identified urbanites. Belgrade is a lively city with no shortage of cafes, bars, patios, and nightclubs, the best of which are tucked away into unmarked apartments, inner courtyards, abandoned factory buildings, or behind decrepit fences near the train tracks. There is a sense of chaos to the city: foreigners often point out that while the street signs are in Cyrillic, all tourist street-maps are in Latin script, and many of the colloquial names of streets are actually old names from the socialist era (such as Revolution Boulevard) that have been officially re-named but never fully adopted by city-dwellers. With a population of approximately 1.3 million, Belgrade is the largest city in Serbia. Novi Sad, the second largest city, has a population of only 260,000.

Belgrade was the capital of the former Yugoslavia, and since Tito was a key part of the Non-Aligned movement during the Cold War and implemented a 'softer' form of communism than the states behind the Iron Curtain, Belgrade had a special relationship to Europe throughout this period. However, after the death of Tito and the rise of Milošević, Belgrade quickly went from being the capital of an internationally respected Yugoslavia to being the capital of a war-torn pariah state, and Jansen's (2009) research has found that this rapid shift is still being experienced by Serbian citizens as a fall (or push) from grace.

Jansen (2005) points out that in 1992, two-thirds of the population of Belgrade was made up of people who were born in rural areas and had moved to the city during their lifetime. Citing Spangler (1983), he notes that approximately 6.5 million Yugoslavs migrated from rural to urban areas in the period 1948-1981 as part of the urbanization and industrialization programs of the

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[14] 3 out of 17 were born elsewhere in Serbia and came to Belgrade for university studies. Of those 3, 2 self-identify as urban.

post-WWII Titoist regime. It should have been no surprise then that when I asked participants to tell me about Belgrade, many of them brought up the influx of rural people into the city. For example, Bojana, the 26 year old graduate student quoted earlier discussing her father's distaste for Milošević and her disinterest in politics, said,

> There are so many villagers [*seljaci*] here! It's not just on the edge of the city –it's downtown! I mean, just the worst of the worst. I see them on the street, but you know how it is, when you run in a different circle, you don't really interact.

Born and raised in Belgrade, Bojana jokingly told me that she was an "urban snob" and could intuitively tell the difference between a true *Beograđanin/ka* and someone who was from "the interior." I asked if it was a matter of dialect or fashion and she explained to me that it was a more intuitive feeling, a sort of urban radar.

Jansen's (2005) concept of deterritorialized urbanity in his research on post-Yugoslav urban self-perceptions in Belgrade and Zagreb is helpful for understanding this kind of vying for position: deterritorialized urbanity is the concept by which urban qualities are granted or denied to city dwellers on the basis of criteria other than address, thereby creating a perceived rural-urban divide within a city. Although everyone lives within the city of Belgrade, for example, not everyone is considered to be (or considers themselves to be) a *Beograđanin/ka*. As Marko, 24, concisely explained to me, "They live here, but they're not from here."

I found that participants used the marker 'urban' to not only distinguish themselves from the city-dwelling *seljaci*, but also to position themselves or their demographic as belonging in the cultural space of Europe. This generally occurred in one of two ways: Either, the participant would attribute Belgrade with particularly European qualities, for example saying something like, "We have made a lot of progress, and we are a much more European city than any other city in Serbia." Alternately, the participant would deny European qualities to rural parts of Serbia, as evidenced in the following statement: "There's a lot of history here, and in that sense it's

something of a –I don't know how to say this—a European city. It's not like you arrived in some village." By describing urban Belgrade as a "European city" as opposed to "some village," the city and the urban-identified are lifted into the contested space of Europe while the countryside remains on the periphery.

The association of urbanity with Europeanness closely mirrors demi-orientalist (Wolff 1995) or Balkanist (Todorova 1997) discourse in which 'Europe proper' is characterized as progressive and civilized in contrast to the barbarianism and backwardness of the Other. For example, Jansen (2005) argues that self-identifying as 'urban' in Belgrade involves painting a picture of oneself as cultured, educated, refined, and civilized in contrast to the 'backwards' rural peasant. He argues that the influx of *seljaci* into the city is therefore perceived as an encroachment or even an "attack" (160) on urban cultural values, especially by older generations who grew up with the political ideal of "modernization as urbanization" (162) that marked the post-WWII Titoist regime. This perspective, whereby societies are depicted as progressing from rural 'backwardness' to urban modernism is also dominant in economic development discourse, and it shares the evolutionist logic attributed to Europeanisation scholarship in chapter 2.

Jansen's (2005) discussion of the rural 'threat' to urban modernization in Belgrade is also based on the perceived association between rural influxes into the city and the threat of regression to 1990s-style nationalism, isolation, and backwardness. Ramet (1996:76) has argued that the rise of ultra-nationalism in Serbia was "a profoundly rural phenomenon" that relied on support from rural citizens. Although she was writing in 1996, four years before the overthrow of Milošević, Ramet points out that the rise of the ultra-nationalist movement constituted a "victory of the countryside over the city" (76), while the anti-nationalist, anti-war, and anti-Milošević opposition during this period came largely from Belgrade. Based on the association between

1990s nationalism and rurality, Jansen (2005) argues that urban self-identification in Belgrade is taking place within a wider discourse of "mourning for urban, European modernization" (160), or nostalgia for the 'what might have been' if the 1990s had happened differently. He suggests that through negative descriptions of *seljaci* living in Belgrade, urbanites describe the city as being "under attack from rurality" (160) or relapsing to the 1990s.

I found that participants tended to describe Belgrade as being encroached upon by *seljaci*, but I would not say they described this encroachment as a threatening "attack," as Jansen found in his research. Perhaps because a large influx of people came to Belgrade from other parts of Serbia in the 1990s when the participants were children, youth in Belgrade today are more accustomed to the rural-urban mix and do not see the influx of rural people as an "attack" on their urban identities, although they perceive themselves as being separate or genuinely urban. Nevertheless, having heard stories from their parents, participants tended to contrast the "golden years" of their parents' Belgrade to the city as they know it today. For example, Goran, the 30 year old *apsolvent* quoted earlier, said,

> Too much immigration has happened in Belgrade in the last 20 years. Belgrade is no longer the European metropolis it used to be. And that's ok, you know? I mean, 2 million people live in Belgrade, and how many live in all of Serbia –6 million? 7 million? So the majority of Serbia is Belgrade. Looking at it proportionally, it's just not possible for everyone in Belgrade to be urban and cool and critical and progressive and all that.

Goran distinguishes himself and his peers as 'truly' urban ("and cool and critical and progressive") as opposed to the non-urban city dwellers. Although Goran is fine with the fact that not everyone in Belgrade is urban, his view that "the majority of Serbia is Belgrade" suggests that he does not want to consider the rest of the country beyond Belgrade, which for him is certainly not cool or critical or progressive. If we transpose the concept of deterritorialized urbanity to the idea of vying for space in the symbolic geography of Europe, the use of urbanity as a signal for Europeanness can be read as a way for participants to position themselves as

'truly' European in relation to other (rural) Serbian citizens.

I found it interesting that numerous participants agreed with Goran's perception that "Serbia is Belgrade," not only in terms of population, but also as the centre of government and political decision-making processes. The oft-cited rhyming expression "*što južnije, što tužnije* [the further South you go, the sadder it gets]" further reinforced for me how participants ranked rural and urban in the Serbian hierarchy. In identifying as genuinely urban, I feel that participants were making claims to Europeanness as a symbolic or cultural designation by distancing themselves from the chaos of the 1990s, insofar as ultra-nationalism is perceived to be a rural phenomenon (Ramet 1996). In terms of Serbian EU integration and the symbolic geography of Europe, positioning urban Belgrade as "progressive" and treating the city as the most meaningful part of the country allows participants to raise Belgrade to the status of 'European' while leaving the Serbian countryside in the darkness of the Balkans, or in the ambiguous zone between Europe and Asia.

Class position and Europeanness

Another way in which participants positioned themselves or their demographic as European relative to other sections of society was through their middle- to upper-middle class position. Although only one participant (a Marxist) directly identified her class position or spoke to class-based issues, most participants' class positions were expressed in terms of travel experience, which implied financial resources, and university education, insofar as formal education is a form of social capital that signifies class position (Bourdieu 1999).

It wasn't uncommon for participants to distinguish themselves as university students from "people on the street," who were portrayed as "dumb," "uninformed," or even "rural." In three cases, the student I was interviewing did not understand that I would be interviewing *only*

university students, and they warned me that while their opinions were coming from a place of education, "people on the street" might not be able to form a unique perspective on the topic of Serbian EU integration. For example, Stevan, 23, talked about the general public in this way:

> They ground all their arguments in Wikipedia—that's where they inform themselves and then they bombard you with it, with their half-information, and they correct you and act important. But really, they don't understand anything. 99% of Serbia is like this.

In this excerpt, Stevan separates himself from 99% of the population of Serbia because of his university education and presumably the critical thinking and research skills he acquired in the process of his studies. It is possible that in his comment, Stevan is directing his insult at *seljaci* living in Belgrade, since rural people are generally stereotyped as ignorant. Regardless of Stevan's intention, it is interesting to note that class was often associated with urbanity. Jansen (2005) also comments on the role of formal education as "desirable cultural capital" (161) by which one could lay claim to deterritorialized urban identification.

In the following excerpt, Bojana, the 26 year old graduate student, connects the themes of urban-identity and class position, and gives a lengthy but honest impression of the particular position that the project participants occupy in Serbian society:

> You hang out with people who are similar to you, you know? And the majority of my and my boyfriend's friends are of a similar –how do I say this?—status. They're generally people who are from Belgrade or have lived in Belgrade their whole lives, who have finished university, who are educated, who work. And surely you can't compare them to people who, you know, live in a village or who work on a farm, who aren't as educated. I mean, I don't discriminate against people who aren't educated, but simply, that affects certain things […]. My friends and I, we're all similar in terms of age and education and interests […]. And then every time I go a little bit outside of my friend-group, I'm like, "Whoa, what kind of people are these?" […] All my friends and the people I associate with, […] they have some perspective on life. And then when I suddenly find myself among people who are, you know, like a barber or something—and I don't have anything against barbers, really—but when I find myself among those people, I'm a little shocked at first, and then I realize that I just don't hang out with those types of people and I'm not used to them. Someone will say something dumb, or someone will not know something, or someone will be uninformed, and not know some basic things, and then I think "This is crazy!" And then I realize that there's a ton of people like that, who have no idea, who have no sense of what's going on in life, who don't know some really basic things. I mean, it's not like my friends are some high intellectuals, but…

This excerpt, taken together with numerous other participants' comments about the general public, depicts the university-educated as an elite bubble, an intellectual minority elevated above

"99% of Serbia," as Stevan put it.

I found it interesting that participants consistently painted a picture of Belgrade as a place where they could not put their university degrees to good use, while in contrast they depicted the EU as a place where they could purse more serious careers with their university qualifications. A prevalent idea among participants was to move away from Belgrade after graduation to work or study in the EU, which will be explored in more detail in chapter 5. While not every student I interviewed had plans to leave Belgrade, it was always within the realm of possibility for either themselves or their friends. Through discussion about re-locating to an EU capital to put their degrees to use, participants positioned themselves as belonging in Europe due to merits and qualifications associated with class.

Shifting Hierarchies: Romania, Bulgaria, and the Periphery of the EU

In the previous section, I explored how participants make claims to Europeanness despite Serbia's current exclusion from the EU, and how the contested label of 'European' is meaningful to them as young people growing up in the legacy of the 1990s. I think it is important to remember that the participants' associations to Europeanness are being made in the context of the EU's eastward expansion, and the shrinking of the 'immediate outside.'

An unexpected but fruitful insight into how this group perceives the phenomenon of EU expansion from the outside looking in arose as participants brought up the recent EU accessions of fellow Balkan countries Bulgaria and Romania. Although I did not ask any direct questions about these two countries –and in fact I expected that Croatia's EU accession would be of more interest to them—their remarks about Bulgaria and Romania seemed to point to the tension of re-positioning oneself in the shifting hierarchies created by the EU's eastward expansion. While the previous section dealt specifically with the participants as individuals or as a distinct

demographic group, I think that the participants' perceptions of these two countries' EU

integration experiences are meaningful in terms of understanding how they view Europe as a

hierarchical space and how they understanding Serbia's position within that hierarchy. This is to

say that while the demographic markers of age, class position, and urban identity allowed

participants to make claims to Europeanness and to in a sense transcend Serbia's geopolitical

exclusion from the EU, their discussion on Romania and Bulgaria grounds them as Serbian

citizens occupying the 'immediate outside.'

A common attitude towards Bulgaria and Romania's EU accessions was indignation.

Take the following example from Marko, the 24 year old student quoted earlier discussing

genuine urbanity in Belgrade,

> I don't know why Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary were accepted into the EU. What makes them
> so much better and more special than Serbia? But they were accepted! And we –we who are the
> same as them? They have unfinished roads. They have a high unemployment rate, corruption,
> criminals, everything. They all have just one major city. They have Bucharest, they have Sofia –
> we have Belgrade which functions normally. And they are accepted into the EU, and we aren't.
> Why? For what reason?

This excerpt is characteristic of what Jansen (2009) refers to as Serbian citizens' resentment of

being "mis-stratified" (829) in the rankings of post-Cold War Europe, as other Balkan and even

former Yugoslav states have become EU-members. Marko's comment affirms Jansen's finding

that not being included in the EU is perceived as an injustice ("Why? For what reason?")

precisely because 'comparable' countries have been allowed membership.

While Marko argued that Serbia should be allowed in the EU if Bulgaria, Romania, and

Hungary are members, he also expressed the idea that those states do not belong in the EU. This

was a relatively common sentiment among participants which strongly echoes Wolff's

characterization of Eastern Europe as "within Europe but not fully European." Marko pointed out

inadequacies such as unfinished roads, unemployment, corruption, and other characteristics

which make these countries unqualified for EU membership. In identifying Serbia as being "the same as them" due to these inferiorities, he evoked demi-orientalist (Wolff 1995) or Balkanist (Todorova 1997) discourse which unites these countries as 'Balkan' or 'Eastern European' by describing them as backwards or underdeveloped relative to the EU. There is an uneasiness between Marko's identification that "we […] are the same as them," and his perception that these countries are considered by the EU to be "so much better and more special than Serbia" since they were allowed membership. This excerpt shows the tension created by the eastward expansion of the EU as it cuts across mental maps and identity categories and creates a new geopolitical hierarchy that makes EU states "more special" than non-EU states.

Marko's comment brings into play the two interrelated hierarchies elaborated at the beginning of this chapter: the hierarchy within the EU structure comes across as he positions Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary as barely deserving of EU membership, and the hierarchy between EU-states and non-EU states comes across as he asks why those countries are deemed to be "more special" than Serbia. This double-layered hierarchy invites the question: how is the periphery of the EU imagined by those on the periphery of Europe?

On the Outside Looking in: Imagining the Periphery of the EU

While Serbia waited for the *datum*, many participants looked to the recent accession experiences of Bulgaria and Romania in order to gauge what life might be like if Serbia joined the EU. In contrast to the political platforms and ad campaigns that participants say have proclaimed the indisputable benefits of Serbian EU accession since 2000, the experiences of Bulgaria and Romania were a point of disillusionment or even pessimism for numerous participants. The disillusionment stemmed from the fact that they had expected the state of affairs in these countries to dramatically improve once they were in the EU, and they were

disappointed to see that change was coming slowly if at all. Several participants told me that

Bulgaria and Romania's EU accessions made them more critical of the EU and the changes EU

accession would bring. They came to realize that it was not as beneficial as the pro-EU ad

campaigns would have them believe. In fact, many participants commented that EU accession

had in fact brought negative results for these countries, most often citing the argument that prices

had increased but wages had stayed the same.

The participants' comments about Bulgaria and Romania's EU accessions strongly

revealed the centre-periphery hierarchy that for them characterizes the EU's structure. For

example, I found that participants were focused on the idea that Serbian EU accession would

mean joining the ranks of Bulgaria and Romania, and that they would "never be equal to

Germany." Often, they discussed the disadvantages of joining the EU as a peripheral member, as

in the following example from Stevan, 23:

> If we were accepted into the EU today, or in 3 years, I think that it would ruin us. Just as I see that
> it is ruining all these surrounding countries. We just aren't ready to carry ourselves with those big
> players. We aren't ready to carry ourselves with the Germans, the French, the Dutch, the Belgians.
> We just aren't yet. First we need to change gradually. It doesn't happen that you wake up in the
> morning and you are changed. We all know it doesn't go that way.

In this excerpt, Stevan makes a separation between Serbia and the "surrounding countries," and

the "big players" of the EU. He understands that Serbia would join the EU as a peripheral or

small player, and conceptualizes the periphery as a zone of exploitation that is "ruining" certain

countries.

The idea that Serbian EU accession would mean joining a distinct peripheral zone in the

EU runs slightly contrary to Jansen's (2009) analysis of Serbian citizen's everyday geopolitical

discourse regarding EU accession. In Jansen's discussion of the "immediate outside" of the EU

as a peripheral zone in Europe, he conceptualizes the EU as a coherent block: there is only an

inside and an outside. While he argues that Serbian citizens perceive European geopolitics as

organized in a "spatiotemporal hierarchy of movement forward" (824) in which some

collectivities are in "'advanced' or 'behind' in a process of ongoing movement" (824), the event

of joining the EU is not further broken down into the event of joining only a peripheral part of

the EU. This conceptualization differs from my own research experience, in which participants

consistently made reference to two parallel hierarchies in Europe: the centre-periphery hierarchy

between EU states and non-EU states, and the centre-periphery hierarchy within the EU itself.

Since the perception of the EU as composed of a centre and a periphery was so strong

among my participants, this difference in analysis may stem from the timing of the research:

since Jansen's article in 2009, Serbian citizens have had more time to evaluate how Bulgaria and

Romania are faring in the EU, and to consider what this might mean for Serbia's potential future

in the EU. However, since I only interviewed university students, I do not know whether the

average person in Belgrade is aware of or concerned with the integration experiences of other

Balkan countries, or if this interest was particular to university students. From the way

participants spoke about these two countries, it seems that they had amassed some anecdotes and

perhaps media reports about life in these countries after EU accession. For example, Vladan, a 24

year old *apsolvent* reflected on Bulgaria and Romania's EU experiences in this way:

> You know how I see the European Union? I know that maybe it sounds like a conspiracy theory,
> but to me it sounds about right, because it's getting worse for everybody in the EU, and it's only
> getting better for the Germans. For example, Bulgaria and Romania joined a couple years ago.
> Prices doubled, but their wages stayed the same. They're getting poorer now for no good reason.
> Maybe here there would be some investments, or maybe something will open up there, but I don't
> know how much the average person is going to feel it. Politicians will feel it.

This excerpt is characteristic of numerous participants' statements that Bulgaria and Romania's

EU experiences made them more pessimistic about Serbian EU accession. This suggests that the

participants' reflections on these countries' experiences have contributed to their widely held

perception of the EU as being composed of a Western core and an Eastern periphery.

However, as mentioned earlier, participants' perceptions of the periphery of the EU were not entirely pessimistic. For some, it was seen not as a site of economic exploitation, but rather meaningful inclusion in "the European story." This suggests that at stake in their discussion on Serbian EU integration was not only the pragmatic advantages or disadvantages of inclusion in the EU as an economic entity, but broader ideas about cultural inclusion in Europe. For example, Milica, the 24 year old student quoted earlier, said, "I want us to latch onto, and to be a part of something bigger. It's always better to be a part of something than to be alone." In this excerpt, Milica describes Serbia's current position outside the EU as somewhat lonely. This idea is all the more poignant if we conceptualize the outside of the EU as a space that is slowly shrinking as the EU grows bigger and absorbs more countries.

From these and numerous other comments about the unfairness and injustice of being left on the outside of the EU, many participants conveyed the idea that it was better to be on the periphery of the EU than to be on the periphery of Europe itself. In this way, the eastward expansion of the EU was pushing those left outside further towards the edges of European belonging. Joining the EU even as a peripheral member was meaningful to many participants on the level feeling included in "the European story," regardless of their often pessimistic opinions about the practical or economic disadvantages of joining the EU as a "small" country.

Who belongs in the EU?

Talking about Bulgaria and Romania's EU accession, participants would sometimes argue that Serbia "would fare better" than these countries if it were admitted, or they would argue, as mentioned earlier, that Bulgaria and Romania did not belong in the EU. For example, Marko, age 24, stated, "What use –I mean I really don't know—what use do Bulgaria and Romania and Hungary and all those small countries that joined the EU have […] when those

countries are clearly falling apart?" Marija, the 29 year old *apsolvent* quoted earlier echoed this

idea, suggesting that Bulgaria and Romania only meet EU qualifications on paper but not in

practice:

> I have the impression that the EU is just a form, and that there is no actual praxis. A form in the
> sense that Romania and Bulgaria were accepted into the EU. So, they completely changed their
> laws in accordance with European laws, but practice zero. They don't actually apply any of it.
> Their paperwork is in order but in practice nothing functions. And I have the impression that this
> is the case with those countries like Bulgaria and Romania who got into the Union when there was
> that euro-boom, so, without any kind of criteria, without anything. It was just formal: fill out the
> paperwork and you're in.

Marija argues that Bulgaria and Romania do not 'truly' meet the criteria for EU membership.

Her comments express a relatively common idea among participants that while Bulgaria and

Romania were accepted into the EU, they do not truly belong in its inner circle. The periphery of

the EU is perceived as a site of internal exclusion: technically inside the EU, but not quite.

The resistance towards fully acknowledging Bulgarian or Romanian EU membership

may be connected to the fact that the EU is commonly equated with Europe in everyday speech

and Serbian political media, as in the political slogan "Let's go to Europe!" [*Idemo u Evropu!*].

To willfully acknowledge that Bulgaria and Romania are 'true' EU members would be to

discursively include them in (and exclude Serbia from) an idea of Europe as civilized,

progressive, and Western. In other words, there is a tension between the West-East hierarchy

elaborated by Wolff (1995), which labels Bulgaria and Romania as 'Eastern,' and the new

hierarchy being created by the EU's eastward expansion. The fact that Bulgaria and Romania

had joined the EU was not enough to alter the "maps in the mind" (Wolff 1995:3) of participants

who still considered these countries to be Eastern, Balkan, peripheral, or simply "the same" as

Serbia, to use Marko's words.

Since Serbian EU accession would mean joining the ranks of Bulgaria and Romania, the

idea that these countries do not 'truly' belong in the EU suggests that some participants

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anticipate that Serbia would not truly be included in the EU either. If the periphery of the EU is understood by Serbian citizens as a site of internal exclusion within the EU, the potential event of Serbia joining the EU may be perceived as a move forward in terms of Jansen's (2009) spatiotemporal hierarchy, but it is not necessarily an event by which a Serbia would cross the threshold into European inclusion or belonging. However, it is worth noting that many participants confidently declared that Serbia would "do better in the EU" than Bulgaria or Romania. In any case, the majority of comments implied that Serbia should at least have been given a chance to participate.

Europe and the Edge of the World

In positioning urban, educated youth as more European than other segments of Serbian society, or in protesting the injustice of Romania and Bulgaria's inclusion in the EU, participants are in a sense attempting to re-shuffle the symbolic hierarchies of Europe in their favour. This vying for position can be explained in terms of Bakić-Hayden's (1995) concept of "nesting orientalisms," through which balkanist or orientalist discourse is used to construct 'Others' internally in the post-Yugoslav national context, in order to separate one's own collectivity from "the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans" (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 922). In considering the participants' comments, it is important to remember that this self-positioning or "internal balkanism" (Jansen 2005: 159) is happening in the context of the EU's eastward expansion, and these comments are being made from an ever-shrinking space on the outside of the EU. The participants' self-understanding as belonging to European culture *a priori* therefore comes into tension with Serbia's geopolitical position outside of the EU, which stands in the way of them being recognized by others as constituting a meaningful part of Europe rather than a peripheral zone.

As other Balkan countries join the EU and the 'immediate outside' of the EU grows

smaller, asserting one's belonging in 'Europe proper' helps to quell the fear of not having a

'place in the world' or being excluded to the point of 'falling off' of the world (Jansen 2009).

Speaking directly to this threat of exclusion, Milica, 24, said this of her summer travel

experiences in the EU:

> It's not like you can say 'Serbia' and people are like, "Oh yeah, I know Serbia." No, it's more like, "Which one's that?" And you say, "We're the ones that aren't in the EU." "Oh, you're the minority on the outside."

Greenberg (2011:92) notes that having a sense of agency is "linked both to material practices in

the world and the ability to control the representation of those practices." She continues that

while total control over self-representation is impossible, certain conditions give people more or

less ability to influence or direct representations of themselves. In the excerpts explored above,

participants make claims to Europeanness in spite of a geopolitical barrier that keeps them on the

outside, suggesting that having a lack of agency to control self-representation may be part of

what it means to occupy the periphery of Europe. As the EU comes to stand for Europe and

cultural ideas about the EU overshadow its core economic function, seeking a sense of belonging

in Europe does not necessarily imply a pro-EU political perspective. More than anything, it is

about inclusion in "the European story" after growing up in relative isolation, and wanting to be

a "part of something bigger" rather than a part of a space that is constantly shrinking.

CHAPTER 4: CORRUPTION, LAWLESSNESS, AND THE "BELGRADE MENTALITY":

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE IN BELGRADE AND THE ANTICIPATED

EFFECTS OF EU INTEGRATION

I asked each student I interviewed to tell me about everyday life in Belgrade. Many

participants described life in Belgrade as chaotic or even lawless in contrast to life in the EU

which they imagined to be orderly and regulated. This chapter is built from the participants'

perceptions about life in Belgrade and the kinds of social and political changes (if any) they

anticipated or associated with European integration. I explore this topic through the lens of

abnormalcy discourse in post-socialist and post-conflict settings (Greenberg 2011; Galbraith

2003; Fehervary 2002), and I draw on Greenberg's (2011) argument that urban youth in Serbia

perceive it to be a "postdisciplinary state," (90) a state that is unable to produce agentive subjects

capable of moral action or of making a 'normal life' for themselves.

In focusing on the participants' perceptions of the changes associated with EU accession,

I want to refrain from framing Serbian EU integration as inevitable or imminent. My interview

questions guided the conversation to the theme of anticipated changes, and while the participants

graciously answered my questions, the discussion was more often than not embedded in feelings

of stagnation or impasse. It is important to remember that the theme or goal of European

integration has been at the forefront of Serbian politics since the overthrow of Milošević in 2000,

and that this age-group has been raised on promises about a future in the EU that have yet to be

fulfilled. "It's always the same story" was a frequent caveat to any discussion about Serbian

European integration and how things will be different if Serbia joins the EU.

Life in Belgrade and "The Belgrade Mentality"

Dejan, a 26 year old graduate student who asked me to meet him at his favourite café and

insisted on paying for my coffee and lighting all my cigarettes for me, assured me that while

things in Belgrade may appear normal on the surface to someone who is "just visiting," the chaos

of the city ran deep. Like many other participants, Dejan described everyday life in Belgrade as

unregulated and uncertain: the system was corrupt and everybody was looking for a way to make

things easier for themselves; plans were made day-by-day because nothing could be counted on

long-term. In explaining the underlying chaos of Belgrade to me, participants frequently referred

to the "Belgrade mentality," which described a relaxed and easy-going society that was unwilling

to follow rules in a state that was unwilling or unable to enforce laws. The Belgrade mentality

was to look for loopholes, to try and slip through cracks in a flawed and corrupt system, to get

the job done quickly so one could relax and enjoy themselves. I understood this mentality to be

both a response to the system they lived in, and a contributing factor to its perpetuation.

Sometimes participants would refer to the 'Balkan' or 'Serbian' mentality, or just to "our

mentality" in general terms, but since their accompanying stories were most frequently about

Belgrade, and since the scope of this project is Belgrade, I refer to it here as the Belgrade

mentality. Kitromilides (1996:186-187) has argued against the purported existence of a shared

"Balkan" mentality, stating that "to insist upon talking about a diachronic uniformity called

'Balkan mentality' is no more than an unverifiable historical legend, and it can turn into a

perverse mythology as well." He argues instead for describing "mental and attitudinal structures"

(186) which come about in specific historical and political contexts, as was the case in eighteenth

century pre-nationalist Balkan society from which the idea of a Balkan mentality took root. Given the participants' urban upbringings, I do not think their uses of the terms 'Balkan mentality' or 'Serbian mentality' were intended to describe a shared mental attitude among all Serbs or Balkan peoples, rural and urban alike. Although "Belgrade mentality" cannot describe a shared attitude among all people in Belgrade, it was used by participants as a way of describing the attitudes they encountered in their everyday lives in Belgrade which they considered to be unique to the place and which they found they understood on some intrinsic level.

Many participants complained about the Belgrade mentality and the state of chaos and corruption it implied, often citing this mentality as an impediment to progressive change, as will be explored later in the chapter. Nevertheless, some participants were quick to highlight its positive aspects. For example, Nevena, 24, responded this way when I asked her "Is there anything that you would like to stay the way it is now, if Serbia were to join the EU?"

> Something to stay the same? Well, I was talking earlier about the Balkan or the Belgrade mentality, how it's full of spite [*inat*] and all that. But, then again, […] when I've travelled, and I haven't travelled a lot, but I have the impression that in the Balkans, people love. And you have these great relationships among friends, colleagues, girlfriends. Somehow people are much closer. And I wouldn't like for us all to become some capitalist machines that only care about getting better jobs and more money, and for us to forget some really basic human values. I mean, in the world and in those big countries, neighbours don't even know each other. They live in the same building and no one knows who else lives in their building. But here in Belgrade it's totally normal for me to go away for 10 days and to give my neighbour keys to my apartment so they can come around and water my plants or whatever. And I wouldn't like for that to change. It's simply normal here for people to know each other, to communicate, to greet an older gentleman on the street whom you see every day when you go buy bread. Even if you don't know him personally, you still say "Good afternoon, how are you? (*formal*)" and you just don't have that in some other countries. I wouldn't like for that to change because I think it's lovely. It's nice when an older gentleman has the freedom to ask me to help him carry something, or to buy him a newspaper from the kiosk. I think it's lovely.

In interviews, the positive aspects of the Belgrade mentality –the friendliness, closeness, and hospitality of people—were frequently contrasted with how participants imagined societies in the West, which Nevena referred to as "those big countries." The participants' flattering descriptions of the Belgrade mentality are interesting to consider against literature or discourse which has

framed the "Balkan mentality" as something inherently negative, violent, or primitive (Todorova 1997; Kitromilides 1996; Kaplan 1993). This difference further suggests that the participants made use of the term 'Belgrade mentality' in order to describe their everyday lives in Belgrade rather than to argue for a shared mentality among all urbanites or all Serbs.

In their praises of the positive aspects of the Belgrade mentality, the younger participants (ages 20 to 25) tended to make a connection between the relaxed or fun spirit of people in Belgrade and the high unemployment rate. For example, Ana, 20, said,

> I really love Serbia and Belgrade because there is a certain spirit to people, I think. A sort of friendliness and general relaxation which I think we would lose if we had some constantly expanding working hours, like I see is happening abroad. My uncle in Austria works 9, 10, 11 hours a day! […] I think people would be a lot more irritable here if they had to work more, and I wouldn't like to see that happen.

To take another example, Milica, 24, said,

> I don't know exactly what would change, but I wouldn't want for us to lose the, the sort of spirit we have, which of course is founded on the fact that no one works here. That would be the only real shame. I mean here, whenever you go for a walk in the street, you're never alone. The city is always buzzing; it's always alive. People are just walking around, drinking in cafes, going shopping!

This connection between not having to work much and being friendly and relaxed (and somehow still going shopping) speaks to the participants' middle- to upper-middle class position as well as their age, since as students the majority of them are supported financially by their parents. With no burdensome financial responsibilities or obligations (yet), I found that the younger participants (ages 20 to 25) generally associated the low employment rate in Belgrade with a relaxed, friendly, and sociable spirit that, in Nevena's words, "those big countries" do not have.

Youth and Abnormalcy Discourse

In terms of the anticipated changes associated with EU integration, the participants' youth gives them an interesting perspective on what is considered normal or abnormal in Belgrade society, as well as what sort of changes they consider to be possible. Youth in Serbia have been characterized in both academic and policy studies as a unique "war generation"

(Greenberg 2011; CPA 2003, 2004), a phrase which points to the effects of growing up in a period of moral disintegration without role models to look up to in the public sphere. Greenberg (2011) argues that youth in Serbia do not feel responsible for the violence and instability of the 1990s, and in Chapter 3 I explored how this leads to a sense of detachment from the current political situation. Although participants frequently described everyday life in Belgrade as unregulated, uncertain, or even chaotic, there was a sense that this situation was neither their fault nor problem, that they were simply (and unfortunately) born into it.

Anthropological research on everyday life in post-socialist settings has found that discourse about what constitutes a 'normal' life is constructed in relation to how people imagine life to be like in the West, which tend to be idealized and exaggerated depictions of the consumerist lifestyle (Fehérváry 2002; Galbraith 2003; Greenberg 2011). Idealized perceptions of western daily life come to be defined as 'normal,' while the difficulties and frustrations of achieving such a lifestyle in post-socialist settings make it so a 'normal' life is only achievable for an elite few (Fehervary 2002). Galbraith (2003) points out that discourse on the normal life can be read as a commentary on or critique of the existing state of affairs, or a means by which to contrast the everyday with the ideal.

This body of research resonated strongly with my own findings and gave me a framework through which to analyze and understand the participants' frequent comparisons of life in Belgrade to idealizations of life in western countries including Canada. For example, Dejan, who explained to me that Belgrade only appears 'normal' on the surface, also explained to me that Canada was orderly and regulated with no national issues and no poverty. I found it interesting that participants who shared their idealistic views on Canada with me generally were not interested to engage in a discussion with me when I offered them information or experiences that

went against their ideas about life in Canada. As Galbraith (2003:8) found in her research on post-socialist Polish youth, the participants' frequent discussion of the abnormalcy of Belgrade compared to western countries seemed to be a "genre of laments."

By listening to their descriptions of the abnormalcy of Belgrade, I realized that I had committed a similar idealization about Belgrade, having visited the city several times as a tourist and a member of the diaspora. My family left Belgrade when I was 3, and I visited every few years in the summertime when it felt like everybody was on vacation and relatives were happy to dote on me. Even after staying for 6 months when I was 20, my idea of Belgrade was very idealistic since I was living on Canadian money which meant I was able enjoy the café culture and nightlife without ever having to worry about finances. In this sense, my idea of Belgrade going into this project was similar to that of the younger participants' (ages 20 to 25) viewpoints elaborate above, whose young ages and middle to upper-middle class positions afforded them a view of Belgrade as sociable, hospitable, and fun despite the poor economic situation. However, despite their positive portrayals of Belgrade in terms of hospitality and friendliness, I found that even the younger participants frequently described Belgrade as abnormal or lacking compared to the west.

As a corollary to normalcy discourse, which highlights the way things 'ought to' be, Greenberg (2011) explores the political and moral dimension of 'abnormalcy' discourse in her research on urban youth's perceptions of Serbia. She argues that through abnormalcy discourse, young people described Serbia as a society with no firm rules or systems or value, operating in a state of crisis, moral chaos, and international isolation. Greenberg's research situates Serbia as a post-socialist and also post-conflict society. She argues that the sense of lacking agency to achieve a 'normal' life was attributed not only to the constraining economic conditions of post-

socialism, but also to a sense of moral decay that emerged in the 1990s and resulted in state corruption, organized crime, and the disintegration of value systems.

The connection between the abnormality of everyday life and the corruption of the 1990s came across often in my own research, especially as participants criticized corrupt politicians, referring to them as "war-lords," "thieves," "degenerates," or "despots," or simply saying the word "politician" so scathingly that everything was implied. Since this age group tends to distance itself from responsibility for the violence and isolation of the 1990s, the abnormality of everyday life in Serbia was put forward variably as something they tolerated, embraced, or wanted to get away from, but never as something that they felt responsible for.

Growing up in a corrupt system and the effects of abnormalcy

As I directed the interviews towards the topic of anticipated changes associated with EU integration, there was a strong sense in most interviews that corruption makes Serbia an abnormal country because, as one student unknowingly summarized a common feeling, "Nothing here functions the way it's supposed to." In contrast, the western countries of the EU were often perceived as running smoothly, even effortlessly. While this sense of falling short against idealized EU standards also came across in the participants' discussion on everyday geopolitical discourse (chapter 3), and employment prospects (chapter 5), abnormalcy discourse has an important moral dimension which depicts Serbia's lack of will or ability to "function the way it's supposed to" as a moral failure or even pathology (Greenberg 2011; Greenberg 2010). Through abnormalcy discourse, negative or chaotic perceptions of Serbia are imbued with an innate quality, connected to people's mentalities and ingrained beliefs. The connection between the innate state of abnormality and the chaos of the 1990s pathologizes the "Belgrade mentality" in a certain way, linking it to a time of conflict and corruption such that it can only be understood

as having the capacity to perpetuate the environment of corruption rather than to make it better

(Hughes and Pupavac 2005). Take for example the following excerpt from Milica, the 24 year

old student quoted earlier praising the "spirit" of people in Belgrade,

> I think that the way of life in EU countries is much more organized than it is here. And I think that
> even if we were to get into the European Union, I think that a lot of things still couldn't function
> the way they do over there. I mean, it all depends country to country. For example in Sweden, all
> the laws are respected. You simply can't break them. While in some other countries which are
> more like Serbia, no one cares. Everyone does what they want. […] From what I've heard about
> the European Union, my impression was always positive: that it's somehow, how would I say this,
> a more advanced society than here. […] It's not just external factors. It's also our mentality;
> change doesn't come easy to us.

In this excerpt, Milica explains that it is part of the mentality for people in Serbia to do "what

they want" and to not care about the laws. When she says that "no one cares," she is referring to

both the law-makers of Serbia –the government officials whom she considers to be corrupt—and

to Serbian society. While Serbia has laws, Milica feels they are neither enforced by the state nor

respected by the population. She explains that an effective legal system is not just a matter of

"external factors," suggesting that even if Serbia were to adopt EU laws, "things still couldn't

function the way they do over there." The issue, for her, is the mentality of Serbian society and

politicians, in which respect for the legal system is not an intrinsic moral value. She contrasts this

situation with how she perceives other "more advanced" societies like Sweden, where laws are

effectively implemented by the state and respected by citizens, and you "simply can't break

them."

Writing about the Western Balkans, Grødeland (2010; 2013) has argued that practices of

corruption are informed by social norms and values and are therefore resistant to change. Both

Grødeland (2010) and Sandholz and Taagepera (2005) identify communism as a structural factor

which created the incentive for widespread corruption, thereby rooting these practices in the

culture of post-communist or 'transitional' societies However, it is important to remember that

before communism, Serbia was under the Ottoman Empire for centuries, which left lasting impacts on social customs and organization well after the end of imperial rule (Kitromilides 1996; Vucinich 1962). In this sense, the corruption present in Serbia today should not be considered a unique feature of the socialist or post-socialist period, but should be understood in the context of a long history of imperial rule, as people developed customs and ways of operating that would allow them to adapt to their circumstances.

While acknowledging the long history of corruption, I would argue that the role of modern media in Serbia adds a unique flair to present-day corruption, as state-ownership of newspapers and television stations seems to be a widely accepted fact of life in Belgrade. While the Milošević regime's control over Serbian media has been extensively documented and acknowledged (Bieber 2003; Miljački 2003), several participants spoke about the comprised freedom of press in Serbia and how contemporary Serbian media is still owned by political parties. The participants who brought this up did it casually: for example, if I asked where they tended to get the most of their information about EU integration, the answer "TV" would come with a caveat such as, "But of course it depends which channel you're watching, which party owns which channel and all that," according to Ana, 20. Natalija, a 22 year old student laughingly described the state control of media as an unspoken truth or a social fact by relating it to a line from a Serbian sitcom where one character believed something she saw on TV and another character exclaimed rhetorically, "My dear, don't you know that they just lie to you?" The participants' capacity to critically engage with state-owned media may be testament to their university educations (especially those in the Social Sciences), or it may truly be a social fact after witnessing the pervasiveness of 1990s era political propaganda.

Grødeland's (2010) research has found that citizens in the Western Balkans believe that people's attitudes regarding laws, authority, and regulation are "conducive to corruption" (571), which is consistent with Milica's earlier statement that "change doesn't come easy to us." Grødeland refers to the attitudes and norms of corruption as "nihilist legal culture" (571), a term famously used by Medvedev to describe the perceived lightness of the law in Russian society. The social fact of media ownership may therefore contribute to the participants' perception of widespread corruption in Belgrade as a form of nihilist legal culture.

Greenberg (2011) addresses the issue of political subjectivation in her conceptualization of Serbia as a "postdisciplinary state" (90): a state that is unable to produce agentive subjects capable of moral action. She argues that urban youth in Belgrade express a desire to be part of a functioning, disciplinary, authoritative state that will give them a moral compass for action. The conceptualization of Serbia as a postdisciplinary state that produces subjects who feel they cannot act morally or meaningfully in the world resonated with my own research, especially in the participants' discussion on the anticipated changes associated with EU integration. Take the following example from Marko, 24, who discusses the effects of growing up in a corrupt system,

> Well, I've gotten used to this system of *fora*[15] in Serbia. How there are no rules. And maybe, if everything were different—but it's also impossible! – We'd have to reform the judiciary a great deal. You know why it's impossible? Well, I can go and break all the laws I want, and I can get called into court. And I delay it: I don't show up to court once; I don't show up to court twice. I can do this for ten years. I can do this for the rest of my life. That's the *fora* in Serbia: you can do anything –but only if you have the nerves for it. And now, if something actually big were to change, the judiciary has to change. And then all of society would start moving forward.

Marko's excerpt shows how growing up in a corrupt system or a postdisciplinary state causes him to "get used to" that system and to perpetuate it despite the fact he might morally disagree with it. He suggest that it is "impossible" to change the system for the better, since the changes that need to be made are on the level of the state (or judiciary) rather than on the level of the

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[15] *Fora* is slang with no direct English translation. It means trick, catch, pun, gag, joke, etc.

everyday. Marko's comment suggests he does not feel he has agency to act morally in Serbian society, rather he has learned the *fora* and acquired the "nerves" to go along the system.

Change, Agency, and Stagnation in the Postdisciplinary State

In the participants' discussion on European integration, change, and perceptions of abnormality in Belgrade, I noticed a tension between two conflicting conceptualizations of progressive political and social change. Change was alternately described as a cause of EU accession –something that would *happen to* Serbia once it joined the EU; or, as an effect of EU accession – something Serbia would have to *make happen* in order to meet EU accession criteria. Frequently, these two conceptualizations of change would come up at different points in a single conversation, although the tension between them was not so clear until I began to transcribe interviews. As will be explored below, the "Belgrade mentality" and the ingrained corruption of the Serbian state featured in both conceptualizations as a barrier to progressive change, supporting Greenberg's (2011) argument that young people in Belgrade feel they are incapable of moral and agentive action in a corrupt society.

Beginning with the conceptualization of change as an *effect* of EU integration –something that would happen *to* Serbia once it joins the EU—a common idea expressed in interviews was that Serbia was so corrupt that its citizens could ignore its laws without fear of penalty while EU laws were inherently authoritative and unquestionable. In fact, Serbian society was described as willing or even "prone" to unlawfulness, given the irreparable atmosphere of corruption. Serbian European integration was therefore described as a process of adopting a set of laws that would *have to* be followed since they would be imposed or regulated by a more authoritative body than the Serbian state. Take the following example from Dragana, 23:

> Until someone concretely tells us that we have to change something, we aren't going to. We aren't in a position where we are able to do it ourselves. And that's what would be good about it [EU integration], for some authority to come and say 'OK, no more games. No more fooling around. Now you have to apply this and that law.' And that we have to do it, that someone regulates it. Because otherwise someone's going to start veering a bit left, a bit right, I'll just go ahead and change this a tiny bit, get out of this or that. And then in the end it's chaos. So as far as all that stuff goes, I think it [the EU] would be really good for us.

In this excerpt, Dragana attributes the lack of progressive change in Serbia to people's mentalities, to their tendencies to "start veering a bit left, a bit right" until the system is in "chaos." Her description is consistent with numerous participants' depictions of Belgrade as lawless, corrupt, and chaotic, as well as with Greenberg's characterization of the postdisciplinary society, in which people do not feel their state is able to provide them with a moral compass for action. Dragana suggests that while people in Serbia do not respect the laws of their own state, they would be more inclined to respect EU laws since those laws would be implemented and regulated by an "authority." In this excerpt, Serbia is depicted as a society of "legal nihilism" (Grødeland 2010) where corruption and lawlessness thrive, taking away individual agency or will to follow Serbian laws or to attempt to make progressive changes within the system.

Her comment that Serbian society will not make any meaningful changes until someone (the EU) "concretely" requires them to happen reflects the feeling of political and social stagnation that ran through most interviews. At 23, Dragana has been hearing stories about Serbian European integration since age 10, when Milošević was overthrown from power and the subsequent Serbian government turned towards the goal of EU membership (Politika 2000). Her comment 13 years later that change will not happen until it is "concretely" imposed reflects a disappointment with the level of progress towards this goal and a lack of enthusiasm about the Serbian state's will or ability to make changes.

Ana, the 20 year old student quoted earlier talking about the general relaxedness of

people in Belgrade, expressed a similar view as Dragana, and also conceptualized progressive

change as something that will *happen to* Serbia once it joins the EU. Ana said,

> I think that everything would change. I think that our system here would have to be straightened
> out a bit. We have so many laws that are completely pointless and outdated, that were probably
> OK twenty years ago, but now we've advanced a little bit. I don't even think they would accept us
> into the EU if we don't clean up certain legal things on our own. I don't know, to sort out
> education and health, and those kinds of key things that are so critical. We have laws about all
> those things but they're not respected. I think the first thing [that would change] would be for laws
> to start being respected, and for some normal laws to be brought in, and that would totally change
> the whole situation here.

Like Dragana, Ana perceives EU laws as unquestionably authoritative in contrast to Serbian laws

which she describes as "completely pointless and outdated" and "not respected." She suggests

that EU laws are "normal," and that if these laws were implemented in Serbia, the legal situation

in Serbia could become normalized. Through the lens of normalcy discourse, Ana's comments

can be read as a way to critique the situation in Serbia by contrasting it with an ideal in the form

of the EU (Galbraith 2003). Although she acknowledges that Serbia must "clean up" certain laws

on its own, she suggests that creating a normal legal situation in Serbia would require a complete

overhaul. She perceives "normal" laws as something that needs to be "brought in" from the EU

rather than something Serbia can create on its own, which further reinforces the pathologization

of the Belgrade mentality by framing Serbian society as having only the capacity to perpetuate

the environment of corruption rather than to improve the situation from the inside out, therefore

requiring outside intervention to achieve a state of normalcy (Hughes and Pupavac 2005).

Another example of a participant who conceptualized progressive change as something

that will *happen to* Serbia once it joins the EU, is Stevan, a 23, who said,

> Nobody here works for the good of Serbia, rather they all work for those guys [corrupt
> government officials] and steal to fill their own pockets. And so I think it would be better if we
> reached some kind of a system, and if the EU won, and if the EU succeeded in driving away our
> thieves. Because then at least people would know the system, would know order. Everything
> would be known. There wouldn't be so much corruption, so much everything. And I think it

would be better. Everything would just be better. So in that sense I think that EU is better –
because it will chase away our thieves.

Like Dragana, Stevan argues that Serbian people would be willing to be disciplined by a more

authoritative system in the form of the EU, through which they could "know order." He suggests

that the issue in Serbia is that it is run by thieves, which contributes to a sense of widespread

corruption. For Stevan, the thieves need to be "chased away" in order for people to regain a

sense of agency to act morally. In this sense, both Dragana's and Stevan's comments are

consistent with Greenberg's argument that urban youth in Serbia want to be part of a functioning,

regulated, and disciplinary state that would give them a moral compass for action and provide

them with a sense of agency that they are unable to achieve in the corrupt Serbian state.

The idea that Serbia would be changed by joining the EU and being subject to EU laws

was consistent with how most participants described the national media's position on Serbian

European integration. They told me that the media tended to promote the EU as a "land of milk

and honey," suggesting that benefits would begin to flow once Serbia became a full EU-member.

However, another conceptualization of change associated with EU membership also came up in

interviews: that progressive change could only be a cause of European integration: something

that Serbia would have to *make happen* in order to meet EU accession criteria. For example,

Lazar, a 29 year old *apsolvent* said,

I simply think that whatever changes happen in a society or in a state, I think that is a process
which takes some time. Nothing can happen overnight. So, I don't like it when the whole
European integration story is presented to people here as a magic wand story: basically that we
need to become an official EU member and that overnight everything will change as though with a
magic wand. I don't think it works that way.

In this excerpt, Lazar rejects the ideas put forward by the previous students that Serbia could be

changed by the implementation of more authoritative laws, or that the EU could "chase away our

thieves," to revisit Stevan's comment.

Saša, 23, continued with the magic wand metaphor: "First we have to clean up our own yard. We have to deal with the situation in this country before we can advance. No one over there has a magic wand for us." Echoing this idea with a different metaphor, Natalija, the 22 year old student quoted earlier, said,

> Nothing could happen that would make big changes here, not for better or for worse. I think that for us, those changes have to happen really slowly. It's not like we're going to get into the EU and suddenly there's instant sunshine.

In all these excerpts, progressive change is depicted as something that Serbia needs to accomplish nationally before being able to join the EU, which is compatible with the reality of accession criteria and conditions required to be met before Serbia is eligible for EU membership. While this conceptualization of change might seem optimistic at first, it is important to remember that many participants described the EU's conditions for Serbia as "never-ending," and that these comments were being made in a political context where full EU membership was still a distant goal 13 years after the overthrow of Milošević. Although these participants acknowledged that Serbia needs to clean up its "own yard" before it can join the EU, many participants referred to their government as "thieves," which suggests that they perceive the Serbian state as unwilling or unable to accomplish this goal. This conceptualization of change is therefore not particularly optimistic: it too evokes the idea of Serbia as a postdisciplinary state and suggests a lack of agency on the part of participants.

The lack of agency was especially evident when participants cited the mentality of people as an impediment to progressive change or a reason why Serbia had not gotten further in the accession process. Take the following example from Vladan, 24:

> I was more optimistic before, thinking it was better over there, and that it would… if nothing else, I thought they [the Serbian government] would at least copy down those laws and that those laws would start to be implemented. Because I do think that their laws are better than ours here. It's really a fucking mess here. You have one law you can interpret three different ways. […] EU laws are better because they're more established and much more acceptable to the ordinary man. But the problem here is that even when we bring in those laws—it's wild here! No one will respect the

laws, and we will have to use force to apply them […]. And now we're coming back to the theme of changing our mentality. Men here have to realize that he must work for his good and well-being, and that will lead to good for all. Not like this where we're all trying to get away with everything, because then no matter what the law is, it won't be good for anyone.

Vladan describes Serbia as "wild," and explains that even if Serbia joined the EU, the new laws would not be followed because of the ingrained mentality of people. His comments draw attention to the issue of political subjectivation, and the question of what kind of a subject is produced by a postdisciplinary state.

Consistent with Greenberg's (2011) argument that a postdisciplinary state produces subjects that feel they do not have the agency to act morally or effectively in the world, Vladan attributes the widespread corruption in Serbia in part to the mentality of people who have become accustomed to a system in which laws are not respected, and who therefore perpetuate the system of corruption. In this way, he draws a mutually constitutive relationship between political subject and political system. More specifically, his comments show how the postdisciplinary state has a constitutive effect on society, constructing a society that has lost the capacity for moral agency and will not respect the law "no matter what the law is." The mentality of people in a postdisciplinary society is therefore represented as hindering society from moving into a disciplinary system, since corruption becomes ingrained in mentality.

Vladan's comments also echo Greenberg's (2010) finding that while Serbian youth perceive their state or society as corrupt and amoral, they tend to position themselves as moral subjects through nonparticipation in politics. Vladan suggests that he is unable to act morally in a "wild" state because of forces beyond his control. He can therefore be read as a moral individual in a corrupt society: someone who is aware of the flaws and fault lines, but is unable to effect change.

Marija, a 29 year old *apsolvent* also focused on the issue of the effects of corruption on Serbian society in the following lengthy excerpt,

> You can't change things just by telling everyone there are new laws to follow. People's ways of thinking change very slowly. […] Our politicians use the EU as a kind of fairy-tale; they told us that we have to go there. And they told us we have to do whatever it takes to get there, as though it's not something that's actually good for us, as through it's something we're submitting to because we have to and not because we need it. […] This society is prone to— and maybe other societies are too, but in ours I see it very explicitly—we are prone to interpreting laws and rules like something that is just a formality. We're playing state. We doll ourselves up so that if someone from the European Union comes, we can say, "Look, we have laws!" […] In our Constitution, it says that we protect sexual minorities. In our Constitution it says that we protect ethnic minorities. In our Constitution it says a lot of things, but in reality if you plan a gay-pride parade, your police minister will tell you "I don't like it. It's not going to happen." And that's OK here. It's unconstitutional, it's unlawful. It goes against the Constitution which is the broadest possible act which determines the social consensus, and upon which we all came to agreement. They put things into the Constitution for the European Union to see. They wrote it down the way it should be written but we all know it doesn't really happen that way. There's a law against drunk driving but we all know that if you throw 50 euros someone's way, or if you call your buddy Pera who's your colleague and works in traffic enforcement, Pera will say 'Let him go! So he drank a little! It's ok!' We all know how it works. Laws don't get much respect here. Because everyone knows that everyone breaks them –especially the people who make them! So the deal is that laws are something we make to show other people that we have a state, but in reality there's no way anyone's going to let gay people parade all over town. It's all formalization, and the whole story about the EU falls within that formalization discourse.

In this excerpt, Marija explains that the state of unlawfulness or corruption in Serbia is widely known and accepted, a social fact of the postdisciplinary society: "They wrote it down the way it should be written but we all know it doesn't really happen that way." In the language of pathologization discourse (Hughes and Pupavac 2005), Marija links the state of corruption and unlawfulness in Serbia to people's mentalities, suggesting that Serbian society is "prone to interpreting laws and rules [as] a formality." However, it remains unclear whether she perceives this mentality and this propensity for lawlessness as an *effect* of living in a corrupt system, which forces people to look for cracks to slip through, or whether she perceives this mentality as a *cause* of corruption, or a factor which has contributed to the creation of the corrupt system. In any case, she identifies the mentality of people as an impediment to progressive change, for example when she says "people's way of thinking change very slowly."

Like the other students who rejected the magic-wand stories of European integration, Marija describes the political changes associated with EU conditions as getting "dolled up" on paper but not in practice. One major issue she points out is that the state itself does not show respect for the legal system: "Laws don't get much respect here. Because everyone knows that everyone breaks them – especially the people who make them!" She illustrates point this through the example of the every-man, Pera, who drove drunk but used his political or social connections (*veze*) to avoid penalty. Marija's reference to *veze* in the context of a describing a corrupt system she feels powerless to change is also indicative of Serbian youth's tendency to distance themselves from responsibility and ownership for a corrupt political system that stems from the 1990s, and still features an aging constellation of 1990s era politicians (Greenberg 2011).

Although Marija does not think that EU membership will create any significant changes in Serbian political culture and society –and perhaps this perception is influenced by the accession experiences of Bulgaria and Romania, as explored in chapter 3—the EU is nevertheless represented as authoritative, orderly, and regulated in contrast to Serbia. Similar to Dejan who explained to me that things in Belgrade only appear normal on the surface, Marija says, "We're playing state," and explains that the Constitution and legal system are only a façade concealing a lawless state and society.

Ivan, a 29 year old *apsolvent* expressed a similar perspective on Serbia as a postdisciplinary state when he described the political system as ruined beyond repair:

> I remember in 2000, the story was that we'd be in [the EU] in five years. […] People thought it would be immediate. People thought it'd be tomorrow or the next day. They said five years and then everything went to shit. […] Everything fell apart, and it began to fall apart even before Đinđić[16] was assassinated, but that's when it definitely fell apart. You simply don't have any more

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[16] Zoran Đinđić served as Prime Minister of Serbia from 2001 until his assassination in 2003. He was a member of the Democratic Party, and a leader in the opposition to Milošević throughout the 1990s. As Prime Minister, he

people left who are capable of anything. These [politicians] are people whom I wouldn't talk to at a *kafana*[17] because they're degenerates. A lot of young people that I know who are in politics are people whom I really don't value. They're not exceptional at anything, nor are they even good at anything. And then they go into politics and they get by, in fact they get by really well. And then, the kind of people they gather around them? Of course in democracy it's the more the merrier, so if there's more of them, what are they going to do to the actual quality people? Well of course they're going to threaten the quality people. So I really don't see anything positive regarding this political scene. I really think that it's the problem.

Unlike the participants quoted earlier who linked the state of chaos or abnormalcy to people's mentalities, Ivan paints a picture of a political system deeply ingrained with corruption while maintaining a sense of morality for himself and his peers, for example saying he would not "talk to [politicians] at a *kafana*" or suggesting that the good quality politicians have been threatened out of office. He describes a situation where people in Serbia have been waiting to join the EU since the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, but this goal is hindered by a corrupt and incapable government that does not represent its citizens. Unable to see "anything positive" in a corrupt and self-perpetuating political system, he paints a picture of political deterioration with no possibility for change.

Stagnation, Impasse, and Memories of Enthusiasm in the early 2000s

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my interview questions steered the conversation towards the topic of political and social change associated with European integration, but even as participants discussed these topics, a feeling of stagnation, apathy, or impasse pervaded almost all of the interviews. This was often expressed through side comments about how EU integration was "always the same story," a story which "never progresses" or "always amounts to nothing," according to three different participants. Another common way this feeling was expressed was through responding to my questions regarding political and social

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advocated democratic reforms and European Union integration. He also served as Mayor of Belgrade in 1997. He was assassinated by Zvezdan Jovanović, a former paramilitary member connected to the Serbian mafia.

[17] A type of traditional tavern or bistro, generally featuring coffee, alcohol, and live music.

change with a quick joke about how change or progress were impossible or unlikely before going on to reflect on the question and answer more thoughtfully.

In cases such as these, I would ask participants if they've always held the view they hold currently, or if it changed over time or was affected by certain events. Often, participants would bring up the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, a period which is marked in their memories by excitement, enthusiasm, and momentum, in contrast to the feeling of stagnation or impasse they currently perceive in society. Take the following lengthy example from my interview with Ivan, the 29 year old *apsolvent* quoted above,

> Ivan: Belgrade is my city. It's the city I want to live in, to die in.
>
> Me: To die in?
>
> Ivan: Yes! Exactly right here!
>
> Me: Shall we start digging?
>
> Ivan: What's the expression, ah, [in English] *there where he falls, he shall be buried*. I would like that, yeah. Somehow I think of Belgrade as that city. But in the last year or so, I've started more and more to think about getting out of here. Because… because of a kind of hopelessness.
>
> Me: Hopelessness? Among young people or everywhere?
>
> Ivan: Somehow it seems like everywhere. That's how I feel. I remember the 90s. The 90s were different – you can ask your parents. We all thought that if Sloba[18] leaves, that'll be it, you know? We had a problem, we knew what the problem was, so there was hope, you know? We had to kick him out and everything was going to be OK. And then this happens, man. Everything just gets worse and worse.
>
> Me: There isn't just one problem to focus on…
>
> Ivan: There isn't a problem that we could solve. We have to deal with the entire political—there is no alternative for this political elite. I can't even call them 'elite.' I'll just call them politicians. There's no alternative. […] It's all the same shit. We're in the same problem.
>
> Me: So there was more hope in society in the 90s than now?
>
> Ivan: Absolutely
>
> Me: Really?

---

[18] Sloba is a nickname for Slobodan Milošević.

Ivan: Yes. 100%. That's my impression. Now there's no hope at all. You know if you get into the EU that it's not going to change you. Even when you get into the EU, it's not like "Well, that was that. We have succeeded in accomplishing that effort, now we can relax." […] I don't know. That's just my impression. People are broken. That's how I feel.

In this excerpt, Ivan contrasts the current situation in Serbia with the 1990s, making the surprising argument that there was more enthusiasm in society in the 1990s than there is today. For him, a major problem in Serbia that contributes to a sense of hopelessness is that there is not one issue that can be isolated and resolved, rather the entire political system is flawed and requiring reform. His comment, "You know if you get into the EU that it's not going to change you" at once suggests a lack of faith in the capabilities of the Serbian state and government, and a growing disillusionment with the purported advantages of EU membership.

Since travel and employment opportunities were often perceived as advantages of EU membership (chapter 5), Ivan's age and *apsolvent* status may contribute to his disappointment towards the EU, since these benefits will be much more difficult for him to reap without the security net of living at home and being supported by his parents. Several participants (including Ivan) joked about delaying graduation indefinitely in order to enjoy the comforts of living at home. Ivan has been working on this thesis but putting off finishing for several years now, and his sense that people around him are "broken" may have much to do with his position on the verge of finishing university and being expected to move out and provide for himself. The future appears bleak for him and it is all the more pertinent because of the additional obligations and realities he will have to face after university as he transitions to becoming self-sufficient.

Ivan speaks rather scathingly of politicians, and links them to the problems of the 1990s when he suggests that Serbian society is "in the same problem" and that there is "no alternative." At 29, he was among the older participants who had more memories and personal stories from the 1990s, and who likely had clearer memories of their parents' enthusiasm after the overthrow

of Milošević. However, some younger participants also talked about the widespread enthusiasm surrounding the overthrow of Milošević, which may stem from their own perceptions of the time, or perhaps from their parents' stories or attitudes regarding this time. For example, Saša, the 23 year old student quoted earlier in this chapter rejecting the 'magic wand' theories of EU integration, reflected on the early 2000s in this way,

> I remember that as the period of the most enthusiasm in this country. Especially when Đinđić was alive, Zoran Đinđić, a politician who we thought could bring some change, and in the end, what? He gets killed. I don't know how much you know about all that, […] but we all really looked at him like hope for a bright future, and after all that, after the war, after Milošević, after that truly awful situation, people simply believed that it couldn't get any worse, that it could only get better. There really was—everyone was enthusiastic. They were. They believed that there would be a brighter future. There was a nice period, quite simply. Even after all those problems, when you come out of something, you can come out of problems a new man, with the feeling that everything will get better. […] I was a kid, but still. I didn't get what was going on. I probably didn't even know what the European Union was then, who knows? But simply I remember that there was a kind of general enthusiasm, like it will get better. And that was that: it is going to get better; we expect it to get better.

Saša's memories of the enthusiasm of the early 2000s stand in contrast with his current view on Serbian European integration, quoted earlier: "No one over there has a magic wand for us." Although Saša's perspective is not nearly as hopeless as Ivan's, they both paint a picture of momentum and optimism surrounding the overthrow of Milošević that has diminished over time due to a lack of progress.

As mentioned in chapter 3, most participants told me they did not understand the seriousness of the 1990s since they experienced this decade as children. This seems to run slightly against their perception of widespread enthusiasm in the early 2000s, suggesting that their parents' experiences or expressions of enthusiasm during this period may be an important influence on this memory. Since I did not interview the students' parents, I do not know about their political attitudes, for example if they also became markedly less enthusiastic over time or after the assassination of Đinđić. However, I think that for this age group, their parents' experiences of the 1990s served as "intimate legacies" (Ghodsee 2011: xv) which influenced

their perceptions of political culture in Belgrade. Hendley (2012) argues that young people in Russia who grew up during the 1990s have been psychically affected by seeing the impact of political and economic transition on their parents, and for this reason are more prone to embrace an attitude of legal nihilism. This may also be the case for youth in Serbia who watched their parents struggle to make ends meet throughout the 1990s. The perception of widespread enthusiasm in the early 2000s most likely stemmed from their parents' hope and optimism about a better future. The fact that this generation witnessed their parents' enthusiasm diminish or even dissolve into hopelessness may contribute to their particular cynicism or disenchantment with EU integration.

Since many participants spoke resentfully about the EU's specific accession conditions for Serbia, I think that the feelings of stagnation regarding social and political change in Serbia stem from the disappointment of expecting quick or easy progress after the overthrow of Milošević, and being met instead with a wall of conditions from the EU and a growing lack of faith in the politicians that seceded Đinđić. As mentioned in chapter 3, at the time of my fieldwork, Serbia was waiting for the EU to set a date (*datum*) to begin accession negotiations. Thirteen years after the initial wave of enthusiasm, this victory was too small to celebrate.

On Asking the Wrong Questions

Asking participants about the anticipated changes they associated with EU integration, I quickly saw that I was asking the wrong questions. I thought that this topic would be more relevant to them since, as university students, I assumed EU membership would open up possibilities of foreign internships, student exchanges, and other forms of travel that would be meaningful or exciting to this group. While all of this might be true, it was still too abstract, distant, or hypothetical to be relevant on the level of the everyday. In addition, the EU has

changed form since the overthrow of Milošević, and Serbian citizens have had more time to

reflect on the practicalities and idealizations of EU accession, especially through the experiences

of other Balkan and former Yugoslav countries, as explored in chapter 3. In the following

excerpt from my interview with Vukan, a 29 year old *apsolvent*, he expresses how the experience

of "waiting" for change to happen has affected him:

> Vukan: They [Croatia] got into the EU, which they'd been fighting for, at least formally, for 17 or
> 18 years. They waited that long to get in and now that they're in there's a 20% voter turnout in
> elections? What can I tell you?
>
> Me: It's a shame.
>
> Vukan: That's simply the way it is. It's not just in Serbia. It's now all over the region, wherever
> you want it. You have to live here for a bit, get into the rut, so you can see what's going on, what
> the stories are, what things are really like. And then it'll be much clearer to you. But like this,
> coming here for a month, it's hard to get into the story.
>
> Me: Yeah. I spent six months here three years ago, but even that. It was a short time.
>
> Vukan: It's a short time, yeah. Really you have to live here for some time to see how things
> function. Start to do some ---like, look for a job! That, for example, is very interesting. Very
> interesting. That's what I was talking about—what does it matter if I finish law school? What does
> that matter, because if I don't have a connection or some political support, then it's hard to find
> some normal job. You can always dig trenches, dig sewage, clean the streets. You can always do
> that. For that, you don't need a connection. But for some remotely human, normal work you
> always need a little push up. That's as clear as day. So there. There's a story for you. You
> shouldn't be idealistic about anything, but you have to know your own position. But […] to be
> enthusiastic about something when you see that it only functions on paper, and that in practice it
> doesn't have anything to do with reality? Then it's simply a normal, human reaction to fall down.
> That's logical. I mean, if you fight for something and you fall a little bit, then you get back up, and
> you say, "Alright, this didn't work, but we fixed it up and now it's better." And you actually see
> that it's better. Then alright, you say, "Hey, things are changing!" But nothing is changing. You're
> just always down. That's that. It's logical. Do you have any other questions?

Vukan gives the example of Croatia's recent EU accession and low voter turnout to explain how

it is difficult to remain enthusiastic in a situation where you are waiting for 17 or 18 years for

something to change. From the tone of his voice it was clear that he was tired of waiting for life

to get better, more stable, or more secure, as 13 years of pro-EU political campaigns had told him

it would.

Based on the numerous comments from participants about the widespread enthusiasm of

the early 2000s, I think this age-group expected that Serbia would be in the EU by the time they

were in university, perhaps even sooner. Now, most of them are on the verge of graduating

university, but the promises about the "land of milk and honey" remain unfulfilled. As an

apsolvent, Vukan asked me, "What does it matter if I finish law school?" since he knows that the

system he lives in will not reward him for this in the ways he has been expecting.

Like Dejan, Vukan also assured me that it is hard for a visitor to understand the

abnormalcy of Belgrade. For him, getting "into the story" involves experiencing the hardships of

everyday life over and over, and realizing that "nothing is changing." Running into a situation

where you need *veze* once or twice is different from living day to day in a system that is

ingrained with corruption. In contrast to the younger participants who embraced the "spirit" and

untiring café-culture of people in Belgrade, Vukan took a stance similar to Ivan, the 29 year old

apsolvent who spoke about hopelessness, and pointed to the way enthusiasm diminishes with

time and leads to a situation where people are "always down."

Vukan's description of life in Belgrade was consistent with the description offered by

most participants: corrupt, lawless, and chaotic. However, since I was a westerner, a visitor, and

asking to have everyday life described to me, I cannot know if youth in Belgrade talk about the

city this way among themselves, if this is an unspoken fact of a postdisciplinary society, or if it

bothers them more when they think about how normal my life in Canada must be like, and

compare their everyday to mine.

CHAPTER 5: BEING ON THE OUTSIDE: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BELGRADE

This chapter extends the finding that participants perceive Serbia to be lawless and

corrupt through an exploration of the practical implications of Serbia's exclusion from the EU

for university students in Belgrade. I ask in what practical ways does this topic matter to

participants and how does it affect their lives and their aspirations for the future? As participants

talked about their lives in Belgrade and their thoughts on EU expansion, I found that the question

of Serbian EU integration was often connected to the practical issue of pursuing employment

after graduation. Participants contrasted and compared employment prospects in Belgrade with

how they imagined employment prospects to be in the EU. While some participants planned to

stay in Belgrade after graduating, the idea of leaving Serbia to work in the EU was prevalent.

The practical topic of employment was therefore connected to the themes of travel and mobility,

and discussion about future employment prospects was put forward as a question of 'should I

stay or should I go?'

In asking how the topic of EU integration affects participants' lives on a practical level, it

is important to at once conceptualize Belgrade as a borderland or 'outside' relative to the EU,

and also as a home in and of itself. At the beginning of my fieldwork, one of my guiding

research questions was 'what does it mean to live in a state 'in transition' towards European

integration?' For me, the term 'transition' implied a sense of momentum or enthusiasm, yet the

interviews revealed feelings of stagnation and ambivalence. From this I learned that it was

important to shift the language and focus from what it means to live 'in transition' to what it means to occupy this particular space, this borderland outside of the EU yet still in Europe. In this chapter, I am drawing on a growing body of literature that is approaching the topic of EU expansion from the perspective of the spaces that are left on the outside (Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004). This literature focuses on the role of the EU's external border and how it affects the everyday lives and future aspirations of people in non-EU countries in Europe. This body of literature rejects the triumphalist connotations of pro-EU Europeanisation scholarship that celebrates EU expansion as the construction of internal "unbordered space" (Szmagalska-Follis 2009:395) while ignoring the processes of exclusion inherent in the construction of secure external borders. Most importantly, it focuses on "the way places are experienced by those who dwell in them" (Blank 2004:356).

For this study, a focus on the exclusionary role of the border is helpful for exploring participants' practical relationship to the EU, expressed through the themes of employment and mobility, as this was the discourse through which they articulated their thoughts and feelings about their futures. The answer to the question 'should I stay or should I go?' depends not only on personal aspirations, but on being able to obtain the appropriate documents and visas to cross the EU border and work. I will first explore the theme of mobility and how the experience of growing up through the isolation of the 1990s and 2000s affects participants' views on travel and mobility today. I then turn to the topic of employment after graduation and discuss how participants' views on employment prospects in Belgrade compared to the EU affect the way Belgrade is perceived as a home for young university students with aspirations of leaving.

Growing up in Belgrade: From Immobility to Visa Liberalization

Numerous researchers have argued that as the EU expands eastward, the construction of internal borderless-space in the EU creates hierarchies based on mobility in Europe (Greenberg 2011; Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009). The extension or revocation of mobility privileges into the Euro-zone mark a country's position in these symbolic hierarchies, and those on the 'immediate outside' of the EU border feel this most pertinently (Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009). Berdahl (1999), writing about the Berlin Wall, argues that borderlands, while being spaces of in-between-ness and hybridity, are also characterized by asymmetrical intersections of culture: "struggles over the production of cultural meanings occur in the context of asymmetrical relations between East and West" (9). In the context of Serbia, this asymmetrical relationship at the borderland is evident in the fact that the EU has the authority to institute or eliminate visas, and to classify Serbian citizens as worthy or unworthy of mobility.

Writing about Serbia, both Jansen (2009) and Greenberg (2011) have theorized mobility as being connected to subjectification, arguing that being granted or denied the ability to cross their country's border affects how Serbian citizens see themselves as subjects deemed worthy or unworthy of mobility. Greenberg (2011) argues that after the isolation of the 1990s, practices of travel in Serbia are linked to ideas around 'normalcy' associated with memories of life in the former Yugoslavia, and that through travel, Serbian citizens assert themselves as agentive subjects capable of effective and moral action in the world. Similarly, Jansen (2009) writes that Serbian citizens who had experienced the mobility privileges of the red Yugoslav passport tended to perceive the subsequent blue Serbian passport with resentment as a "demotion," (824), a "materialization of entrapment," and a "humiliation" (830).

Since this project focuses on youth who grew up in the 1990s, I think it is important to pay attention to their unique experiences and perspectives around the issue of mobility in order to explore the connection between mobility and subjectification. While Greenberg's (2011:90) analysis treats Serbian youth as "former Yugoslav citizens," the participants' relationship to mobility can be better understood by approaching youth as belonging to a post-Yugoslav citizenship regime. As mentioned in chapter 1, although the Yugoslav nationality officially disappeared in 2003, the relative freedom of mobility and economic stability associated with the former Yugoslavia was lost in the 1990s, well before this age group could meaningfully experience these events as a loss per se. Rather, they grew up in the 1990s when visas and sanctions were already standard practice. Jansen (2009) touches on this generational divide when he writes that middle-aged people in Serbia often spoke fondly of the 'normal lives' they had lived in the former Yugoslavia, and compared those days to the current situation of humiliating entrapment. However, it is important to note that his research took place before the EU's 2009 decision to add Serbia to the Schengen list, allowing Serbian citizens to enjoy visa-free travel in most EU countries. The blue Serbian passport is therefore no longer the "materialization of entrapment" it once was.

While the students I interviewed may not have resented the Serbian passport as a "demotion" from the red Yugoslav passport of their parents' generation, they certainly celebrated visa liberalization. Through their stories about travelling in Europe without visas after 2009, I gathered that participants had a fair amount of recent travel experience. However, with a few noted exceptions, participants grew up relatively immobile, and several pointed out this difference between their childhoods and those of other children in Europe. Like many other participants who did not cross an international border until quite recently, Bojana, 26, said,

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> Well, I wasn't sable to travel. I left the country for the first time when I was already in high
> school, when I was 17. That was the first time I left because we weren't able to go. There were
> visas and anyway we didn't have money to travel.

Bojana travelled to a foreign country for the first time in 2004, five years before the visa liberalizations. As this excerpt shows, immobility was not only due to the prohibitive visa regime, but also due to financial restrictions associated with the economic situation in the 1990s, which in turn resulted in the inability to afford to pay for visas. After the visa liberalizations in 2009, and an improvement in the economic situation of her family, travel became a much more frequent activity for Bojana. In fact, I had some difficulty scheduling our interview between her trips to Vienna and Prague.

A couple of participants who came from wealthier families were able to travel during the visa regime, but they pointed out that this was not standard. For example, Lazar, a 29 year old *apsolvent*, said,

> Well, I travelled even while we needed visas, because I really loved travelling, and because of
> luck and my situation, I had financial support from my parents and I was able to afford it […]. Of
> course, when they took away the visas, I did travel more, since it was easier.

Although participants did not experience the 1990s-era visa regime as a *loss* of freedom of mobility after the red Yugoslav passport, the experience of (most) participants of growing up relatively immobile due to both political and financial reasons affects how they view the act of travel now and what it means for them to be able to move freely within the "unbordered space" of the EU, and to be able to afford vacations. I agree with Greenberg (2011) that the idea of borderless travel is particularly appealing to young people after the experience of growing up immobile, and is linked to ideas around a 'normal' life after the isolation and chaos of the 1990s. I think that the act of travel may be a way that participants separate themselves from the 1990s, a tendency that was explored through other examples in chapter 3. Take the following long excerpt, again from Bojana:

I'm not terribly interested [in Serbian EU integration politics] generally. To me it was only important in the moment that they put us on the Schengen white list. I was like, 'great! I can travel.' That's enough for me. When I heard that they might take us off the list, I was like, 'ok, I'm leaving this place.' I was already beginning to think about sanctions! I mean, I saw the 1990s coming back. They'll close us off in the country, there's no more leaving, the 1990s are coming back. I mean, I was literally thinking like that. And then, nothing. In the end nothing happened; I calmed down a bit. But that's when it wasn't so nonchalant for me. I guess because I had forgotten that I wasn't able to travel before, and now that I thought it was going to happen again, I panicked. It sounds funny, but when you feel trapped in your own country, and you can't leave, you *literally* can't leave –I mean, if you have a visa you can, but it's not so easy to get a visa […]. And now, you know, you're suddenly allowed to travel. People really just don't get that, people who have been able to travel their whole lives without problem[19], they don't get how much that means. To be able to pack your bags, buy a ticket, reserve a hostel, and go. It wasn't like that before […]. Even if you got a visa they could send you back at the border. There were lots of stories about people getting sent back.

In this excerpt, the Bojana makes a connection between the 1990s and her previous experience of immobility or feeling "trapped" in her own country. Because she remembers the experience of entrapment, she does not perceive the act of travel as a simple "pack your bags […] and go" situation, but seems to hold a deeper appreciation for "how much [it] means" to be classified as a mobile body. The degree of passage her passport allows her reflects Serbia's improved geopolitical position in Europe after the 1990s, and relationship to the EU as a candidate-state. Through the ability to travel, she separates herself from the violence and isolation of the 1990s, saying she had "forgotten that [she] wasn't able to travel before." However, through the threat of visa re-institution[20], she is made to remember the 1990s and even to fear they might come back. Her fear that Serbia could suddenly get taken off of the Schengen list illustrates Jansen's (2009) argument that the EU has the authority to certify Serbian citizens as worthy or unworthy of mobility. As the EU extends (or revokes) mobility privileges to Serbian citizens, it has the power to affect people's understandings of themselves as being included or isolated, proud or resentful, and worthy or unworthy of mobility (Jansen 2009).

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[19] She is referring to me as a foreigner and a Canadian citizen, but in translating her quote I am unclear whether she is also referring to people in Belgrade who are younger than she is and who do not remember the 1990s as well.
[20] She was unclear whether this threat was a rumour among her friends or in the media, or whether it was official news from European Union officials.

Several other participants also told me they had forgotten about the visa regime in the

four years since the 2009 visa liberalization. For example, Goran, a 30 year old *apsolvent* said,

> For example if you wanted to travel as a tourist, it was a big hassle to get a visa. And I remember
> all that but it already seems like the distant past. It's easy to get used to something that's good,
> something that's better. Since they stopped requiring visas, it's simply like you forget you ever
> had to have them.

Goran's comment that it is "easy to get used to something that's good" demonstrates the role of

the past in negotiating the present (Berdahl 1999). Through a form of "willful forgetting" (219),

the isolation of Serbia's past is replaced by "something that's better" as he moves into the future.

This point makes it important to pay attention not only to what is said about the present, but also

to the silences, absences, and omissions through which the past is alive in the present (Berdahl

1999).

Not talking about visas

While it was common for participants to forget about ever needing visas before 2009

when it came to short-term travel as a tourist, Serbia's position as a non-EU country still limits

participants from being able to seek employment or stay long-term in the EU. This situation is

contrasted with the foreign employment situation during the participants' parents' generation,

when many European countries but most notably West Germany hosted many Yugoslavs, Turks,

and others as guest-workers (*gastarbajteri,* from the German *gastarbeiter*) to solve labour

shortage problems after WWII and into the 1970s. Daniel (2007) notes that in 1973, the year of

the energy crisis when economic migration from Yugoslavia reached its climax, there were

830,000 Yugoslavs working in European countries, and of those, 514,000 were in Germany.

Foreign seasonal work was normal for the participants' parents' generation, and extended into

the 1990s although it was complicated by hybrid forms including war and economic refugees

(Daniel 2007). I found it interesting that participants talking about employment after graduation

generally did not make the distinction between short-term mobility as a tourist and long-term mobility as a foreign worker; they tended to speak about employment in terms of 'should I stay in Belgrade or should I go work in the EU?' without ever mentioning the practical obstacle of visas.

One student was an exception to this rule and commented on the way work visas and bureaucracy impeded her ability to work in the EU. She stated that EU citizens are prioritized for employment over non-EU citizens, which makes applying for a job much more competitive. In addition, she stated that EU companies are less inclined to hire non-EU citizens since the company must then be involved in the work-visa application process. This is to say that the mobility privileges granted to Serbia through the Schengen list do not necessarily translate into the ability to easily seek employment in the EU. Yet, while the students' plans and aspirations to work in the EU depended on visas, they were absent from the conversation. While a Serbian citizen can apply for short-term paid internships in the EU, this is not a long-term solution for employment after graduation.

I surmise that since participants had not yet graduated, they spoke about the topic of employment after graduation in hypothetical terms and did not want to bother with details like visas so far in advance. Nevertheless, their discussion about seeking future employment in the EU without ever evoking the practical issue of mobility made me interested in exploring the ways in which the EU border affects university students' plans and future endeavors.

Employment after Graduation: Participants' Ideas about the EU versus Belgrade

I asked every participant what they planned to do after graduating university, and I found that this question generally opened the conversation towards a comparison of employment

prospects in Belgrade and the EU[21]. Employment prospects in Belgrade were consistently

described as unfulfilling, corrupt, and stagnant, while the EU was described as a place where

they could succeed professionally, as will be explored below through several excerpts. Only one

participant, quoted above, mentioned the issue of visas when discussing employment prospects

in the EU. However, while participants may not have been concerned with the exclusionary role

of the border, a different function of the border was present in their discussion: the function of

the border in obscuring what is on the other side, leading to idealizations, exaggerations, and the

sentiment that 'life is elsewhere' (Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004).

     Participants' ideas about employment prospects in the EU were constructed though

"partially factual, partially exaggerated stories" (Szmagalska-Follis 2009:388) of what life is like

in EU countries that stemmed from sources such as personal travel experience as tourists, stories

of friends and relatives, and pro-EU political platforms. Participants described the early 2000s as

a time of heightened idealizations about the EU in Serbian media, contributing to a sense of

enthusiasm in society. Dejan, a 26 year old graduate student, explained that the experience of

growing up with persistent pro-EU ad campaigns and political platforms had led to idealizations

about life in EU countries:

> In those first days, in 2001, 2002, 2003, the European Union was seen as […] a kingdom, like
> getting into the EU would make everything amazing, divine, milk and honey would pour from all
> the trees, and so on, as though there were absolutely no problems there, and that absolutely
> everything should be subordinated to this goal of EU accession, and making it happen as quickly
> as possible. Like it would save us. Because the EU was simply a symbol of prosperity. It was,
> then. Of peace, of tolerance, of something, of all the positive things. And that was the dominant
> picture at that time. And all of us – I remember it was pretty much seen as a race—when are we

---

[21] This question was more pertinent to some participants than others considering the 10 year age difference (20-30) and how close they were to finishing their degrees. I should note here that of the 17 students I interviewed, 8 held *apsolvent* (all-but-thesis) status. A student could theoretically remain an *apsolvent* indefinitely, years, and since it is customary for students in Serbia to live with their parents, several absolvents joked that they had no real incentive to graduate, leave their parents' home, and enter the job market. That said, five of the 17 students worked part- or full-time jobs and two proudly declared that they paid their own rent and were independent.

going to get into the EU? When are we going to get into that club? We absolutely have to. You imagined that by joining the EU there would be enormous salaries, vacations 2 or 3 times a year, and all that. So it was a total idealization of the EU.

With the expectation of "enormous salaries [and] vacations 2 or 3 times a year," it should not come as a surprise that the idea of leaving Belgrade to work in the EU was prevalent among participants. Even though Dejan is describing heightened idealization and suggesting that he is more critical of the EU now than he was in the early 2000s, his comments about employment later in our interview reveal some tension between what Dejan knows about the media's inaccurate representations of life in the EU, and which elements of idealizations he has accepted as truth. Consider the following excerpt in which Dejan compares employment in Belgrade to the EU:

Take for example the issue of corruption. Corruption is something that has to be dealt with before joining the European Union, but in Serbia everywhere you go, corruption is knocking at your door. Nobody looks at your personal qualities and your achievements. The only thing that matters is that you have a connection. You know someone and you get a job. And there's a ton of young people who don't have connections, either political or family connections, but who are very high-quality, and they end up with no job and no perspective. So of course they're going to leave the country. So that's that example. I expect that if we were in the EU, that I wouldn't have to have a connection in order to find a job, but rather I'd be hired on the basis of: you have an interview, they call you back, they look at your grades, they get a sense of who you are, they look at your CV, they look at your extra-curricular activities, and on the basis of all that you get an interview and you get a job.

Although Dejan is critical of idealistic media portrayals of the EU, he nevertheless holds an idealistic view of employment prospects in the EU. I found that there tended to be some disconnect in this area for a number of participants: while they expressed some degree of skepticism towards pro-EU political rhetoric which they believed obscured the disadvantages of EU integration or falsely portrayed the EU as a land of "milk and honey," to use Dejan's earlier words, they nevertheless tended to be idealistic about employment prospects in the EU, especially when comparing the EU to Belgrade. In this example, as in numerous others, an idealized description of what employment prospects must be like in the EU is contrasted with the

ways in which Serbia is lacking in opportunities. Dejan portrays the EU as a place where things function smoothly without corruption, and where educated individuals are valued.

Through his description, we get a picture of Serbia as a corrupt place where important jobs are not given to qualified individuals but rather to well-connected ones. Dejan portrays Serbia as a country with no order that is unable to provide appropriate jobs for its university graduates, which suggests that he is unsatisfied and disappointed with the current employment situation. A feeling of disappointment was common among participants, which is not surprising since they are university students. They are investing in educations that they feel make them "high-quality" people, to use Dejan's word, but the system they live in does not value their merit without additional political or social connections (*veze,* from chapter 4).

While not all participants planned to leave Belgrade to work in the EU, this idea was prevalent. The question of 'should I stay or should I go?' was presented as a matter of necessity, since staying in Serbia implied giving up hope for a well-paid and meaningful job. Students in the social sciences were particularly vehement in their assertions that there were no jobs available for graduates in their respective fields, but there was a general consensus among students that Serbia did not provide the conditions for university graduates to succeed.

It is important to remember that the idealized depictions of employment in the EU and the quite barren depictions of employment in Belgrade are both imagined rather than experienced. Their negative remarks about employment prospects in Serbia are spoken therefore not from a position of personal experience and disappointment in the labour market, but rather future expectation. Their bleak view of employment could also be influenced by the work experiences of others close to them, most likely their parents. It is uncommon for students in Belgrade to work while they study, and most students perceived there to be a lack of part-time

jobs available to them in the Belgrade economy (which they again contrasted with the imagined

employment situation in the EU). It is customary for students in Serbia to live at home with their

parents and be financially supported by them. As noted in chapter 4, many students joked about

putting off graduation indefinitely in order to enjoy the luxuries of home, and since a student in

Serbia can theoretically hold *apsolvent*[22] status indefinitely, this joke was sometimes a reality.

Marija, a 29 year old *apsolvent* was one participant who made this joke. She spoke of

employment prospects in the EU in the following way:

> I think that the general perception of the EU is that it's a place where if you're even remotely
> capable, you can get by with your merits. Where if you work, you will get paid adequately for it.
> You will be recognized and rewarded adequately for it. You simply work and mind your own
> business. Meaning that your work doesn't depend on anybody else in the sense that you have to
> watch out for bureaucratic problems or for somebody to undermine you, or not let you do
> something, the way it happens in Serbia. So, I think the system is constructed in such a way that
> you are able to make something of yourself simply through work. There's nobody on the
> sidelines to help you or hinder you. Rather, you simply make your own destiny.

The strong element of idealization in Marija's imaginings of the EU ("you simply make your

own destiny") points to a contrast between her expectations and reality regarding her life in

Serbia (Galbraith 2003). Marija's comments show a yearning for independence and a career. She

wants to "make something of [herself] simply through work" but does not feel that the system in

Serbia will allow her to achieve this. At 29, Marija holds *apsolvent* status for a Bachelor's degree

and lives at home with her parents. To graduate would mean to be thrown into the labour market

which she considers corrupt and which she does not think values the worth of her degree.

Moving to the EU to seek employment may be a way to gain the sense of independence she

desires, or that she thought she would achieve after university.

Interestingly, participants never brought up other possible destinations such as the United

States or Canada, nor did they seem particularly interested in asking me questions about

employment in Canada beyond asking me what I planned to do after I graduated. I do not know

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[22] As mentioned in chapter 3, *apsolvent* status means "all-but-thesis" status.

whether the exclusive focus on employment in the EU was due to the topic of the interviews, or

due to a genuine fascination with employment prospects in the EU.

In the following section I will elaborate on the two major characteristics of the participant

group which inform their understandings or anticipations of employment in Belgrade compared

to the EU: their age and their class position.

Young and educated in Belgrade: All dressed up with nowhere to go?

Many of the participants' negative descriptions of employment prospects in Serbia were

connected to the 1990s, most notably to the issue of corruption and the idea that Serbia does not

provide the necessary conditions to make a person feel secure. For example, Vukan, a 29 year

old *apsolvent*, said:

> Everything is so uncertain here that you simply can't know what is going to happen tomorrow, much less plan for something long-term. And that's very hard. That's been the situation here for the last 20 years, and you just get used to it. Today I could be the director of a firm, and tomorrow I could be fired and have to be a maid somewhere, or a nanny, a cleaning lady[23]. I mean, that's how it is here. That's how things are. People are used to it, more or less, and no one complains because they simply know how the system functions, and that's that. This isn't a regulated country. You can't compare it to some more orderly country, where when you finish university, there's a job waiting for you in your field, or you can compete for a position in your industry. It's not like that here. And everyone's contriving different ways to at least get close to the job they were training their whole lives for, or the job they wanted to have. But nothing is certain for anybody. That's how it works.

In this excerpt, Vukan offers a rather naïve description of employment in Serbia that is not

rooted in experience, since he has never worked nor applied for a job. Like Marija, he is an

apsolvent and is living at home with his parents. The employment landscape he describes sounds

precarious and scary, especially compared to the comforts of living at home. Although Vukan

has not yet begun to look for a job in his field, he is disillusioned by the corruption he sees

around him. Like many other participants he links the current state of corruption to the 1990s,

saying "That's been the situation here for the last 20 years." With participants still feeling the

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[23] Each example he listed as a demotion from 'director' was phrased in the feminine, while 'director' was phrased in the masculine. Just saying.

negative effects of a time they were too young to meaningfully remember, such comments are imbued with a sense that this mess is not theirs, both in the sense that they did not create it, and they cannot be expected to clean it up. For example, Milica, 24, said:

> I'm going to Sweden[24] [to pursue a Masters degree after graduation]. Because I want a standard. That's that. It's a consequence of Serbia, that you get sick of the chaos that rules here, that some people love. Sometimes it's amusing because that chaos lets you slip through the cracks, but on the other hand, the system doesn't function, and you're not protected. You can't count on anything. And that's why I want to go to Sweden, because it seems to me that there is a high social standard over there, unlike here.

This excerpt shows a sense of frustration of living in a system that "doesn't function," and a lack of responsibility for "the chaos that rules here." Because of the popular view among participants that most of the important jobs in society are being filled by "uneducated," "incapable," and "unqualified" people with *veze*, many of the participants felt they were caught up in and disadvantaged by an unregulated system in which they will be unable to make use of their education. This connection between the 1990s and the present state of chaos highlights the importance of contextualizing Serbia as both a post-socialist and a post-war state, and understanding that these students have grown up during a time of big political and economic changes (Ghodsee 2011). The system of merit they perceive to be lacking in Serbia is connected in their minds to the moral chaos that emerged in the 1990s and spilled over into the present.

Through discussion about employment prospects in Belgrade compared to the EU, participants positioned themselves as belonging to the middle- or upper-middle class and being more qualified and more 'deserving' of well-paid jobs than people who had secured these jobs through the corrupt system of *veze.* The participants' class position may therefore contribute to the predicament of 'should I stay or should I go?' They were raised on the idea that a university degree would qualify them for important jobs in society (such as "the director of a firm,"

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[24] Milica was recently accepted into a Masters program at Lund University, Sweden.

according to Vukan), and now, faced with bleak employment prospects, they seem unwilling to accept lower-class jobs ("a maid […], a nanny, a cleaning lady"). As middle- or upper-middle class, university-educated young people, they feel that the corrupt Serbian state is not allowing them to put their merits and qualifications to use. It follows that they would be dissatisfied with employment prospects built on *veze* –why get a degree if you still need a connection?

As mentioned in chapter 3, it was not uncommon for participants to distinguish themselves as university students from "people on the street," who were portrayed as "dumb" or "uninformed." Even when talking about people their age or friends outside of university, participants tended to highlight their formal educations as a feature which separated them from other Belgrade youth, and gave them a different set of perspectives, needs, and aspirations. This perceived difference between 'us' and 'them' shows the importance of considering class when exploring how university students in Belgrade experience Serbia's position outside the EU and how they reflect on the topic of Serbian EU integration. The "immediate outside" of the EU is not a homogenous space, but is itself layered with hierarchies which affect people's positions or relationships to the topic of EU integration. For example, many participants commented that young people in Belgrade are generally content to sit at cafes all day and party at clubs all night, without ever thinking about long-term issues. In the words of Vladan, 24, "A lot of young people are uninformed. They sit around in cafes and they don't care about what is going on. When I say 'European Union' to them, they think 'Oh yeah, Berlin, nightclubs, this, that. Super.'" Vladan suggests that the topic of Serbian EU integration is more relevant for him as a university student than it is for other young people in Belgrade: as a university student, his aspirations are geared towards the promise of meaningful employment, while he perceives other young people to be interested only in nightclubs.

The participants' class position influences their disappointment with the current situation, but also partially enables them to try and seek employment in the EU, since their university degrees give them the credentials to apply for jobs or paid internships that they consider meaningful and at which they could put their degrees to use. In this way, class position, expressed through university education (Bourdieu 1999), leads to dissatisfaction with the situation in Belgrade while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for mobility, however partial.

Although the participants' aspirations to leave Belgrade were still hypothetical, the prevalence of the idea among educated, young people suggested to me that they were describing a phenomenon of brain-drain. Milica, the 24 year old student quoted earlier explaining why she is going to Sweden, spoke directly to this issue:

> There really are a lot of high-quality people, and it's a shame that they have to go. And also, this slows down our development, because development is dependent on capable people. If all those capable people leave the country, there's nobody left to keep pushing forward […]. It's falling apart over here, while all the good people—it's what they call brain-drain and it's true. And it's really a shame. It's a shame that I'll be a part of that. But I'm not going to sit here and try and dig the country out of a bad situation, and sit and wait for things to change.

Milica's comments express a sentiment which was common among participants: that leaving Belgrade to pursue employment (or in her case, graduate studies) in the EU is not a matter of choice but of necessity—that they "have to go." Like Dejan, quoted earlier, Milica positions university students as "high-quality" people in a system that does not value them. They do not want to graduate university with the feeling that their degrees will not be enough to secure them meaningful employment, and they do not want to work jobs for which they feel over-qualified. Anica, a 26 year old graduate student suggested this when she said, "I love [living in Belgrade]. If I left, it would be because of the impossibility of finding a job. You don't have much freedom in choosing what you would like to do."

These excerpts show a sense of resignation that the situation in Serbia will not improve quickly enough to benefit the participants' career-paths. In addition, these students seem confident that they will be satisfied with the employment opportunities they imagine are available in the EU. Although employment in the EU is idealized, the excerpts also show a sense of sadness about leaving one's home that I think it is important to explore further. In the next section, I will elaborate on the perspectives of participants who had decided to stay in Belgrade after graduating, and explore how Belgrade as a home is imagined and experienced by participants as they contrast it with the EU.

Participants' Ideas on Staying In Belgrade after Graduation

Whether they planned to stay or go, participants offered a unanimously bleak description of employment prospects in Belgrade. Although this conversation began with the open-ended question "what do you plan to do after you graduate?" the idea of leaving Belgrade after university was so prevalent among young university students that even those who planned to stay in Belgrade felt the need to justify this decision to me. Staying in Belgrade was not a given, but a decision made against compelling ideas about life in the EU. The participants' justifications for choosing to stay in Belgrade took many forms (my favourite was: "Well, my cat lives here!"), but not one participant cited the issues of visas, mobility, or the practical disadvantages of finding work in the EU as a non-EU citizen.

Broadly speaking, the participants' reasoning for staying in Belgrade can be grouped into two categories: either the decision to stay in Belgrade was based on the view that employment prospects in the EU were over-idealized and actually not much better than in Serbia, or it was based on an affective connection to Belgrade as a city and to the specific "Belgrade mentality" which bound them to the city and its inhabitants. The Belgrade mentality will be explored in

more detail in the following chapter. It was an expression used by participants to describe a friendly, care-free, hospitable society that has the propensity to look for cracks to slip through in the corrupt system. It is interesting to note that in both lines of reasoning, participants did not paint a more flattering picture of the employment situation in Belgrade; it remained corrupt, unfulfilling, and based on personal connections. What differs from the examples explored above, in which participants wanted to leave Belgrade for the EU, is the participants' relationship to or acceptance of "the way things are" in Belgrade.

The first category of reasoning to stay in Belgrade was built on the idea that employment prospects in the EU were over-idealized and exaggerated. I was surprised to learn that even those participants who had engaged in idealizations about the EU and who had described employment prospects in Serbia as corrupt and chaotic in contrast, later told me they were planning on staying in Belgrade because they considered employment in the EU to be over-idealized. For example, Vukan, the 29 year old *apsolvent* who was quoted earlier describing employment in Belgrade as precarious and corrupt compared to the EU where he imagined "there's a job waiting for you in your field," later told me he planned on staying in Belgrade after graduation. He reflected on his skepticism or disillusionment towards the EU, saying,

> Now listen, there are people [politicians] who are simply skeptical about this, but they have to keep talking about it publically and saying how it's going to last, how it's the only prospective organization for us, how people live the best lives in the EU. And I believe that those people know deep inside that it isn't like that. But that they simply have to talk that way publically. It's their job to talk like that. Someone is forcing them to talk that way, and you're just going to say what they tell you to. I'm talking about politicians, representatives. But no one is really so crazy to think that it's all milk and honey, that milk and honey pour over there. I mean, that's a classic fallacy. Even in those most-developed countries, those richest countries, it's not really like that.

This excerpt reveals a tension between idealization and skepticism: Vukan's skepticism towards Serbian politicians' idealized depictions of life in the EU comes into tension with the rather

idealized descriptions of EU employment prospects he himself put forward earlier in our conversation.

For many participants, the Serbian media's flattering depiction of the EU is only beginning to crack as they hear stories from friends who had lived or worked in the EU for a short time and then returned to Belgrade, or from their own travel experiences to the EU which showed them that the differences between 'here' and 'there' were underwhelming. Popular idealizations about life in the EU (e.g. "'you simply make your own destiny'") were brought down to earth by hearing about mundane experiences. For example, Ana, 20, said,

> I have some friends who went abroad for some masters programs, or who just went away for a couple months, tried it out, and came back here. Basically, all those who went say that it's very hard, that you have to really work. Which is normal I guess.

The reality of having to "really work" runs against idealizations of the EU where, to re-visit Vukan's quote, "there is a job waiting for you in your field." In this way, realistic rather than idealized stories or experiences break down the idea that 'life is elsewhere' (Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004). For example, Bojana, the 26 year old graduate student told me about dealing with mistakes and inconsistencies in her British internship application, and said,

> I was disappointed. What did I expect? I mean, an international bank based in England, I really expected more from them, and not that kind of sloppiness. But… it makes it a bit easier [laughs], when you hear things like that. Then you see that it's not so bad here.

Bojana's comment shows her realization that the kind of bureaucratic "sloppiness" she thought was exclusive to Serbia actually exists in places she considers to be more orderly, like England. Similarly, Dara, 23, reflected on her friend's experience studying in Italy, and said, "I heard that in Italy there is the same kind of chaos that there is here, concerning legal things and all that. And that's crazy."

In all of these excerpts, EU countries are taken off their proverbial pedestals and shown to be less different from Serbia than the participants had initially thought. This differs from the

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Serbia-EU comparison elaborated earlier, where the participants' description of Serbia as corrupt and unregulated was constructed by contrasting it with a picture of the EU that was stable, orderly, and rewarding. For Dara, Dejan, and other students who had decided to stay in Belgrade, the deflation of EU idealizations co-exists with a bleak perception of employment in Serbia. This is to say that the situation in Serbia is not described as being better than the participants had initially thought. Rather, the situation in Belgrade retains its chaos, while the participants' imaginings of the EU lose the element of idealization, resulting in the feeling that "it's not so bad here," according to Bojana.

The second category of reasoning that participants used to justify their decision to stay in Belgrade was built around an affective connection to Belgrade as a city, including "the way of life here" and "the Belgrade mentality." While the prospects for employment continued to be described as bleak, Belgrade as a city was described in positive terms as a friendly, lively place in which one could have a good time, rather than succeed professionally. Consider the following excerpt from Marko, 24:

> There's an aspect to our mentality that I wouldn't like to see change [if Serbia joined the EU]. Life in the West is a lot faster. Life in Belgrade is fast too, but over there it's faster, but not in terms of fun, going out, and so on. When I was in Vienna a month ago, I was walking around town on a Sunday night at 9pm and the city was empty. I wondered why it was empty. Where are all the young people? Vienna has 4 million people! And then it hit me—those people have to go to work the next day! At 8 o'clock the next morning, they are going to wake up and go to work, earn money, provide for their families, for their companies, for their country. But here? On a Monday—which is a work-day! Most suicides in Europe happen on a Monday, since people are at their nerves' end on Monday and they don't want to go to work. But they still get up at 8 and go to work and they come home at 4. But here? On a Monday at noon, the cafes are overflowing. You'll see it more now that the weather is getting nicer. Knez Mihajlova street is littered in cafes, and those aren't tourists. Those are young people! Young people who are supposed to be changing the country, who are supposed to be changing the world, who are supposed to be working harder than anyone. They're sitting around, drinking beer, drinking juice.

Marko expresses a common sentiment among participants that the high unemployment rate is actually connected to the relaxed and easy-going mentality of people in Belgrade. Although he recognizes that young people "are supposed to be changing the country" and "working harder

than anyone," he romanticizes Belgrade as a place where cafes are "overflowing" and no one has to wake up early for work. Rather than describe the EU as a place where you are "able to make something of yourself simply through work," in the words of Marija, he instead points out that most suicides in Europe "happen on a Monday," thereby positioning work in the EU as unfulfilling and laborious as opposed to Marija's more flattering depictions of work in the EU as successful and inspiring. His comments suggest he has chosen to embrace the care-free lifestyle of unemployment in Belgrade.

Or consider another example from Anica, the 26 year old graduate student: "The unemployment rate is high. People generally don't do anything all day, which then leads to the fact that everyone is fun and always going out. But on the other hand, we're stagnating in a professional sense." These excerpts also speaks to the age and class position of the participant group, since living at home and being supported by their parents affords them the freedom "go out" despite the poor economic situation. More importantly, these excerpts describe Belgrade as a good place to have fun, but not a good place to achieve the employment aspirations of university graduates.

Anica told me that her urge to move away had diminished over the years, stating, "I've gotten used to Belgrade." When I asked her to clarify what that meant, she replied "I've gotten used to the way of life here." Since most participants described Belgrade as a limitlessly fun city with a great social life despite low economic standards, I think that getting "used to" Belgrade can be read as embracing the positive aspects of its chaos despite the fact that it that it does not provide the conditions for professional success.

I found it rather sad that staying in Belgrade was not a given, and that participants felt they needed to justify this decision to me. Perhaps this sadness was rooted in the nostalgic

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element of my immigrant identity and my own idealizations of Belgrade, or perhaps it was

caused by the fact that most students presented life in Belgrade as chaotic and difficult, and I

therefore felt sad that the place one calls home is not always the place where they would feel

most comfortable or at ease. Unfortunately, I cannot know if these justifications occur as

frequently when students talk among themselves, since certain aspects of my own positionality

may have contributed to the participants' need to justify staying: it may have been influenced by

the fact that I was born in Belgrade and left, which put the idea of leaving within the realm of

possibility. It may also have been influenced by the fact that I am from the 'West,' since it was

not uncommon for participants to refer to imagined employment prospects in Canada and

contrast them to employment prospects in Serbia. Participants generally thought that I would be

"secured" a job in sociology after graduating and were sometimes unconvinced when I told them

this was not the case. Additionally, they imagined that students in Canada do not work alongside

their studies and were surprised to hear that I had worked in the service industry since age 15.

Their justifications may also have been influenced by the fact that I am a university student and

they did not want to appear unambitious or lazy in their decisions to stay in a city where they

could not put their degrees to use.

Questions around Mobility and Elephants

   Through the participants' discussion about staying or leaving Belgrade, I saw that one

effect of the EU border is to create idealizations and exaggerations about life in the EU which are

reinforced by a lack of mobility (Szmagalska-Follis 2009; Blank 2004). Although participants

did not refer to the practical issue of work-visas, it remained the elephant in the room since this

issue seriously complicates the goal of working in the EU until or unless Serbia becomes a full

EU member. The promise of future accession constitutes a major difference between

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Szmagalska-Follis' (2009) research on the effect of the EU border between Poland and Ukraine, and comparable research on Serbia's relationship to the EU since Serbia, unlike Ukraine, is a candidate-state. For example, Jansen's (2009) research distinguishes Serbia's relative proximity to the EU through the concept of the "immediate outside" (824) or the "waiting room" (828) of Europe. Perhaps Serbia's proximity to the EU contributed to the popularity of the idea of leaving Belgrade to work, yet this idea is very much contingent on the promise of future accession.

Despite, or perhaps because of Serbia's relative proximity to the EU as a candidate state, participants seemed to harbor growing disillusionments about life in the EU. This disillusionment may be connected to the common view elaborated in chapter 3 that Serbia may not join the EU in the near future, or that Serbia may only ever attain peripheral status in the EU. Until or unless Serbia joins the EU, the participants' answers to the question 'what do you plan to do after you graduate?' will be impeded by the issue of mobility, yet it does not enter the conversation. Following Berdahl's (1999) suggestion to explore not only what it said but also what is silent or absent, I think that the EU border was the elephant in the room which influenced participants' decisions to stay in Belgrade. This is to say that the experience of being on the 'immediate outside' of the EU for a prolonged time and not anticipating EU-accession in the near future may lead to an acceptance or even acquiescence about "the way of life" in Belgrade, to borrow Anica's phrase. Anica told me she had "gotten used to" Belgrade, but she continued to describe it as a place where she felt she was "stagnating" professionally.

Marko, the 24 year old student who was quick to romanticize Belgrade and did not idealize the EU at any point in the interview (even telling me that most suicides in Europe happen on a Monday), also spoke of the "way of life" in Belgrade:

> Belgrade… well, that's the city where I was born. That's the city where people understand my language, where I understand them, where the mentality of people is nearest to me. I understand people who leave. I support them if they wish to leave. I understand their reasons for leaving, and I understand if they manage to fit into the mentality and the way of life in Vienna, in Berlin, in London. There are simply people for whom this way of life in Belgrade doesn't sit well. They want more serious lives. We in Belgrade, we are, considering that we've gotten used to various—may I swear in this conversation?—various bullshit, people in Belgrade have learned that there exist two ways. There's a film that says "Either you go and forget Serbia, or you stay. If you stay, you learn to live by the only method, and that is *otimanje*[25]." That's from a Serbian cult film. However, I would change it a little bit: 'Either you go and forget Serbia, or you learn to make peace with the state of things in Serbia, and learn to live a relaxed life.' At least this new generation of young people, who have no responsibilities, for whom nothing is important, for whom the only important thing is to hang out and enjoy life.

Marko's comments suggest that there is a way to put up with the corruption and chaos of

Belgrade, that it may only be a matter of perspective or mentality. Milica, who is moving to

Sweden because she wants "a standard," would likely not be satisfied with a life of *otimanje*, nor

would Marija, who wants to "make something of [herself] simply through work." Marko's

decision to "make peace with the state of things in Serbia" does not seem to stem from

disillusionment with the EU, but from a process of learning to "live a relaxed life" of "no

responsibilities" instead of chasing a career in a corrupt employment landscape. However, like

Anica's acceptance of "the way of life" in Belgrade, this decision to "make peace" remains

embedded in a bleak description of employment prospects for university graduates and the

corrupt valuing of *veze* over merit. Although participants were silent on the issue of visas, the

quiet coexistence of complaints and plans to stay in Belgrade suggests that perhaps immobility

makes getting used to the "way of life" in Belgrade more of a necessity than a virtue, more of an

acquiescence than a peace.

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[25] I am unsatisfied with all short translations of *otimanje*. It literally means to take something from someone else forcefully. In the context of the above sentence, it means to live outside the law.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This project has explored how the expansion of the European Union affects the lives, identities, and aspirations of university students in Belgrade as they inhabit the shrinking "immediate outside." Before delving into a concluding commentary on the main themes running through this project, I would like to consider Lithuanian-Polish poet Czesław Miłosz's (1968:5) ideas on writing simultaneously about people and the places or the contexts they inhabit:

> A three-year-old's love for his aunt or jealousy towards his father take up so much room in autobiographical writings because everything else, for instance the history of a country or a national group, is treated as something "normal" and, therefore, of little interest to the narrator. But another method is possible. Instead of thrusting the individual into the foreground, one can focus attention on the background, looking upon oneself as a sociological phenomenon. Inner experience, as it is preserved in the memory, will then be evaluated in the perspective of the changes one's milieu has undergone.

Miłosz's excerpt suggests that people –their viewpoints, their imaginations, their priorities, and so on—cannot be separated from the contexts they inhabit. Further, he suggests that changes which occur in this context write a shared social history on groups of people, a collective memory which coexists with the more disparate and personal lenses of their own "inner experience[s]."

I think of Miłosz's approach to writing as a sort of poet's "sociological imagination" (Mills 1959), showing the ways in which personal milieux are affected by broader social structures. I think this framing is useful for thinking about the two interrelated stories I am attempting to draw out through this project. On the one hand there is the story about political context: about the eastward expansion of the EU and Serbia's current position on the "immediate outside," about the legacy of 1990s era isolation and the quality of impasse or stagnation in contemporary Serbian politics; on the other hand there is the story of a group of people who have grown up during this period and whose perceptions, aspirations, plans, and worries are informed

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by and affected by this context. Miłosz's perspective suggests that people are inseparable from political context whether it comes across indirectly through personal stories and "inner experience," or whether it comes across more directly as for example through "everyday geopolitical discourse" (Jansen 2009:824).

At the end of Jansen's (2009) paper on Serbia's exclusion from the EU, he advocates for the potential of "an anthropology of everyday geopolitics in peripheries" (830). While this project has focused on a specific group in a specific context, it has nevertheless brought forward certain themes that extend beyond the Belgrade university experience, and can be meaningfully applied in similar contexts. In the following sections, I will elaborate on some themes which have come across through this project and which have put it in conversation with other literature on Europe's post-socialist periphery.

On Resentment

Both Jansen (2009) and Szmagalska-Follis (2009) argue that everyday phenomena such as humiliation and entrapment characterize the experience of exclusion from the EU. Additionally, Szmagalska-Follis has found that the eastward expansion of the EU contributes to increased resentment among those left on the outside, since the fact of exclusion then becomes more obvious and perhaps more personal. This runs contrary to some of the pro-EU Europeanisation scholarship explored in chapter 2 which conceptualizes non-EU states as moving along a path towards European integration by 'learning' European norms and values (Konitzer 2011) and which posits that most political actors will eventually realize the benefits of European integration and will adjust their politics accordingly (Vachudova 2005).

The theme of resentment resonated strongly in my own data, particularly through the participants' complaints about Bulgaria and Romania's inclusion in the EU. I realized through

this project that although resentment may characterize the experience of being on the outside, drawing a connection between the experiences of exclusion in Serbia (Jansen 2009), Ukraine (Szmagalska-Follis 2009), or other non-EU states, resentment is not a static state of being, but rather is a dynamic emotional response to a given geopolitical situation. Unlike some Europeanisation literature that treats skepticism and even enthusiasm as a relatively static, one-dimensional response (Vachudova 2005), both Jansen and Szmagalska-Follis allow for dynamism in their conceptualizations of resentment. In their analyses, the response of resentment is informed by external factors such as the construction of secure borders, the revocation of mobility privileges, or the increasing amount of time spent in the "waiting room" of Europe (Jansen 2009:828), but also by internal factors such as where one imagines themselves or their collectivity as truly belonging in the hierarchies of Europe. The timing of their research is important to note: Szmagalska-Follis explored Ukrainian people's feelings on EU expansion around the time the Poland-Ukraine border was being constructed, when feelings of resentment were arguably most intense; Jansen explored Serbian people's geopolitical self-positioning at a time when Serbian citizens needed visas to enter the EU, which changed after the visa liberalizations in 2009. The context and timing of their research therefore affected the quality or intensity of the resentment that they encountered, and accordingly, their analyses allow us to conceptualize resentment as a dynamic emotional response rather than a static fact of being excluded.

This project has looked at urban, educated, middle- to upper-middle class youth, and has found that they tend to mark themselves as belonging to Europe through these identity categories ("urban," "young," "student"), and has also found that they tend to feel varying degrees of resentment about not being considered European enough for the EU (chapter 3). Like the

experiences of resentment elaborated by Szmagalska-Follis and Jansen, this resentment is best

considered a snapshot of a particular group in a particular context. It is informed by such factors

as witnessing their parents' experiences of struggle during Serbia's isolation from Western

Europe in the 1990s, and the participants' own understandings of themselves or their

demographic as belonging to Europe despite Serbia's geopolitical position on the outside of the

EU and the wall of accession conditions that many said appeared never-ending.

On Western Influence

Another theme that put this project into conversation with other research on Europe's

peripheries is the theme of Western influence, or the symbolic power of (Western) Europe to

stand for civilization and progress, thereby creating various hierarchies within the space of the

continent (Todorova 1997; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Wolff 1995). The theme of Western influence

was especially significant in the literature on normalcy and abnormalcy discourse in post-

socialist spaces, which discussed the power of the West to define the terms of political progress

after socialism (Greenberg 2011) as well as to define what is considered normal in terms of post-

socialist consumer standards (Galbraith 2003; Fehérváry 2002). In this project, this theme came

up through the participants' constant comparisons between 'here' and 'there,' and their

tendencies to describe the ways in which Serbia is lacking by comparing it to the imagined (and

highly idealized) West.

While the comparison between 'here' and 'there' was partially built into the interviews

by the nature of the subject matter, I was surprised at how often these comparisons occurred and

how idealistic a picture they portrayed of the West. As a researcher from Canada, I struggled

with my own role in eliciting or influencing these comparisons. Greenberg (2010:43) argues that

"Serbian failure to be western is constituted in relation to an outside, judging gaze," such that her

presence as a western researcher could not be easily separated from her young Serbian participants' perceptions of her as a "judging westerner" (44).

While being a member of the Serbian diaspora partially relieved me of this position, it was still difficult to avoid it entirely. I felt as though I occupied a partial insider-outsider position, standing with one foot inside and one foot outside. For example, I felt markedly "western" when participants made idealized comments about what my life in Canada must be like, or told me that I came from a "normal country." On the other hand, I felt like an insider when participants assumed I knew what they meant about a given topic and therefore did not elaborate as extensively as I wished. As a Serb, many participants felt that I was "on their side" or would write a flattering report about Serbia. Because of the sentiment that I was "on their side," I feel that I was seen as a westerner, but not a "judging westerner."

Nevertheless, I was often concerned about coming across as one, which may have been a result of my earlier experiences living in Belgrade: when I spent six months in Belgrade at age 20, my love for the city sometimes landed me in uncomfortable conversations with young Serbs who were offended that I had chosen to live in Belgrade when I had the option of living in Canada. They told me that they would never leave a country like Canada, as though I were misusing my western freedoms by choosing to live in Belgrade for six months. At the time I was puzzled why these people refused to embrace their wonderful city, but I understand now that they saw me as fortunate for leaving Serbia with my family in the 1990s, and considered me to be a westerner flaunting her mobility privileges. Jansen (2009) touches on this sentiment when he writes about his Bosnian friends joking that a major difference between them was that he could leave the country anytime while they had no choice but to stay.

This imbalance between other young Serbs and myself persisted as I conducted fieldwork. In hindsight, I realize that my worry about being perceived as a "judging westerner" caused me to censor myself on certain occasions: for example, during the transcription process, I noticed that I had refrained from asking participants whether or not they voted in previous elections. Although voting tendencies are not the only relevant form of political engagement, and participants may have participated in alternative forms of political expression, asking participants whether or not they tended to vote would nevertheless have been a useful question that could have told me something meaningful about their relationship to politics. Unfortunately, I did not know at the time how to ask that question without sounding like a "judging westerner" trying to making sure that everyone is participating in democracy.

On Youth

Another theme that runs through this project is the particular perspective of youth (in this case urban middle- to upper-middle class youth) and how they understand, inherit, and engage with the "intimate legacies" of rapid and radical geopolitical changes (Ghodsee 2011:xv). Although the participants in this study are not representative of all youth in Serbia, and are also characterized by class position –all members of a single ethno-national background and urban-identity—Mizen (2002:17) points out that youth is nevertheless a "shared condition." The perspective of youth in Serbia is important to explore because youth have been singled out as a unique war generation (Greenberg 2011), and because they are the first generation to grow up in a post-Yugoslav state. Since the material standards, social welfare, and citizen agency that characterized the former Yugoslavia are often conceptualized as a state of 'normalcy' that was lost through the chaos of the 1990s (Greenberg 2011; Jansen 2009), post-Yugoslav youth

perspectives on what constitutes a normal life are especially important for understanding how they experience or envision their state in the context of democratization or European integration.

However, the importance of looking at youth perspectives extends beyond the post-Yugoslav experience. I have cited the research of Hendley (2012) and Schwenkel (2011) on youth in Russia and Vietnam respectively, but this theme can be extended to any post-socialist or post-war context where a younger generation witnesses the effects of political and economic change on their parents' generation, and is met with the various challenges and benefits of a new economic and political landscape.

Reflections

Creating a project proposal in Toronto, I made several assumptions that turned out to be rather misguided, but nevertheless led to constructive insights and surprises. Most notably, I made the assumption that the topic of Serbian EU integration would be relevant and meaningful to university students in Belgrade. After all, Serbia had just become a candidate state in 2012, and as I arrived in Belgrade in April 2013, the Serbian government was waiting for the EU to set the date [*datum*] to begin accession negotiations. To me, these events seemed like movement towards a long-standing political goal that could potentially change the experience of everyday life in Belgrade. However, it did not take much time in Belgrade talking to people about the *datum* before I realized that these were not *events* in the way I had imagined them to be. Becoming a candidate state did not change anything in day-to-day life, and after so many years of conditions, reforms, and waiting, it did not even seem to bring the end-goal of EU accession that much closer.

As elaborated in chapters 3 and 4, this topic did matter to participants, especially in terms of travel, employment, and broader ideas about inclusion in the "European story" after growing

up in relative isolation from the rest of Europe during the 1990s and until the visa liberalizations in 2009. Yet, the topic of Serbian EU accession was too abstract, too distant, or too tentative to be relevant in the way I thought it would be. Since many participants complained that it was a "story that never changes" or that there was never any substantial progress, it could be considered more of a backdrop, or a quietly playing tape loop, than a distinct feature in the day-to-day lives of the participants. While participants were generally happy to be interviewed and to share their perspectives with me, Serbian EU integration was not a topic they discussed in their everyday lives with their friends, parents, or peers.

The sense of stagnation or impasse that ran through most of the interviews came as a bit of a surprise, but it was a welcome surprise that forced me to reconsider my assumptions and preconceived notions about what was important to young students in Belgrade. This stagnation went against the enthusiasm and evolutionary momentum implicit in transitology or Europeanisation literature outlined in chapter 2. Although I had already identified this literature as problematic before beginning my fieldwork, I had not realized how much of it I had internalized and the ways in which it seeped into my research project, quietly shaping my focus and the questions I asked. Coming up against this sense of stagnation therefore forced me to re-focus my guiding questions for this project: I made the decision to ask not what it means to live in a 'transitional' space, which implies that EU accession is the inevitable end-point of transition, but rather to ask what it means to live in the "immediate outside" of the EU, which points to the geopolitical reality and experience of living on the peripheries of Europe. While I found the former framing problematic, the latter framing is not neutral, either: it too has an impact on how I understand and interpret the participants' relationship to EU expansion. However, I felt that the experience of living on the peripheries of Europe was a more accurate portrayal of the context

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that participants have grown up in, and would therefore allow for a more grounded

understanding of their perspectives.

Another element that took me by surprise was how present the 1990s still were, how they

filtered in through memory or post-memory and affected the participants' perceptions, outlooks,

and ideas about their society. I had consciously chosen the topic of Serbian EU integration

because I wanted to explore a contemporary issue, and I made the assumption that youth in

Belgrade would not have much to say about the 1990s, having experienced this decade as

children. Of course, the opposite was also true: they spoke about Serbian EU integration as a

stagnant topic or a story that never changes, while the legacy of the 1990s seemed to actively

affect their lives and their future aspirations, whether they relayed this to me through personal

memories or stories their parents had told them.

The six weeks I spent doing fieldwork did not feel like enough to truly get into the

rhythm of life in Belgrade, as was suggested by a few participants in chapter 5, but it did feel like

enough time to become aware of certain recurring themes that characterized everyday life in

Belgrade. The most prominent and pervasive of these themes was the city-wide rural-urban

divide elaborated in chapter 3. A May Day trip with some friends to a lake on the scenic Avala

mountain just outside Belgrade drove this point home for me, as I mistook this day-trip escape

for a piece of "true" rurality based on certain ingrained stereotypes I was harbouring, including

pig-roasts, turbo-folk blasting from open car doors, and even a spontaneous *kolo*[26] – all of which

I witnessed at the lake. My urbanite friends mocked our fellow lake-goers, and it was not until

the drive home that one of them realized my mistaken interpretation and corrected me, saying

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[26] *Kolo* is a Yugoslav collective folk dance usually performed at weddings.

"No, no, no, they're from Belgrade! Everyone you saw there will be driving back to the city, 100%. This is just a weekend getaway. I know. I know. We live in a bubble."

Jansen (2005) notes a similar experience in his article on urban self-perceptions in Belgrade and Zagreb. He writes that this was not a topic he anticipated exploring in-depth when he began his fieldwork, but he found that it "pervaded everyday life" (154) and was therefore important in ways he had not anticipated. The Avala excursion was the event that made me realize the extent of the rural-urban divide in the city, and the significance of deterritorialized urbanity and identifying as 'truly' urban in Belgrade. Coming from Vancouver and Toronto, I was accustomed to the suburban sprawl that characterizes North American urban centres and arguably makes urbanity less of a significant marker than in a place like Belgrade, which is something of an island of urbanity in an otherwise rural country. In Vancouver and Toronto, I have never come across the sort of intuitive urban radar that Bojana from chapter 3 possessed, marking out people who lived in the city but were not 'truly' urban.

The Avala trip also made me realize that the group I was interviewing really was something of a 'bubble' in Belgrade society, as was elaborated in chapter 3 through their youth, university educations, and urban identities. When I recruited participants, I did not require in advance that participants identify as urban; I only required them to be university students between the ages of 20 and 30. However, 16 out of 17 participants identified as urban. This overwhelming majority may have been due to class issues, for example, the connection between urbanity and formal education (Jansen 2005). Or, it may have been due to methodological factors such as sampling strategy, since participants were recruited by convenience and snowball sampling which means they were all connected to at least one other participant (see Appendix A). Even though this result was unintentional on my part, I am grateful for this cohesiveness as it

leant some clarity to my analysis that would have been more difficult to achieve if, for example, half of the participants did not identify as urban.

Limitations

There is much room for improvement in this project. As discussed above, the decision to focus on the experience of living on the peripheries of Europe came inductively, through engagement with the data and being met with a sense of stagnation that I had not been expecting. Upon reflection, I would have framed many of my interview and research questions differently in order to have been more conceptually prepared for the sense of stagnation that pervaded the interviews. This could have allowed me to engage with the feelings of stagnation more constructively, for example as Greenberg's (2010:46) more open-ended research methodology allowed her to conceptualize political apathy not as an obstacle or barrier, but a "a productive aspect of how people experience and understand democracy." In what ways was the pervasive sense of stagnation a productive aspect of the everyday experience of being on the outside?

Since several participants referred to the everyday, mundane, Belgrade experience that I could not 'really' know in six weeks, I would upon reflection have tried to approach the everyday more directly or intentionally than I did, allowing myself more room to explore the ways in which the topic of EU expansion matters or doesn't matter to participants on the level of everyday experiences. While I feel that I partially attained this intention, especially in chapter 5 which focuses on the practical implications of being on the outside of the EU in terms of employment and mobility, these practical implications are nevertheless future-oriented or goal-oriented rather than being a true expression of the day-to-day experience of being on the outside of the EU. I think this is one limitation of this research compared to other ethnographies, and I

think it is a limitation that could have been resolved through a more open-ended research focus that left room for everyday experiences to take shape.

Additionally, I feel this project could be improved by a larger sample of participants. I proposed to interview 10 students for this project and ended up interviewing 17. The majority of the participants I interviewed (10) were between born between 1987 and 1989, while only 5 were born between 1983 and 1984, and only 2 were born between 1991 and 1993 (See Appendix A). In chapter 3 I discussed how the age difference between the youngest and oldest participants may have contributed to the differences in their perspectives on the 1999 bombing of Belgrade, suggesting as Shore (2009:110) has argued, that "a few years suddenly mattered very much" in shaping youth perspectives and understandings of intense historical events. However, my analysis could have been improved by recruiting more participants born in the early 1980s and early 1990s in order to see whether the differences that I found between the oldest and youngest participants were true patterns or mere coincidences.

Another difference separating older and younger participants came up in chapters 4 and 5, when I discussed how younger participants (ages 20-25) tended to make a connection between the high unemployment rate in Belgrade and its fun nightlife, praising the relaxed and friendly aspects of the Belgrade mentality. The older participants were less likely to make this connection, perhaps because they were closer to finishing their degrees and facing the prospects of entering the labour market and moving out of their parents' homes. While these age-related patterns were present in my sample of 17, a larger sample would have allowed me to explore such patterns further, and to either clarify or complicate them through the addition of more voices and perspectives.

Finally, I feel this project would be complimented by a content analysis of Serbian media. Many participants spoke about the idealization of the EU in Serbian media and political platforms. Additionally, when I asked participants where they tended to get the most of their information on Serbian European integration, a common answer was through watching the news on TV or reading online newspapers. However, as I suggested in chapter 5, the stories of returning friends or family members from the EU also served as key source of information, shaping the participants' understandings of life in the EU and often leading to disillusionment or disappointment. While acknowledging the various avenues through which participants inform themselves about the EU, I feel that a content analysis of, for example, the Serbian daily newspaper *Politika* could lead to interesting insights about the way the EU has been portrayed in media from the overthrow of Milošević in 2000 until the present, and how this portrayal may have changed over time. It would have allowed me to learn more about how participants learned about Serbia's past, and about the role of media in shaping historical narratives. This would have been a particularly interesting line of questions to explore with a sample of university students since many of them suggested that their university educations separated them from "people on the street" who were portrayed as dumb, uninformed, or unable to think critically (chapter 3). The students were for the most part aware of issues such as media ownership and tried to engage critically with representations of the EU on the news. Unfortunately, the embarrassingly slow pace at which I read Cyrillic made a content analysis nearly impossible for the time-frame of this project.

Contributions, Connections, and Further Explorations

Although there are many things I would change or build upon, I think that this project has led to some interesting insights on how urban, educated, young people in Belgrade experience

life on the periphery of Europe. Conducting the interviews in Serbian allowed me the advantage of interviewing people that English-speaking researchers would not have been able to access, and additionally allowed participants the freedom to express themselves in their own language, even if the translations were mine. Considering all the slang, colloquialisms, and untranslatable Serbian words, I feel that participants were able to express themselves freely and I think this project therefore contributed a more intimate understanding of young people in Belgrade than would otherwise be possible for English-language research conducted in a similar time-frame.

I feel that this project connects thematically and ethnographically with other research on Serbia, especially that of Jansen (2009) and Greenberg (2011, 2010). One common thread that runs through all these studies is a focus on political context: Jansen addresses the political rather symbolically, through an analysis of Serbian people's self-positioning and 'everyday geopolitical discourse,' while Greenberg (2011) addresses the political more directly in her exploration of the phenomena of political apathy and nonparticipation in politics among Serbian youth. The political focus of Jansen and Greenberg's research suggests that Serbia's recent political history should not be sidelined in an anthropological exploration of the everyday. As discussed in chapter 1, Belgrade went from being the capital of an internationally respected Yugoslavia, to being the capital of a war-torn pariah state, to now being the capital of a small non-EU state, all in a relatively short amount of time. It is therefore important to situate Serbia as a post-socialist, post-Yugoslav, and post-conflict state in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the past affects the present on the level of everyday experiences and aspirations. This project has maintained focus on the political by simultaneously exploring the broader context and the perceptions of individual students. In particular, how Serbia's long-standing position on the

outside of the EU affects the participant group's sense of self-positioning or emplacement relative to Europe.

This project also lines up thematically with Greenberg's (2011, 2010) focus on youth perspectives in Serbia. Following the lead of other research on post-socialist and post-conflict settings (Ghodsee 2011; Schwenkel 2011; Shore 2009; Galbraith 2003), I think it is very important to make this distinction because generational difference leads to difference in perspective concerning how events are interpreted or understood. Since this project only focused on youth and therefore did not allow for any cross-generational comparison, I think this is an area that could be explored further. For example, given the past-in-the-present quality of Serbian political life and the participants' tendency to connect the current state of corruption to the legacy of the 1990s, I think it would have been interesting to interview the participants' parents' generation in order to explore generational continuities and cleavages regarding memories of the 1990s. While I found that young people's tendency to separate themselves from the violence and instability of the 1990s also translated into a lack of responsibility towards contemporary political outcomes and events, insofar as contemporary Serbian EU accession politics are still focused on making a recovery from the 1990s, interviewing their parents' generation would allow me to ask about the older generation's relationship to contemporary politics. Having protected their children from the harsh realities of the 1990s, how does the legacy of this decade inform the way they perceive life in Belgrade today, with their adult children in university? What are the major differences or similarities between the older generation's 'everyday geopolitical discourse' and self-positioning in the context of EU expansion compared to youth?

Lastly, while I would like to have been more conceptually prepared for the sense of political stagnation or resentment that pervaded the interviews, I nevertheless think that these

sentiments connect this project to other research on post-socialist Eastern Europe in the context of EU expansion. In chapter 3, I discussed how my finding that participants resented Bulgaria and Romania's inclusion in the EU differed slightly from Jansen's (2009) analysis, in which Serbian citizens positioned themselves relative to the EU as a more coherent block, and I suggested that this difference was likely due to the timing of the research: from Jansen's article in 2009 to my research in 2013, Serbian citizens have had more time to evaluate how Bulgaria and Romania are faring in the EU, and to consider what this might mean for Serbia's potential future in the EU. Having drawn on Jansen extensively throughout this project (2009, 2005), I think that my attention to the participants' feelings of resentment or stagnation help put this project into conversation with his research by elaborating on the ways in which these dynamic responses may be changing form over time, for example as other Balkan countries join the EU or as Serbia's time spent in the "waiting room" increases. Resentment, stagnation, apathy, and ambivalence are all important emotional responses that came up in my research that have been theorized in ethnographic and qualitative research as characterizing the experience of living on the periphery of the EU (Greenberg 2011; 2010; Jansen 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2009), but which have been largely ignored or downplayed in Europeanisation scholarship (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007; Checkel 2001).

My hope is that this project has contributed to broader sociological knowledge by drawing connections between personal milieux and broader structures, in Mills' (1959) terms, or, to return to Miłosz, by drawing connections between the foreground of personal memory and the background of social and political history. This project can be considered a snapshot of urban university students at a particular time and context. The participants' frequent comparisons between their lives in Belgrade and how they imagine life in the EU speak to the perceptions,

desires and aspirational tendencies of urban, educated, young people in Serbia as they imagine the EU from the outside looking in. Their perceptions have been informed by their simultaneously unique and shared experiences of growing up in Belgrade through the 1990s and 2000s, through political turbulence and then stagnation. And looking forward, their perceptions will be affected by whatever is to come next, as this group proceeds to graduate and to move into the next phases of life after university, which cannot be known in advance. Beyond the Belgrade experience, I hope this research has helped inform how we think about and understand life on the peripheries of Europe and how the eastward expansion of the EU affects the everyday experiences and identities of non-EU citizens as they compare what they know to what they imagine.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Participants

     For this project, I conducted interviews with 17 university students in Belgrade between the ages of 20 and 30. Of the 17 participants, 8 identified as female and 9 as male, as elaborated in the table below:

Year of Birth	Male	Female
1983	1	0
1984	3	1
1985	0	0
1986	0	0
1987	1	2
1988	1	0
1989	3	3
1990	0	0
1991	0	1
1992	0	0
1993	0	1

(Table 1)

     Of the female participants, 4 were undergraduate students, 1 was an *apsolvent*, and 3 were graduate students. Of the male participants, 1 was an undergraduate student, 7 were *apsolvent* students, and 1 was a graduate student. This made a sample total of 5 undergraduate students, 8 *apsolvent* students, and 4 graduate students.

The participants' disciplines varied. Of the male participants, 2 were enrolled in History, 1 in Law, 1 in International Studies, 1 in Civil Engineering, 1 in Electrical Engineering, 1 in Organizational Sciences, 1 in Andragogy, and 1 in Drama Arts. Of the female participants, 2 were in enrolled in Psychology, 1 in English Literature, 1 in Italian Literature, 1 in Languages, 1 in Sociology, 1 in Culture and Media, and 1 in Quantitative Economics.

Of the 17 participants, 15 were born and raised in Belgrade and only 3 were born elsewhere in Serbia and came to Belgrade for university studies. Of those 3, only 1 did not self-identify as urban. This overwhelmingly urban sample in a city that experienced a large rural influx in the 1990s (Jansen 2005; Ramet 1996) may speak to the connection between urbanity and class position discussed in chapter 3 with reference to Jansen's (2005) argument that formal education is a form of "desirable cultural capital" (161) by which one could lay claim to deterritorialized urban identification. This is to say that university students may be more likely to identify as urban, or that urbanites may be more likely to attend university than rural people, likely due to financial advantages and opportunities. However, the high number of urbanities in my sample could also be due to sampling strategy, as participants were sourced through convenience and snowball sampling. Given the rural-urban divide in Belgrade and the tendency to "hang out with people who are similar to you," according to Bojana, my sample may be overwhelmingly urban because participants were located largely through word-of-mouth.

Sampling Strategy

As mentioned, participants were found through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Since I had lived in Belgrade for 6 months previously (2009), I made use of friendly and professional contacts in order to find participants. I emailed approximately 10 people about the project and asked them to forward the email with my contact information to

anyone they knew who fit the demographic criteria. In order to ensure that I would get a diverse sample in terms of academic interests, I specified that an interest in politics was not a requirement as the interviews would be more focused on life in Belgrade.

Prior to my arrival in Belgrade, my aunt's friend's son (called Ivan throughout this project) secured a small office for me on the third floor of the Philology Faculty (yes, *veze* in action), where I conducted interviews for the first few weeks. After a freak heat-wave hit the city, I relocated interviews to parks and cafes, which unfortunately compromised the quality of the recordings due to wind, ambient noise, traffic, and so on. Ivan put me in contact with a few participants and then told me his faculty volleyball team would be playing a tournament against other faculties in the university that week. I attended, feigned an interest in volleyball, and talked to people from other faculties who either agreed to be interviewed or agreed to forward the project information to their peers. It seems people were true to their word, as there were 2 or 3 interviews where neither the participant nor I could figure out exactly how we were put into contact with one another (and the commonness of certain names such as Milica or Jelena made this even harder to figure out).

Interviews

Interviews were informal, semi-structured and open-ended. I made sure to ask certain questions to each participant for a sense of cohesiveness (e.g. "what are you planning on doing after you graduate?") but I tried to let the interviews take natural turns based on what the participant was saying. While it would have been easier for me to conduct interviews in English, certain limitations in my Serbian actually turned out to be helpful. For example, since my comprehension skills have always far surpassed my speaking skills, this limitation helped ensure that the participants were doing most of the talking, and I was actively listening, unlike in

English where I found I have a tendency to talk too much in interviews. Another limitation that turned out to be an advantage was my rather informal Serbian, which helped ensure an easy-going conversational quality to the interviews. This quality also improved with time and practice as I was able to ensure I covered the themes I wanted to cover without having to reference my interview guide as often.

Moving the interviews from the small office to parks and cafes also contributed to the flow of interviews, since these settings were more informal and relaxed and also allowed the participants (and me) to distract ourselves with coffee cups, cigarettes, and passersby that helped take the anxiety out of natural lulls in conversation. These settings also brought out the generousness of people in Belgrade, as they consistently insisted on buying me my drinks despite my insistence on buying them theirs. When one participant seemed genuinely disheartened and even offended that I paid the bill, I realized I was not being culturally sensitive and allowed future participants to pay for my coffee even though this made no sense to me, since they were already being so generous with their time.

Transcription, coding, translation

I transcribed the interviews, which proved to be easier in Serbian than English, perhaps because it is a phonetic language. However, the process of coding took me much longer than it would have in English. The transcripts were coded using Dedoose qualitative and mixed methods online software. I coded for themes (e.g. Employment, Travel, 1990s, Life in Belgrade, Ideas about the EU, Family, Media, Government, Society, Time, etc.) and then used the analysis descriptor charts generated by Dedoose (e.g. Code occurrence, Code co-application) in order to see which codes came up most often, which codes were present in every interview, and which codes tended to come up in combination with other codes. I then went back into the codes that

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were most frequent or most meaningful and did a secondary coding. For example, excerpts coded under both 'Life in Belgrade' and 'Ideas about the EU' were re-coded with themes such as 'Hierarchy,' 'EU functions properly,' and 'Urban,' which eventually led to the analyses in chapters 3 and 5.

I translated only the excerpts I intended to used as quotes, and although I had previously worked as a Serbian-English translator for media reports, translating colloquial language proved to be very difficult. I even decided to omit one quote from chapter 4 since I was unable to come up with a satisfactory translation, and opted instead to express the general feeling of that quote with reference to several other quotes from different participants. The quote I omitted was, "*tamo bi bolje prošao, ali ovde bi se bolje snašao,*" which roughly translates to "I would get by better over there [in the EU], but I could find my way along / make do better here," which speaks to the experience of knowing the system well enough to slip through the cracks, although the English version lacks all the poetic nuance of the Serbian version.