The University of Belgrade
Faculty of Political Science

Master's Thesis

Serbian Distrust and Disengagement with Local Civil Society: When Western-Conditioned Transitional Justice Conflicts National Identity Construction

Master Academic Studies
Peace, Security, and Development Studies

Written By:
Julia Davies
Index No. 7/2024
Advised By:
Professor Filip Ejdus

Belgrade, September 2025

Plagiarism Disclaimer

This work was written by me, in my own words, except for quotations from different sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such. I am conscious that the incorporation of material from other works or a paraphrase of such material without acknowledgement will be treated as plagiarism, subject to the custom and usage of the subject, according to the Faculty of Political Science and University of Belgrade regulations.

Acknowledgments

First, thank you to my mentor and thesis advisor, Professor Filip Ejdus, who made it possible for me to finish this research despite the closure and ongoing political unrest across Serbia. Thank you also to my other great professors–Tijana Rečević Krstić, Marko Kovačević, and Nemanja Džuverović–for all they taught inside and (mostly) outside the classroom.

Secondly, thank you to all involved in Serbian civil society, who continue to advocate for what they believe in. For those with whom I had the pleasure to share coffee and conversations, thank you for welcoming me to your offices, workshops, and panels. This thesis was contingent on your knowledge and expertise. Specifically, thank you to the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, which provided endless connections, a space to work and collaborate, and insights into the everyday realties of working in Serbian civil society.

Thank you to all the incredible friends I made in Belgrade and to my family back in the US for your unwavering encouragement and support for my passions for learning, writing, and traveling. Extending gratitude to the Fulbright Association and the U.S. Embassy in Serbia for giving me the financial support to live in Belgrade and attend this MA program.

Finally, thank you to all the student activists would continue civil society's demands on the streets of Serbia. It was an incredible opportunity to be in Belgrade from the start of these protests and be a witness and participant throughout its evolution.

Abbreviations

BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
BCSP	*Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku* (Belgrade Center for Security Policy)
CAA	*Centar za antiretnu akcijuje* (Center for Anti-War Action)
CZKD	*Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju* (Center for Cultural Decontamination)
CIEH	*Centar za istraživanje i edukaciju o Holokaustu* (Center for Holocaust Research and Education)
CRTA	*Centar za istraživanje, transparentnost i odgovornost* (Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability)
CZDS	*Centar za društvenu stabilnost (*Center for Social Stability)
CDRSEE	Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe
CNA	*Centar za nenasilnu akciju* (Center for Nonviolent Action)
CoE	Council of Europe
EC	European Commission
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
GONGO	Governmental non-governmental organizations
HLC	*Fond za humanitarno pravo* (Humanitarian Law Center)
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
ICT	International Criminal Tribunals
IRI	International Republican Institute
YUCOM	*Komitet pravnika za ljudska prava* (Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, formerly Yugoslav Committee for Human Rights)
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
OST	Ontological Security Theory
RTS	Radio Television of Serbia
RECOM	Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed in the Former Yugoslavia
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SOC	Serbian Orthodox Church
SNS	*Srpska napredna stranka* (Serbian Progressive Party)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
US	The United States of America
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
TJ	Transitional justice
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YIHR	*Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava* (Youth Initiative for Human Rights)

Table of Contents

Abstract

Civil society is widely considered necessary to build and sustain democratic transitions, yet Serbia presents a striking paradox: despite extensive international support for civil society development, 44% of citizens express 'no trust at all' in civil society organizations and 80% avoid participation entirely. This challenges fundamental assumptions about civil society's role in democratic transitions. To fully understand local distrust and disengagement, we must examine why and how Serbian identity diverges from its civil society. Adopting a relational theoretical framework, the study employs Iver Neumann's poststructural Self-Other theory to analyze Serbian identity construction through its characterizations of its closest Others– Europe, the United States, and Russia. Using Lene Hansen's poststructural discourse analysis across official, media, and oppositional narratives, complemented by interviews with civil society actors, this research addresses: Why do most Serbians distrust local civil society? How do media and pro-government actors construct civil society as 'Other'? What are the lasting effects of Western-conditioned transitional justice and democratization on civil society legitimacy? The findings demonstrate how Western intervention can inadvertently undermine civil society legitimacy when it conflicts with national identity construction, offering insights for both liberal internationalist theories and foreign aid in post-conflict and post-communist states.

Chapter 1: Introduction

After the civil society-led overthrow of nationalist wartime leader and indicted war criminal President Slobodan Milošević in 2000, there was hope for Serbia's path towards democratization and European integration to ensure lasting peace and stability in the post-war Balkans. Instead, post-Milošević Serbia has been characterized and condemned for its staunch resistance to addressing past war crimes, stalled Serbia-Kosovo normalization and European Union (EU) integration, coupled with two-decade-long trends towards authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. Concerns of rising ethno-nationalism and deepening relationships with Russia and China have distanced Serbia from its promised "European future."

Yet, as I write this paper, I can hear whistles and shouts from student protesters outside my window, calling for democracy, government transparency, and rule of law, amassing support from across the country and region against the ruling party. The student protest movement since November 2024 is not what most Serbians consider to be "civil society" (*civilno društvo*)– a phrase that immediately raises suspicion and distrust. Indeed, despite the open support from many Serbian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), students have purposefully and openly distanced themselves from them. What is Serbian civil society then? For most, civil society can be loosely identified as a small collection of organizations that oppose the rising authoritarian government in support of greater Western integration and liberal democracy. While both the student protest movement and civil society share the same values and demands, why has institutionalized civil society failed to gain the level of trust and engagement that the students have, despite advantages in resources, time, and professionalization?

This study sets out to examine *why Serbians distrust and disengage from local civil society.* It will look at how Serbian national identity is discursively constructed in relation to the West and the East by examining the major characterizations in Serbia of the European Union, the United States, and Russia. I will argue that the current Serbian government places negative characterizations of the West onto local civil society to position pro-democratic, opposition actors as the 'radical Other' and incompatible with a Serbian identity victimized and resistant to the West. Taking a poststructuralist theoretical approach, I understand identity formation as a relationally and discursively constructed process and analyze how a Serbian identity victimized and resistant to the West is applied to civil society. It identifies main discourses in Serbia that build and sustain widespread distrust and disengagement: Western funding dependency, misalignment with local priorities, and incompatibility with Serbian national interests. This study reveals the challenges of international efforts to build and sustain locally engaged civil societies in states maintaining ambiguous identities between the East and the West. It adds to disinformation scholarship in semi-authoritarian states and the role of state-controlled media in shaping identities to maintain political power and sideline pro-democratic actors.

1.1 Historical Background

After World War II, the second Yugoslavia emerged under President Josip Broz Tito's leadership, following the Partisans' victory over Nazism and its collaborators. The state aimed again to unify the Southern Slavic peoples under the concept of brotherhood and unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). This ideology sought to accommodate the national interests of each ethnic group into one federal system consisting of six republics–Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia–and two autonomous provinces within Serbia: Kosovo and Vojvodina.[1] Until Tito died in 1980, he managed to paper over these interests through policies that explicitly disallowed "chauvinism" and "national local patriotism."

The Tito-Stalin split in 1948 and expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform led to the development of Yugoslavia's two unique characteristics, self-management/self-government (*samoupravljanje*) and non-alignment. In the 1950s, the ideology of self-management socialism was introduced as a unique economic system between capitalism and the planned Soviet-style economy, with economic and political decision-making decentralized to workers' councils and local territorial units.[2] Based on the "people's committees" instituted during WWII in areas liberated from the opposition, Tito instituted "self-management organs in the image of political organizations," which enjoyed widespread support from the population. Yugoslav socialist ideology also differed from almost all other forms of socialism in affirming the self-interest of the individual producer and legitimizing working to raise one's standard of living.[3]

After the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution in the 1990s, Serbia transitioned from liberal communism to authoritarianism under Slobodan Milošević,[4] considered in the West as the person most responsible for the 1990s wars.[5] Elected the President of the Socialist Republic of Serbia in 1989, Milošević's authoritarian regime centralized political and economic power among a small elite, obstructing civil society and democratic governance while maintaining superficial democratic elements, such as multi-party elections and limited independent journalism.[6] In response to growing domestic discontent during his rule (hyperinflation, shortages, the 1999 NATO bombing), various anti-nationalist and anti-war movements coalesced around opposition to Milošević, laying the foundation for today's civil society. Many presently active Serbian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Center for Anti-War Action (CAA) and the Women in Black formed in the 1990s.

---

[1] Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Yale University Press, 2009): 136.
[2] Aleksandar Jakir, "Workers' Self-Management in Tito's Yugoslavia Revisited," *Moving the Social* 33 (2005): 137-155; Sharon Zukin, "Self-Management and Socialization," in *Yugoslavia in the 1980s* ed. Sabrine Ramet (New York: Routledge, 1985): 116.
[3] Zukin, "Self-Management and Socialization," 116.
[4] Nebojša Vladisavljević, "Serbia's Turbulent Democratization," in *The Post-Socialist Transition of Serbia: Economic Policy, Democracy, and European Integration*, edited by Ivan Vujačić (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).
[5] Janine Clark, *Serbia in the Shadow of Milošević: The Legacy of Conflict in the Balkans* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008).
[6] Jasna Dragović-Soso, "The Impact of International Intervention on Domestic Political Outcomes: Western Coercive Policies and the Milošević Regime," in *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995*, ed. Petar Siani-Davies (Routledge, 2003): 120-135, 121.

In attempts to discredit and delegitimize opposition activists, the regime weaponized the state-owned media to vilify civil society through media slander, police raids, detentions, and legal repression,[7] which ironically was the peak of civil society's vibrancy.[8] Yet by the end of 1999, Milošević had become increasingly unpopular with the Serbian population and faced severe economic problems from the NATO bombing, trade embargo, and exclusion from international monetary organizations.[9] In October 1998, student veterans of the 1996 anti-Milošević protests formed a new non-violent opposition group named *Otpor!* with the core mission to remove Milošević from power. Promising to deliver youth votes, *Otpor!* successfully united the opposition political parties to form the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), led by Vojislav Koštunica.[10] In the federal presidential elections held in September 2000, Koštunica won 50.24% of the vote to Milošević's 37.15%. In response to Milošević's attempts to cling to power, *Otpor!* and other opposition actors called for mass protests, and hundreds of thousands of demonstrators flooded the streets of Belgrade in the so-called Bulldozer Revolution. The pact between members of Serbia's democratic opposition and segments of the old regime's security ensured the success of the mass protests and ousting of Milošević on October 5, 2000.

Freedom House's annual assessment of political rights and civil liberties classified Serbia as 'free' since 2003, reflecting a brief period of democratization, but declined to 'partly free' in its 2019 country report after the consolidation of power by the current President Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS - *Srpska napredna stranka*).[11] Kosovo's declaration of independence–a former Serbian province and symbol of Serbia's nationhood, history, and mythology–created a formative sociopolitical rift in the country. Vučić and the SNS exploited the population's grievances about the loss of Kosovo, artfully positioning themselves as the protector of Serbia's national interests and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo to accumulate and personalize power.[12] As such, the country has witnessed eroding political rights and civil liberties, state capture of the media, electoral fraud, attacks against civil society,[13] and a gradual return to right-wing authoritarianism.[14] It is in this context that we witness a revival of past

[7] Marius Dragomir and Minna Aslama Horowitz, "Epistemic violators: disinformation in central and eastern Europe," in *Epistemic Rights in the Era of Digital Disruption* (Springer International Publishing, 2024): 155-170, 133.
[8] Zdenka Milivojević, "Civil Society in Serbia: Suppressed During the 1990s - Gaining Legitimacy and Recognition After 2000," CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Serbia, (2006), 12.
[9] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 1999-2000," 2000, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_1999-2000_complete_book.pdf.
[10] Max Rennebohm, "Serbians overthrow Milosevic (Bulldozer Revolution)," *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, 2000, https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/serbians-overthrow-milosevic-bulldozer-revolution-2000.
[11] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 1999-2000," 532.
[12] Marko Stojić, "Anchoring or Undermining Democracy: The European People's Party and Democratic Backsliding in Serbia," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 62, no. 2 (2024): 546-563.
[13] Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), "Civil society and media will not give up the fight for a democratic and free Serbia," July 28, 2020, https://yihr.rs/en/civil-society-and-media-will-not-give-up-the-fight-for-a-democratic-and-free-serbia/; Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Report, Serbia," 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2024.
[14] Neven Andjelić, "Western Balkans regimes between European democracy and autocracy," *Covid-19, State-Power and Society in Europe: Focus on Western Balkans* (2022): 37-58.

political tactics to discredit opposition civil society as anti-Serbian and foreign Other, weaponizing Serbia's ambiguous and Western-victimized identity.

1.2 Outline

The rest of the paper will proceed as follows: First, Chapter 2 (Literature Review) will define the conceptual evolution of civil society from early political philosophers, with a marked delineation in the post-Cold War era as a normatively positive concept, along with criticism of this liberal democratic definition. I will then review the literature on civil society's development in Serbia throughout the dissolution of Yugoslavia to today, first as anti-war, anti-Milošević actors to transitional justice (TJ) activists. This literature looks at early theories and scholarly explanations for TJ failures in post-Yugoslav Serbia related to Western conditionality and building a financially dependent civil society. Together, it presents how TJ promoted through conditionality and funding dependency can undermine local legitimacy and serve as a potent tool to construct local supporters as the radical Other.

Next, Chapter 2 covers the existing literature around key events and historical narratives of Serbia's closest Others—Europe and the US, as the West, and Russia as the East—to analyze what this says about the dominant narrative about the Serbian Self. It concludes Serbian identity is positioned as in-between the East and the West, underpinned by characterizations of the EU and the US as aggressive, self-interested, and imperial. Conversely, Russia is positioned as the socio-culturally similar and protectionist older brother, the viable and natural alternative to the West. This "leaning towards the East" via positive characteristics of Russia and negative characteristics of the West is used to explain the distrust and disengagement with a pro-Western civil society.

Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework) describes the study's theoretical grounding in early poststructural philosophy and how scholars have applied this to international relations (IR). It utilizes Neumann's poststructural Self-Other theory to examine how Serbian identity is constructed against external Others (EU, the US, Russia) to be applied to internal Others (civil society). Chapter 4 (Methodological Framework) outlines how I will use Hansen's poststructural Discourse Analysis fourth model to analyze discourse in Serbia on the West (as the EU and the US), Russia, and civil society for establishing the *less-than-radical-Other* West and *radically Other* civil society. It then details the data collection methods and limitations for the 19 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors from 15 different Serbian NGOs, research institutes, think tanks, and academic institutions.

In Chapter 5 (Analysis), I will explain *why* civil society is associated with these unfavorable traits of the Western Other through a discourse analysis using political speeches and pro-government and opposition mainstream media sources, supplemented with insights from the interview data. It will identify and describe three main discourses characterizing civil society: foreign funding skepticism, misalignment with local priorities, and incompatibility with Serbian national interests. Chapter 6 (Conclusion) will offer suggestions for actions to combat civil

society's radical Othering and early insights gleaned from Serbia's current student protest movement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the following chapter, I will trace the conceptual foundations to define "civil society" by early thinkers such as Locke, Hegel, Ferguson, de Tocqueville, Marx, and Gramsci. I will analyze the theoretical shift in the post-Cold War era into a normatively positive concept, along with more critical approaches to these liberal democratic assumptions, identifying gaps in the existing literature. Then, I will detail Serbian civil society's emergence in Yugoslavia through the state's dissolution as anti-war and anti-Milošević activists. Beginning with a theoretical background on transitional justice (TJ), I transition to civil society's evolution in post-Milošević Serbia as the main local implementers of Western-conditioned "dealing with the past" initiatives. I look at scholarly explanations for why most Serbians reject TJ initiatives to address the past and the unintended impacts of Western foreign funding in building civil societies in post-communist and post-conflict Serbia. I then examine the existing literature on Serbia's major characterizations of its external others, the EU and the US as the West, and Russia as the East, in the discursive identity construction of civil society as its internal other.

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Civil Society

There is no commonly accepted definition of the term "civil society." Early thinkers such as Hobbes, Kant, and Durkheim view civil society to be synonymous with political society and the state, rooted in ideas from the early Catholic Church.[15] John Locke first connected civil society to democratic principles such as consent and limited government, arguing that absolute monarchy is inconsistent with civil society. In *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), he finds that all men who agree to give up life in the state of nature are part of the political or civil society (using the terms interchangeably) to yield legislative and executive power.[16] German philosopher Friedrich Hegel was the first to distinguish the state from civil society, seeing it as the intermediary between the family and the state. In *Philosophy of Right* (1821), he maintains that civil society administers justice to defend against the state's executive and legal powers through cooperation in the attainment of individual ends.[17]

While Hegel's theory detaches the civil society sphere from the individual and the state, it still radically departs from contemporary understandings of civil society through its grounding in economic self-interest rather than moral altruism. For Hegel, civil society is inextricably connected to the free market economic order through the pursuit of individual needs leading to economic production and engagement. In other words, civil society's role is in protecting the free market through ensuring property and contractual rights. Similarly, Adam Smith, while not directly referring to civil society, suggests in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that individuals

[15] Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1891-1937), ed. & trans. Derek Boothman (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 75-76.
[16] John Locke, "Of Political or Civil Society," in *Second Treatise of Government* (1690).
[17] Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 220-223.

pursuing their own economic self-interest contribute to collective prosperity. Smith's "commercial society" is his version of civil society, a space where individuals pursue economic goals without state interference.[18]

In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson fears that reliance on the free market to deliver liberty (like Hegel and Smith suggest) would not be a sufficient protection against the state.[19] Man's motivation cannot be reduced to predictability in economic self-interest; people are motivated to act via virtues such as human solidarity and moral sentiment.[20] He called for civil society to be the moral check against the economic sphere (the free market) and the political sphere (the state). For Ferguson, civil society corresponds with the "civilized" and "polished" stage of societal development, contrasting a "primitive" or "rude" society, emerging from humans' natural and inherent sociability, rather than deliberate agreement for the common good (like Locke). The Hegelian concept of civil society highlighted two important aspects of civil society: the pluralism of associations and its interrelatedness with the state,[21] which scholars trace to an 18th-century reaction against French Enlightenment universalism.[22]

French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835) further develops this "associational pluralism" view of civil society, most closely resembling today's understanding of the term. In his search for what conditions made the flourishing of democracy possible in America, he identified the formation of voluntary associations of citizens as the bulwarks against anarchy and state oppression.[23] While not explicitly using the term "civil society," he argues the formation of political and civil associations creates a culture that looks to like-minded individuals to solve problems through association rather than government, keeping power limited and in the hands of the people. Put more simply, de Tocqueville states, "at the present time the liberty of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority."[24]

Civil Society and Socialism

If associational organizations serve as a check against state power in the economic and/or social sphere, can a "socialist civil society" exist? This question is relevant for examining the origins of civil society in Serbia as a post-communist state (did civil society exist in socialist Yugoslavia?), and the widely agreed intrinsic connection between liberal democracy and civil society. For Hegel, Smith, and Ferguson, civil society was bound up with and depended on the free market economic order, and for de Tocqueville, the freedom of association was central to

[18] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).
[19] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (London: T. Cadell, 1767).
[20] John Varty, "Civic or commercial? Adam Ferguson's concept of civil society," *Democratization* 4, no. 1 (2007): 29-48.
[21] DeWiel, "A conceptual history of civil society," 28.
[22] Ibid, 5.
[23] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volumes One and Two* (1835, 1840), trans. Henry Reeve (Pennsylvania State University, 2002): 214.
[24] Ibid, 217.

securities against oppression. Similarly, Marx repeatedly emphasized that civil society is fundamentally intertwined and inseparable from capitalism, and hence, impossible to coexist with real human emancipation and a classless society.[25] For Marx, the state is an outgrowth of civil society's socio-economic relations, not a universal entity (as Hegel), and therefore operates like the state in perpetuating economic dominance of the bourgeoisie.

Yugoslavia's so-called "Coca-Cola socialism"[26] provides a compelling case study in discussions on whether a civil society can exist under socialism. While many models of state socialism suppressed independent association, Yugoslavia pursued a comparatively decentralized form of governance, marked by self-management and limited openness to the West. This has led some scholars to argue that elements of civil society were, at least partially, present under socialist rule in Yugoslavia.

Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik contend that civil societies in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe "were not built from scratch." Rather, they emerged from a "comprehensive and solidly institutionalized association sphere" inherited from the socialist era. While Yugoslav associational life was indeed politicized and centrally directed, it "also recognized and institutionalized a certain diversity of interests," laying the groundwork for the development of civil society after socialism.[27] Despite the centralization of power in the hands of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), Yugoslav society featured a wide array of formal organizations, including youth groups, women's associations, workers' clubs, and neighborhood councils.[28] Over time, Yugoslavia also developed a class of professionals, managers, and educated citizens who succeeded in integrating Yugoslavia with Western institutions.[29]

However, the appearance of associational vibrancy belied the enduring reality of state control. Organizations that appeared "civil" in form often functioned as instruments of state surveillance and control. For example, labor and workers' associations were closely identified with the ruling party and did not provide a platform for dissent or democratization.[30] Instead of laying the foundation for an independent civic sphere, they reinforced citizens' dependency on the state and suppressed the emergence of alternative voices.

This tension between form and function under Yugoslav socialism has led many Eastern European scholars to reject the notion that civil society could meaningfully exist under a socialist framework. Some find that even in economically decentralized Yugoslavia, the concept of a socialist civil society is "not only theoretical, but utopian," concluding that socialism and civil

---

[25] Mojmir Križan, "Of "Civil Society" and Socialism in Yugoslavia," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 37, no. 4 (1989): 287-306, 299; John Ehrenberg, "Marxism and civil society: The left and the politics of decay," *Contemporary Issues in Education* 14, no. 1 (1995): 73-84.

[26] Radina Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism. Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties* (Central European University Press: 2018).

[27] Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, "Civil Society From Abroad: the Role of Foreign Assistance in the Democratization of Poland," Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, February 2000.

[28] https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108185/1/Sokolic_civil_society_post_yugoslav_space_accepted.pdf, 5.

[29] John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 286.

[30] Ivor Sokolić, Denisa Kostovicova, and Adam Fagan, "Civil Society in Post-Yugoslav Space: The Test of Discontinuity and Democratization," *The legacy of Yugoslavia: Politics, economics and society in the modern Balkans* 375, no. 95 (2020): 1-39.

society are exclusive entities.[31] Similarly, Frane Adam and Darka Podmenik argue that civil society could not exist in the Yugoslav socialist system because it was impossible to demand political rights and liberties in a system with "no functional differentiation" between the state and society.[32] Ivor Sokolić agrees, writing that "civil society is antithetical to the essence of the Communist rule that is premised on the obliteration of any type of social organization outside state control."[33] Indeed, most Yugoslav philosophers considered the abolishment of capitalism and all elements considered "civil" as necessary for universal human emancipation,[34] agreeing with Marxist thinking of the incompatibility of civil society and socialism. Still, civil society initiatives critical of the communist regime emerged in Belgrade towards the later phases of socialism, such as the Committee for the Defense of Thought and Expression, which galvanized Serbian intellectuals to fight against regime-led repression.[35]

Post-Cold War Perspectives

In the post-Cold War era, civil society was redefined as a normatively positive force for democracy, distinct from and opposed to the state. The most influential scholarship from this period was Jean Cohen and Aaron Arato's book *Civil Society and Democracy* (1994), defining civil society as the "sphere of social interaction between the economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (the family), the sphere of associations (voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication."[36] They contend that civil society influences states and markets through democratic associations and open-ended dialogue to keep democracy vibrant and promote the common good of society.[37] John Keane in *Global Civil Society?* (2002) defends the inherent goodness of civil society as rooted in its moral pluralism. Not only is this a space where human differences can proliferate, but civil society is "a *universal* ethical principle that guarantees respect for moral differences."[38] Mary Kaldor similarly affirms the normatively positive concept of a globalized civil society as opening new possibilities for human emancipation by upholding and spreading international rules and norms.[39]

In Keane's earlier work, *Democracy and Civil Society* and *Civil Society and the State* (1988), he framed civil society as a pluralistic realm institutionally separate from the state, acting

---

[31] Mojmir Križan, "Civil Society-a New Paradigm in the Yugoslav Theoretical Discussion," *Praxis international* 9, no. 1 & 2 (1989): 152-163.
[32] Frane Adam, Darka Podmenik, and Mateja Rek, "Trans-nationalisation and European context of organised civil society," *Elite Networks, NGOs and Governance* (2007): 103-137.
[33] Ivor Sokolić, "Civil society in post-Yugoslav space: The test of discontinuity and democratisation," forthcoming in *The Legacy of Yugoslavia, Politics, Economics and Society in the Modern Balkans* ed. Othon Anastasakis, Adam Bennett, David Madden and Adis Merdzanovic, (IB Tauris, 2020).
[34] Križan, "Of "Civil Society" and Socialism in Yugoslavia," 299.
[35] Richard Bernstein, "Political trial in Yugoslavia: Putting Openness to the Test," *The New York Times,* December 15, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/15/world/political-trial-in-yugoslavia-putting-openness-to-the-test.html.
[36] Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993): ix.
[37] Liv Egholm and Lars Bo Kaspersen, eds. *Civil Society: Between Concepts and Empirical Grounds* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 5.
[38] John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge University of Press: 2003): 202.
[39] Mary Kaldor, "The Idea of Global Civil Society," *International affairs* 79, no. 3 (2003): 583-593.

as a "thorn permanently in the political powers' side."[40] Keane's perspective, rooted in the 1980s and 1990s citizen-led overthrow of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and dictatorships in Latin America, emphasized pluralism and public accountability as barriers against authoritarianism. For example, Michał Nowosielski (2012) highlights how Poland's "third sector" non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were pivotal in mobilizing the anti-authoritarian Polish Solidarity movement, united by "the viewpoint of civil society against the state."[41] This optimism about civil society's democratic potential resonated across the political spectrum, with capitalists viewing it as upholding the democratic order and socialists seeing it as an agent of change.[42]

However, the idealization of civil society as a morally altruistic "force of good" has faced significant criticism for stifling critical discussion on its negative implications and controversies. Gideon Baker argues that civil society theory has turned into a "neutral social-scientific concept," whereby "what we would *like* civil society to be, or what we think it *ought* to be, is often confused with an empirical description."[43] He further criticizes the "colonization" of civil society theory by liberal democratic theory, which reduces it to apolitical institutions supporting economic liberalization and therefore limits its role as a site for genuine democratic participation.[44] Jenny Pearce notes that this has led to a depoliticized, Western donor-driven "project" rather than a process subject to academic and practitioner analysis and debate.[45] Neera Chandhoke warns that the post-Cold War concept of civil society as an alternative to the state and the market is unrealistic and dangerous because the essential conditions of civil society are institutionalized by the state.[46]

Further criticism relates to the Western donor-driven model of financing civil society institutions and organizations in non-democratic or semi-democratic states. Frane Adams challenges the picture of civil society as an authentic representation of the people's voices, since these organizations are not elected and instead are based on private initiative and represent very partial material and ideological interests.[47] Similarly, Sabine Saurugger criticizes the assumed link between civil society representation and democracy, arguing that expertise and efficiency increase resource access for civil society, resulting in "professionalization" and resource

---

[40] John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1988): 14; John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London: Verso, 1988).
[41] Michal Nowosielski, "Revival of the civil society: development of the third sector in Poland 1989-2008," *IZ Policy Papers* 2, (2009).
[42] Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce, *Civil society & development: A critical exploration*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).
[43] Gideon Baker, "The taming of the idea of civil society," *Democratization* 6 (1999): 1-29.
[44] Baker, "The taming of the idea of civil society," 7.
[45] Jenny Pearce, "NGOs and Social Change: Agents or Facilitators?" *Development in Practice* 3, no. 3 (1993), 222-227.
[46] Neera Chandhoke, "Civil society–Conceptual History from Hobbes to Marx," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5 (2007): 607-614.
[47] Frane Adam, "O tri pristupa pojmu 'civilno drustvo'" (On Three Approaches to the Concept of 'Civil Society'), *Pogledi*, 18 (1988), 163-176, 170. All quotations (and titles) translated in Križan, "Of "Civil Society" and Socialism in Yugoslavia," 290.

dependency. In practice, this creates an expertise-representation gap and sidelines local interests in favor of donor-driven agendas.[48]

While scholars such as Adams and Saurugger examine civil society as private initiatives whose resource dependency drives professionalization and separation from the public, their analyses rely on positivist assumptions that treat public perceptions of mismatched priorities as objective facts and not constructed realities. This research addresses that gap through a poststructural approach that conceptualizes feelings of nonrepresentation as constructed rather than representative of fixed truths. It will examine how Serbian identity emerges through poststructural processes and influences distrust and disengagement with civil society.

The idea of civil society emerged with the rise of capitalism and liberalism, initially understood as a political society, and then to describe a sphere of social activity separate from the state. In the 1980s and 1990s, the popularly supported fall of communism across Eastern and Central Europe and the collapse of military dictatorships in Latin America positioned civil society as the vehicle for realizing Francis Fukuyama's prescient vision of the "End of History."[49] As a result, civil society after the Cold War was redefined as a normatively positive force, ushering in liberal democracy, emphasizing its role in opposing state power and fostering pluralism. However, academic critiques highlight its potential for Western-centrism, professionalization, and dependence on foreign funding, urging a more critical approach to the fruits of a "global civil society." These debates underscore the complexity of civil society's role in post-communist and post-conflict contexts, providing a critical foundation for understanding Serbians' contested relationship with their local civil society.

2.2 Civil Society in Post-Yugoslav Serbia

While the suppression of social and political groups is rooted in Yugoslavia's one-party socialist rule, the repression of civil society through association with the West as "anti-Serb" actors emerged under Milošević. During the wartime regime in the 1990s, authority over the media was transferred to the government, transforming the leading media sources (*Politika*, *Večernje novosti*, and *Radio-televizija Srbije – RTS*) into state organizations.[50] This state-controlled media silenced information about the wars and promoted nationalistic propaganda, "serving the engine of war politics."[51]

It was in this nationalist and repressive state that several groups, associations, intellectual circles, and organizations began to form in opposition to the government. While some groups involved in anti-war and anti-nationalism activism emerged in response to the silence and denial of war crimes committed by Serbs, other organizations were nationalists and never spoke out

[48] Sabine Saurugger, "The professionalisation of interest representation: A legitimacy problem for civil society in the EU," *Civil society and legitimate European governance* (2006): 260-276.
[49] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
[50] Ana Milojević, "Three Decades Later: From Self-Managed to State-Captured Media in Serbia," in *Three Decades Later: The Media in South East Europe after 1989* (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021): 265-289, 267.
[51] Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), "Media and Revisionism about the 1990s' Wars in Serbia," March 2023, 12.

against war crimes.[52] What brought these activists and groups together was the deteriorating standard of living, criticism for abandoning Serbs in Croatia and Kosovo,[53] Serbians' desire to "live in a normal country,"[54] and most crucially, their opposition to Milošević.

As the regime's legitimacy and popular support were based on exclusive nationalism, the state-controlled media gave the anti-Milošević opposition a "one-dimensional definition" as liberal, anti-war, and anti-nationalist. To delegitimize dissent, "the regime vilified civil society as a part of its strategy to reaffirm its nationalist policy" through repression and propaganda, part of its wider control over Serbian society.[55] This hostility was represented in media slander, police raids, detentions, and legal repressions, and carried out mainly by administrative and financial means. It eventually turned to violence, exemplified in the murder of independent journalist Slavko Ćuruvija and raids of *Otpor!* offices (a youth-led opposition movement).[56] The regime accused organizations receiving foreign donations as "foreign mercenaries," "spies," and "national enemies," portraying their anti-nationalist stance as unpatriotic and anti-Serb.[57]

In the September 2000 elections, the opposition coalition DOS (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*) gained a convincing majority of votes, and the Milošević regime responded by attempting to falsify the results. After the Supreme Court decided to nullify the elections, protestors from around Serbia converged on Belgrade, taking over the federal Parliament and RTS building, and eventually forcing Milošević to concede power.[58] Most research conducted on electoral revolutions argues that post-communist transitions are bottom-up, including societal mobilization, youth activism, and civil society.[59] Indeed, most analysis on the peaceful overthrow of the Milošević regime cites the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as crucial in the coordinated campaign.[60] Balkan sociologist Eric Gordy's initial assessment in December 2000 provides a more nuanced view, including other factors such as the loss of Kosovo as a "source of cheap parliamentary seats" and the deal made between the opposition

[52] Denisa Kostovicova, "Civil society and post-communist democratization: Facing a double challenge in post-Milošević Serbia," *Journal of Civil Society* 2, no. 1 (2006): 21-37.
[53] Belloni, Roberto. "Civil society in war-to-democracy transitions." *From war to democracy: Dilemmas of peacebuilding* (2008): 182-210.
[54] Ibid, 507-522.
[55] Marius Dragomir and Minna Aslama Horowitz, "Epistemic violators: disinformation in central and eastern Europe," In *Epistemic Rights in the Era of Digital Disruption* (Springer International Publishing, 2024): 155-170, 133.
[56] Orli Fridman, "'It was like fighting a war with our own people': anti-war activism in Serbia during the 1990s," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 4 (2011): 507-522.
[57] Kostovicova, "Civil society and post-communist democratization," 28.
[58] Eric Gordy, "Serbia's bulldozer revolution: Conditions and prospects," *Southeast European Politics* 1, no. 2 (2000): 78-89.
[59] Mladen Joksić, "Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution Reconsidered: Examining the Consequences of Pacted Transition in Cases of Regime Hybridity," Master's thesis, International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, 2008.
[60] Florian Bieber, "The Serbian opposition and civil society: Roots of the delayed transition in Serbia." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 73-90.

and the police.[61] However, he still describes *Otpor!*'s importance in forcing the opposition to present a united front against Milošević through mobilizing large numbers of young voters.[62]

With the growing perception that the Milošević regime was the core political problem in the region (perpetuated by Madeline Albright and, by extension, then US President Clinton), international actors shifted their support to the pro-democratic opposition actors committed to overthrowing the Milošević regime.[63] Silvano Bolčić's research shows that 43% of NGO projects in the first half of the 1990s were oriented toward anti-war actions or affirmation of democratic values.[64] The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) spent $41 million promoting anti-Milošević civil society groups before his overthrow,[65] the US State Department funded opposition political parties and NGOs (such as *Otpor!* and *G17*) through organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and International Republican Institute (IRI),[66] and the US's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) operated with a budget of around $22 million USD to support community-based projects strengthening anti-Milošević opposition forces.[67]

2.3 Civil Society After Milošević: Transitional Justice & Western Conditionality

Having achieved its primary objective of regime change in 2000, the anti-war civil society transformed into "memory activists," insisting on engaging with the past through establishing alternative calendars, commemorative rituals, conferences, truth-telling commissions, regional exchanges, inter-ethnic dialogue, war crime documentation, and disseminating knowledge on digital platforms.[68] While civil society champions broader liberal democratic values such as democracy, transparency, and the rule of law, this research specifically examines their role in transitional justice (TJ) and dealing with the past. This focus on TJ is because after the 1990s wars, the end of international sanctions, foreign aid, and EU accession was specifically conditioned on Serbia's willingness to address past wrongs and implement TJ, notably through cooperation with the ICTY, of which civil society actors were the main implementers on the ground.

In this section, I will examine how Western conditionality and funding structures enabled local political elites to strategically link anti-Western sentiment with opposition to TJ, ultimately delegitimizing civil society actors as foreign agents rather than legitimate domestic voices. The section proceeds in two stages: first, reviewing theoretical literature on TJ and human rights norms surrounding post-conflict accountability; second, demonstrating how the

---

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Pinna, 184; Goldstone, J. A. "The Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia." *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century: The New Waves of Revolutions, and the Causes and Effects of Disruptive Political Change* (2022): 450.
[64] Gordy, "CRDA and civil society in Serbia," 4.
[65] Beissinger, Mark R. "Structure and example in modular political phenomena: The diffusion of bulldozer/rose/orange/tulip revolutions." *Perspectives on politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259-276.
[66] Presnall, "Which way the wind blows," 666.
[67] Vetta, "'Democracy Building' in Serbia," 42.
[68] Oril Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022): 16, 131.

mechanics of Western democracy allow local elites to frame these organizations as extensions of foreign interference rather than authentic expressions of Serbian civil society.

2.3.1 Theories on Transitional Justice

Ruti Teitel's *Transitional Justice* (2000) is widely considered the foundational text in the field of TJ, examining how states employ varied legal mechanisms to address different meanings of justice during political transitions from authoritarianism to democracy.[69] Teitel emphasizes that societies' specific historical legacies of injustice shape their liberalization paths, advancing the normative claim that official historical accounts of past wrongs can pave the way toward more liberal democratic orders.[70] Grounded in the Enlightenment view that history as a discipline is universalizing and redemptive, this framework treats historical truth as justice itself, though Teitel acknowledges that both truth and history remain subject to present political and social contexts.[71] While these processes, such as transitional truth-telling commissions, allow for therapeutic, cathartic healing on an individual level for victims and perpetrators, there is a high potential for conflict with international and local state interests.[72]

International human rights norms have since standardized these memorialization practices, requiring past crimes to be properly commemorated and remembered.[73] This "historical justice" holds a corrective aim, promising subsequent institutionalized legal mechanisms and reforms to uphold the rule of law and prevent relapses into conflict.[74] In other words, societies in transition's official truth processes are constructed to advance a democratic future based on the rule of law through retributive justice, as exemplified in post-WWII Germany and Japan. Indeed, Diane Orentlicher's comprehensive analysis of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) confirmed its legal achievements in catalyzing domestic war crimes prosecutions and advancing global justice through establishing institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC).[75]

However, formal and informal remembrance practices promise much more than legal and structural changes towards democracy and accountability. Denisa Kostovicova's research (2023) found that truth-telling about war crimes and human rights violations does indeed contribute to reconciliation.[76] She maintains that good quality deliberation and discussion between divided

---

[69] Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[70] Ibid, 69-119.
[71] Ibid, 69-70.
[72] Ibid, 88.
[73] Lea David, "The emergence of the 'dealing with the past' agenda: Sociological Thoughts on Its Negative Impact on the Ground," *Modern Languages Open* 1 (2020).
[74] Ibid, 88-90.
[75] Diane Orentlicher, *Some Kind of Justice: The ICTY's Impact in Bosnia and Serbia* (Oxford University Press, 2018): 2-6.
[76] Reconciliation as a word is subject to ongoing scholarly and practitioner debates, but Kostovicova defines reconciliation as interethnic mutuality and cooperation in public communication. See Denisa Kostovicova, *Reconciliation by Stealth: How People Talk about War Crimes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2023); RECOM Reconciliation Network, "What is RECOM?" https://www.recom.link/en/sta-je-rekom/.

groups about their truths affirms the global norm that addressing past wrongs is necessary for healing and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.[77] Croatian scholar Miroslav Volf (2006) argues that while memories of wrongs can be misused to create false identities and generate hatred, they can also serve societal well-being through personal healing, acknowledgment of victims, and protection from future violence.[78]

Yet Serbia presents a striking challenge to these theoretical assumptions. Widespread public denial of international verdicts of war crimes, such as the denial of the Srebrenica genocide, and celebration and glorification of convicted war criminals dominate Serbia's visual and discursive landscape in conversations about its past.[79] International media portrays the celebration of war crimes and denialism as popular sentiment among Serbian people,[80] and Western institutions and local civil society emerged in response to and continue to condemn Serbia's silence and denial to uncover unwanted memories.[81]

For example, the Council of Europe's (CoE) Commissioner for Human Rights 2023 report on Serbia stressed that without remembering the past, there can be no right to truth, justice, or guarantees of non-recurrence of crimes.[82] Serbia must remember its past crimes by "unequivocally condemning them and telling the truth about history," recommending memorialization as the way to "foster respect for the human rights of other groups" and promote "peace, justice and reconciliation" in the country and the region.[83] The Belgrade NGO Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) published "Revision about the 1990s Wars in Serbia," writing that heroic memory of the wars, heroization of war criminals, denial of atrocities, and rejecting criminal accountability dominate the memory landscape in Serbia.[84] If the TJ literature, international institutions, and human rights activists promise that states must address their past wrongs to democratize, heal past traumas, and prevent the recurrence of violence, why does Serbia refuse to do so?

Must Serbia Remember?

[77] Ibid, 14.
[78] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006): 34.
[79] European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 7 May 2025 on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Serbia," 7 May 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0093_EN.html; Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), ""Truths That are Denied" Manual for the improvement of commemorative practices and the fight against the glorification of war criminals," https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/230228-YIHR-Manual-Truths-that-are-Denied.pdf.
[80] Eric Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial: The Past At Stake in Post-Milošević Serbia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013): 91.
[81] Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict*, 28.
[82] Dunja Mijatović, *Report on Serbia: Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe following her visit from 13 to 17 March 2023*, CommHR(2023)25 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2023), https://rm.coe.int/report-on-serbia-by-dunja-mijatovic-commissioner-for-human-rights-of-t/1680ac88cc.
[83] Ibid, 13.
[84] Humanitarian Law Center Foundation (HLC), "Revisionism about the 1990s Wars in Serbia," 2023, https://hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Revizionizam_eng%5B46094%5D.pdf.

Until the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the state's official history was based on socialism, Yugoslavism, "brotherhood and unity," Tito's cult of personality, and the anti-fascist Partisan victory in WWII. This shared history disintegrated alongside Yugoslavia in the 1990s, with each new nation-state beginning extensive historical revisionism by strengthening the myth of nationhood and disconnecting its historical memory from the Yugoslav legacy.[85] Across the former Yugoslavia, similar trends emerged around historical collective memory, namely the "selective interpretation of the 1990s wars, which established the nation as victims and martyrs, never perpetrators," aiming to place the nation on the "right" side of history.[86]

Ontological security theorists posit that states must maintain a stable sense of self through securing a desirable memory of their past to explain historical revisionism and denial.[87] Serbia's case exemplifies this dynamic. To maintain a stable national identity, Serbian society displays what Sabrina Ramet terms "denial syndrome," attributing past crimes to victims rather than acknowledging perpetration.[88] As of 2024, in downtown Belgrade hangs the unavoidable banner, "THE ONLY GENOCIDE IN THE BALKANS WAS AGAINST THE SERBS!" denying the Srebrenica genocide through reference to the Croatian-perpetrated genocide against the Serbs in WWII.

Eric Gordy's analysis attributed the failure of TJ in Serbia to flawed assumptions that social and cultural change can be achieved through legal and political action. Legal truth through institutionalized mechanisms has not contributed to social reconciliation, challenging the promised linear progression from truth to justice to reconciliation. The ICTY's transformative impact on citizens' beliefs proved disappointing, failing to encourage official acknowledgment of past crimes as liberal civil society supporters had hoped.[89] In her comprehensive analysis of the ICTY, Diane Orentlicher similarly finds that it is both misguided and counterproductive to ascribe social transformation to international criminal tribunals (ICTs), and in Serbia and Bosnia, the "amazing powers" attributed to the ICTY only raised hopes that were soon disappointed.[90] The ICTY did not have the transformative impact on citizens' beliefs and knowledge, nor on encouraging official acknowledgement about past crimes, as supporters of the ICTY (mostly from the liberal, anti-war civil society circles in Belgrade) had hoped.[91]

In the case of the former Yugoslavia, historical truth as reconciliation is complicated by the messy and contested realities of the 1990s wars and the Balkan's history. There cannot be neat categorizations into "victim" and "perpetrator" roles, as done in post-Nazi Germany or post-

[85] Tamara Trošt and Lea David, "Renationalizing memory in the post-Yugoslav region," in *Patriotic History and the (Re) Nationalization of Memory* (Routledge, 2023): 74-85.
[86] Ibid, 75.
[87] Jelena Subotić, "The Appropriation of Holocaust Memory in Post-Communist Eastern Europe," *Modern Languages Open* 1 (2020), 22.
[88] Sabrina Ramet, "The denial syndrome and its consequences: Serbian political culture since 2000," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007): 41-58.
[89] Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial,* 68.
[90] Orentlicher, *Some Kind of Justice*, 10.
[91] Ibid, 195.

genocide Rwanda. Indeed, substantial resistance to memorialization in Serbia is the constant contention that crimes against Serbs are ignored by TJ initiatives.[92] While the ICTY concluded that the overwhelming majority of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide were committed by Serbs, these were not the only crimes committed, so feelings of guilt and responsibility turned into feelings of victimization. Unaddressed grievances from WWII, namely the Croatian Ustaša's concentration camps and the communist period in Socialist Yugoslavia, can partially explain Serbia's inability to confront the grievances from the Yugoslav wars.[93]

Jelena Subotić's *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (2009) calls for greater attention to domestic political conditions when understanding why international TJ goals remain unfulfilled and politicized on the domestic level.[94] She links low or inconsistent domestic demands for TJ to domestic elites' response to international pressure as a means to an end of local political goals.[95] Similarly, Gordy argues that in the immediate aftermath of the wars, Serbia lacked the necessary legal and political infrastructure to seriously address past wrongs, and the TJ was implemented before Serbian society was ready to confront the past. After communism, institutions positioned to deal with questions of guilt had low levels of public credibility, compared to institutions like the military and the Orthodox Church, which lacked the political will and institutional capacity to engage with the past.[96]

In 2012/2014, the rise of Vučić's SNS party marked the country's distinctive turn towards nationalism, censorship, and authoritarianism, explaining the state's open hostility towards truth-telling or accountability related to past atrocities today. Vučić began his political career as the Minister of Information under Milošević in 1998, alongside numerous other members of the SNS party.[97] Perhaps not enough time has passed between Milošević's Serbia and today's Serbia, with recycled politicians who could likely be implicated in crimes of the past regime and continue to maintain political legitimacy through censorship and media control.

More scholars critical of liberal democracy promotion posit that in Serbia and the Balkans, TJ initiatives are approached from a Western, international position, which sidelines local and indigenous approaches without consulting ordinary people or victims of the conflict. In other words, it does not consider "the socioeconomic, cultural, and personal limitations" to public and visible engagement as promoted by civil society.[98] Serbian anthropologist and memory scholar Lea David, in *The Past Can't Heal Us: Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (2019), contends that externalized memorialization mandates have little

---

[92] Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial,* 102.
[93] Ibid, 4-6.
[94] Jelena Subotić, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 6.
[95] Ibid, 20.
[96] Ibid, 27.
[97] Hamza Memišević, "Views on Freedoms Between Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Case of Serbia," *UPRAVA stručni časopis* 25 (2021): 125-147.142; Mladenov Jovanović Srđan, "Confronting Recent History: Media in Serbia During Aleksandar Vučić's Ministry of Information in the Milošević Era (1998–1999)," *Hiperboreea* 6, no. 1 (2019): 61-74.
[98] Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict,* 88.

transformative power on the ground, instead having the opposite effect of promoting national and ethnic-based memory narratives. She finds that the human rights memorialization agenda, once transformed into policies implemented by local actors, becomes an oppressive force that often destabilizes societies, enforces animosities, and strengthens ethnic nationalism.[99]

2.3.2 Western Conditionality

It is common for the Western-led international community to have a set of behavioral expectations for post-conflict transitional societies, and TJ, through dealing with past crimes, is a fundamental part of this transition.[100] Indeed, Gordy writes that in Serbia, "everything in the field of transitional justice has been in response to external pressure and conditionality."[101] This is done through varied coercive policies, or carrots (joining international institutions, trade agreements, foreign aid) and sticks (military attacks, sanctions, tariffs).

In May 1992, the UN, the US, and the EU imposed comprehensive sanctions against the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to end the Bosnian War. These sanctions were lifted after the Dayton Agreement was signed (1995) and Bosnia held its first national elections.[102] The US maintained an "outer wall" of sanctions (preventing membership in international financial institutions) to guarantee cooperation with the ICTY and end human rights abuses in Kosovo.[103] In 1998, the UN imposed a second series of international sanctions and an arms embargo against rump Yugoslavia in response to violence in Kosovo.[104] The EU imposed additional sanctions, including an oil embargo and a ban on commercial flights to and from Serbia. In 2001, the US, UN, and EU sanctions were lifted after Milošević's extradition to The Hague.[105] Afterwards, US financial support, vital to Serbia's economic recovery, and EU accession continued to be conditioned on Serbia's full cooperation with the ICTY, measured through the arrest and transfer of the remaining war crimes indictees to The Hague.[106]

Conditionality's ability to change state behavior to reach specific objectives remains debated within academia, the media, and policy-makers. Indeed, the EU and US-led coercive policies against the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s demonstrate both successes and failures of

---

[99] Lea David, *The Past Cannot Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[100] Subotić, *Hijacked Justice,* 26.
[101] Ibid, x.
[102] Vojin Dimitrijević and Jelena Pejić, "UN Sanctions Against Yugoslavia: Two Years Later," in *The United Nations in the New World Order* ed. Dimitris Bourantonis and Jarrod Wiener, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995): 124-153.
[103] Milica Delević, "*ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL: THE CASE OF YUGOSLAVIA,*" *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2019), https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol3_1/Delvic.htm?gmuw-rd=sm&gmuw-rdm=ht.
[104] Arms Control Association, "UN Lifts Arms Embargo on Yugoslavia," October 2001, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2001-10/un-lifts-arms-embargo-yugoslavia.
[105] The Guardian, "EU lifts economic sanctions against Serbia," 9 October 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/09/balkans5.
[106] Human Rights Watch, "Yugoslavia: Link U.S. Aid to Cooperation with Tribunal," 30 April 2001, https://www.hrw.org/news/2001/04/30/yugoslavia-link-us-aid-cooperation-tribunal.

international coercion as a foreign policy.[107] For example, Vjekoslav Perica's research found that the 1999 NATO bombing in Serbia resulted in a conservative-nationalistic revival in places like universities and cities where Western-oriented liberals once dominated.[108]

Focusing on TJ, Western conditionality diverted national discussion away from past wrongs to "a fixation on the economic and political fruits of ICTY compliance."[109] For example, between 2001 and 2005, arrests and transfers of ICTY suspects coincided with the deadlines to receive US aid.[110] Further, the Serbian government and media framed arrests as "voluntary surrenders," portraying indicted war criminals as national patriots and martyrs.[111] While Western conditionality was necessary to induce Serbian authorities' grudging transfer of fugitives to The Hague, local justification for ICTY cooperation on pragmatic rather than moral grounds prevented true societal willingness to discuss accountability and past crimes.[112]

More problematically, Nikolas Rajković argues that conditioned cooperation with the ICTY was counterproductive by strengthening local nationalist forces against cooperation and making the work of democratically elected governments more difficult.[113] He found that compliance politics is not based on rational cost/benefit calculation stimulated by the right combination of "carrots and sticks," but rather on the historical, cultural, and ontological context of the target actor.[114] For Serbia, Western and external victimization was the context in which conditioned compliance was interpreted. Most Serbs saw the ICTY proceedings as a "collective and disproportionate punishment of Serbs" and a distortion of the historical record to place all blame on the Serbian side.[115] The intended impartial, international court to establish historical facts was felt by many as a continuation of Serbian victimization.

In sum, Serbians' experience with TJ and dealing with the past was associated with Western conditionality to induce cooperation with the ICTY. Both pro-Western and anti-Western local political elites portrayed the ICTY as anti-Serb and only complied out of economic and political necessity. Subsequently, TJ initiatives beyond the ICTY became associated with Western conditionality and the accompanying negative feelings toward external imposition, creating the foundation for delegitimizing civil society as the primary implementers of these initiatives.

2.3.3 Foreign Funding Dependency

---

[107] Jasna Dragović-Soso, "The Impact of International Intervention on Domestic Political Outcomes: Western Coercive Policies and the Milošević Regime," in *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995* ed. Peter Siani-Davies (London: Routledge): 120-135, 131.
[108] Ibid, 187-188.
[109] Orentlicher, *Some Kind of Justice,* 87-88.
[110] Ibid, 68.
[111] Iavor, "EU conditionality and transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia," *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy* 2, no. 1 (2006): 365-375.
[112] Orentlicher, *Some Kind of Justice*, 241.
[113] Nikolas Milan Rajković, "The Limits of Consequentialism: ICTY Conditionality and (Non) Compliance in Post-Milosevic Serbia," *Review of European and Russian Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2008): 27-72, 51.
[114] Rajković, 65.
[115] Rangelov, "EU conditionality and transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia," 368-372.

The funding structure supporting Serbian civil society reinforced these dynamics of external dependency and local delegitimization. Adam Fagan, a political scientist specializing in Western Balkans Europeanization, argues that international actors provide the necessary economic, diplomatic, legal, and strategic support for local TJ institutions, but the level of support is dependent on fluctuating national economic, political, and ideological interests. On two extremes, international actors can distance themselves from local demands for justice if it contradicts national interests, and on the other extreme, become too involved in transitional measures, causing local groups to disengage or become too dependent.[116] This "over-participation" of international actors can undermine the legitimacy and support for initiatives in post-conflict societies.

Roberto Belloni criticized the international effort to build civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina by creating one at odds with the Bosnian context and history, ultimately prohibiting genuine reconciliation.[117] He argues that the reliance on international foreign aid and short-term projects has created and sustained the gap from local community priorities, as civil societies in post-communist Europe were only financed to strengthen the neo-liberal status quo.[118] Bojan Bilić finds that civil society as a concept is interwoven with Western European social and political thought, and therefore "transplanting" civil society to a volatile political environment, from which it should actually stem, fundamentally changes the intrinsically Western idea of it as a democratization agent that is supposed to be independent from the state and prevent its intrusion in all aspects of public life.[119]

In interviews with NGO leaders in Serbia, Eric Gordy finds a perception that NGO activity is becoming "donor-driven" rather than "need-driven," where local organizations feel like subcontractors for larger international organizations.[120] Aaron Presnall notes that the insatiable and political process of funding levels for democracy assistance creates a "highly competitive business" among Serbian NGO recipients, seeing private donor models as a better replacement for foreign state funding.[121] Théodora Vetta's anthropological study on Serbian civil society found that local NGOs' reliance on foreign donors for funding effectively created a highly educated and pro-Western "new urban local elite."[122] The dominant project model of funding (rather than general funding) leaves local partners with fewer resources to develop community mobilization and engagement and to prioritize project-based skills, such as advanced

[116] Ibid, 278.
[117] Roberto Belloni, "Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2, (2001): 163-180.
[118] Adam Fagan, "Taking Stock of Civil-Society Development in Post-communist Europe: Evidence from the Czech Republic," *Democratization* 12, no. 4 (2005), 528-547.
[119] Bojan Bilić, "A concept that is everything and nothing: Why not to study (post-) Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist contention from a civil society perspective," *Sociologija* 53, no. 3 (2011): 297-322, 303.
[120] Eric Gordy, "CRDA and civil society in Serbia," in *Paper for Workshop on New Approaches to Sustainable Democracy-Building, Watson Institute, Brown University*, (2003): 19-20.
[121] Aaron Presnall, "Which way the wind blows: democracy promotion and international actors in Serbia," *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 661-681, 677.
[122] Théodora Vetta, "'Democracy Building' in Serbia: The NGO Effect," *Southeastern Europe* 33 (2009): 26-47, 30.

English development, jargon, and management techniques.[123] Marek Mikuš's research into civil society in Serbia between 2010-2011 concluded that NGO actors are moving towards localized fundraising to overcome suspicion and political alienation of civil society.[124]

After Milošević's overthrow in 2000, international donors "virtually flooded Serbia with money to seize the perceived window of opportunity to boost efforts at democratization" through democracy assistance programs covering rule of law, democratic governance, political and social process, NGO development, and independent media.[125] Between 2001–2017, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) invested more than $750 million in economic growth, infrastructure projects, and the NGO sector involved in promoting reforms in governance, human rights, and the rule of law in Serbia.[126] After Washington's changing priorities post-9/11,[127] the EU replaced the US as the leading international funder to Serbia, alongside a few private US foundations (George Soros's Open Society Fund, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund), to support Serbia's civil society and independent media with the goals of political stabilization, democracy promotion, and EU integration.[128]

While in the past, EU funding to Serbia's civil society has mainly taken the form of democracy promotion, in recent years, substantial funding has gone towards strengthening local civil society to implement TJ and efforts to deal with the past. In 2018, the European Parliament (EP) published the report "Reconciliation in the Western Balkans," acknowledging the criticism against its past prioritization of retributive justice (linked to the ICTY) over restorative justice (victims-centric), and further that the ICTY has been widely perceived as "externally imposed."[129] The report made clear that the Europeans must continue their support and funding of local civil society "as the main driver for putting the issue of reconciliation on the agenda of the region's leaders" as it "continues to play a fundamental role in insisting on progress in the reconciliation process."[130] As a result, the new EU enlargement strategy moved towards a "more holistic approach" focused on forms of justice that address diverging narratives about the past. Such initiatives include the Initiative for RECOM, the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE), the Joint History Project, the Balkan Transitional Justice (supported by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, BIRN), and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) based on the post-WWII Franco-German Youth Office.[131]

---

[123] Ibid, 44.
[124] Marek Mikuš, "Indigenizing "civil society" in Serbia: What local fund-raising reveals about class and trust," *Focaal*, no. 71 (2015): 43-56.
[125] Ibid, 185.
[126] Slobodan Janković, "Relations between the United States and Serbia: Asymmetric confrontation and relation," National University of Public Service Press, Dialog Campus, 2019.
[127] There was also less incentive to continue aid to Serbia after the immediate US goal of ousting the illiberal Milošević regime was accomplished, combined with the understanding that Serbia's future rested in Europe.
[128] Presnall, "Which way the wind blows," 671.
[129] European Parliament, "Reconciliation in the Western Balkans: The difficulty of emulating the EU model" April 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637964/EPRS_BRI(2019)637964_EN.pdf, 6.
[130] Ibid, 6.
[131] Ibid, 6-7.

The RECOM Initiative, the regional commission for the establishment of facts about war crimes and other serious violations of human rights committed in the former Yugoslavia, is by far the most comprehensive regional attempt at truth-telling and addressing the past in the former Yugoslavia. Comprising over 2,200 NGOs, its tasks include investigating allegations of war crimes and human rights violations in connection with the 1990s wars, naming war victims, and collecting information about detention camps. RECOM's main funders are the EU and NED (US-based), along with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rockefeller Brothers Fund (US-based), *Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft* (Swiss-based), and *CCFD-Terre Solidaire* (French-based).[132] The project was initiated by three regional NGOs: the HLC in Belgrade, the Research and Documentation Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and *Documenta* in Croatia.

The EU-funded BIRN initiative similarly brings together NGOs from Southern and Eastern Europe to publish news, investigative reports, and interviews on "transitional justice, media freedom, foreign influence, radicalization, corruption and the rule of law, as well as political crises."[133] Examples of other smaller CSO projects to addressing the past include YIHR's publication "State of Denial – Serbia 2023: Lessons on Patriotism from War Criminals," funded by the German Federal Agency for Foreign Affairs[134] and the EU and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) funded conference, "Truths That Have Been Denied" to share experiences and recommendations for continued work on TJ and human rights work.[135]

It is common for post-conflict, local civil societies to rely on external, foreign support for activities that the state rejects for political or ideological reasons, or simply does not have the financial ability to support.[136] The intent of this section is not to demonstrate a lack of local agency over RECOM, BIRN, YIHR, or any of the other TJ projects. Indeed, more than 580,000 people from the former Yugoslavia signed their support for the RECOM initiative at the end of 2014.[137] Nearly all permanent employees at local NGOs in Belgrade are from Serbia or the Balkans, demonstrating at least some base level of local desire to work in the field of TJ and belief in the redemptive promises of historical truth. Instead, it demonstrates that international aid from the US and the EU has built and currently sustains local civil society in Serbia. With the end of economic sanctions and the ICTY's closure in 2017, international funding to civil society has become the dominant "softer" approach to coerce Serbian society into democratic reform and dealing with its past. As such, local dependency on Western resources dictates organizational and project focus, resulting in a civil society promoting what's in vogue for the EU and US.

---

[132] RECOM, "What is RECOM?" https://www.recom.link/en/sta-je-rekom/.
[133] Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, "About BIRN," https://birn.eu.com/about-birn/.
[134] Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), "Report: "State of Denial – Serbia 2023: Lessons on Patriotism from War Criminals" 20 December 2024, https://yihr.rs/en/report-state-of-denial-serbia-2023-lessons-on-patriotism-from-war-criminals/.
[135] Sofija Todorović, Balkan Insight Network (BIRN), "Balkan Youth Deserve the Truth About the Past – Not Denials," June 30, 2023, https://balkaninsight.com/2023/06/30/balkan-youth-deserve-the-truth-about-the-past-not-denials/.
[136] Kostovicova, *Reconciliation by Stealth,* 141.
[137] European Western Balkans, "Roadmap for RECOM presented: Political support the basic precondition," May 23, 2018, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/05/23/roadmap-recom-presented-political-support-basic-precondition/.

2.3.4 Conclusions

The existing literature reveals how Western TJ promotion can inadvertently undermine the very civil society it seeks to strengthen. Local dependency on Western resources, combined with the historical association between TJ and external conditionality, provided local elites with a powerful narrative to delegitimize civil society as extensions of foreign interference rather than authentic expressions of Serbian civic life. These consequences extend beyond TJ to broader questions of civil society legitimacy in post-conflict contexts. When international TJ and democracy promotion conflicts with national identity construction–as it does in Serbia through the imposition of TJ norms that challenge dominant narratives of Serbian victimhood–civil society actors become caught between external funding requirements and local legitimacy needs. This creates the paradox observed in Serbia: extensive international support for civil society development coinciding with widespread citizen distrust and disengagement.

The literature reviewed here attempts to explain TJ failures in Serbia by treating rejection of dealing with the past as measurable perceptions. I take a more critical approach, conceptualizing rejection of TJ and civil society as the local implementers as constructed realities that are both influencing and influenced by Serbian identity formation. To understand Serbian identity formation and how civil society adopts the negative characterizations of the West in relation to a 'Western victimized' identity, I will look at the major Serbian characterization of the West and the East in the following section.

2.4 Serbian Identity Formation: Between the West and the East

This section reviews the literature on Serbian identity to contextualize how its ambiguous positioning between the West (EU and US) and the East (Russia) sets the context for the radical Othering of civil society as Western to explain public distrust and disengagement. Building on Section 2.3's analysis of Western-conditioned transitional justice (TJ), which positioned civil society as implementers of externally imposed initiatives, this section organizes the literature on Serbia's victimhood identity and its rejection of Western-aligned actors based on Neumann's Self-Other framework of relational identity formation (see Chapter 3: Theoretical Grounding). The following subsections examine scholarly perspectives on Serbian characterizations of Europe, the US, and Russia, to contextualize the salient threat a Western-linked civil society poses to an ambiguous and Western victimized Serbian identity.

2.4.1 Neither West nor East?

Substantial literature has been devoted to Serbia and the Balkans as being caught between two worlds, the meeting place of great civilizations, or where the East meets the West. Indeed, one doesn't need to leave Belgrade to notice the visual variance from across the Danube, where common perceptions contend the Ottoman Empire's end and the Austro-Hungarian Empire's beginning. Serbia is neither the East nor the West, with this ambiguous position present in

popular metaphors such as the "Serbia as a Bridge" trope or historical narratives of the Balkans as a place where great powers vie for power.[138]

Filip Ejdus described the Serbian belief that the East and the West represent two incompatible worlds in collision as "civilizational-ambivalence," in which Serbians should and will remain neutral.[139] Ana Russell-Omaljev's book *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in 'First' and 'Other' Serbia* (2016) analyzes how this "in-between" narrative is played out in contemporary Serbian politics and society, which she terms as "First" and "Other" Serbia. She writes, "It is a choice between absorption of modernity presented as alien by Other Serbia and return to the simulated authenticity of (ethnic and religious) origins as seen by First Serbia."[140]

Jelena Petrović examines Serbia's position on the "periphery of an imagined European community" through discourse analysis on the Serbia-EU visa liberalization process (2009-2011), concluding that Serbians imagine themselves as "flawed Europeans" based on economic hardships, lack of alternatives, and memory of lived collective suffering and condemnation from the European community.[141] This creates and affirms the ambiguous identity as belonging in Europe while being perpetual victims of Europe. It also affirms Hansen's contention that single shaded Self-Other dichotomies for understanding identity are not sufficient, degrees of Otherness construct understandings of Self. To analyze this "in-between" identity, I will look at the existing literature that explains and describes Serbia's major characterizations of the EU and US (as the West) and Russia (as the East).

2.4.2 Serbia and Europe: Perpetually on the Path

The "European idea" has evolved significantly, both temporally and spatially, stretching as far back as the Middle Ages or even Antiquity. Words once interchangeable with Europe: "Civilization," "Christianity," "the West,"[142] have today become represented in the "European Union." While the EU is an institutional body created in the years just after WWII, in modern times, it has come to encapsulate the broader European identity project. Richard Swedberg analyzes discourse on the development of this "European Ideal" over the centuries, concluding that these works emphasize the role, ideals, and cultural symbols of Europe and place great importance on the development of a "European consciousness," rejecting Europe as simply a

[138] Bojan Savić, "Where is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture," *Geopolitics* 19, no. 3 (2014): 684–718, 703; Marko Kovačević, "What place for East and West? Discourses, reality and foreign and security policies of post-Yugoslav small states," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 110-131, 111.
[139] Filip Ejdus, "Security, culture and identity in Serbia," *Western Balkans Security Observer-English Edition* 7-8 (2007): 38-64.
[140] Ana Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in 'First' and 'Other' Serbia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2016), 240.
[141] Jelena Petrovic, "The return of the Serbian other: Interpretative repertoires of nationalism and identity politics in online news discourses on Serbia's integration in the European union," (2013).
[142] Milutinović, *Getting over Europe*, 18.

political or geographical concept.[143] These values are clearly stated on the EU's website today: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights.[144]

However, continued EU enlargement to Eastern and Central European countries with differing histories, cultures, and political values from Western Europe poses great ontological challenges and insecurities. Scholars argue that to maintain the "European idea" while continuing the policy of EU expansion eastward, there must be a shared normative base. Most minimally, this includes a commitment to democratic rule and rejection of authoritarianism.[145] Despite these ontological challenges, the EU still represents the present-day "European ideal" of peace, freedom, equal economic opportunity, and human rights.

Ayşe Zarakol, in *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (2010), argued that the overwhelming dominance of the West in creating and upholding international norms forces all non-Western states to define their identity in relation to the West to minimize their "comparative backwardness" and maintain ontological security within the international system.[146] Indeed, this could not be truer than in Serbia, where characterizations of Europe are ambivalent and deeply shaped by historical grievances and competing identities. The principal dispute between these two Serbian identities is their attitudes towards Europe, either as a friend and sharing common characteristics with the Serbian self, or as an enemy, radical, and different. Serbian characterizations depict Europe as self-interested, imperial, and incompatible with Serbia's core national interests. At the same time, Europe is also characterized as hopeful, modern, and futuristic.

European Disillusionment: Self-Interested, Zero-Sum, Imperial

Dominant Serbian narratives characterize the EU as hypocritical and self-serving, pursuing its own political and economic interests under the guise of liberal democratic values. This skepticism is rooted in a longer history of inconsistent European involvement in the Balkans, dating from the 13th to 19th centuries, of the competing Austrian/Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires and the so-called "Eastern Question." European states fought numerous wars against the expanding Ottoman Empire, inciting Serbian resistance and uprisings to counter the Ottoman Empire.[147]

However, as the Ottoman Empire declined in the 19th century, new political and economic considerations for the then-present political vacuum on Europe's border arose. The British, French, and Austrians, fearing Russian expansion, sought to preserve the integrity of a

---

[143] Richard Swedberg, "The Idea of 'Europe' and the Origin of the European Union - A Sociological Approach," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie,* 23, 5 (1994): 378-387.
[144] The European Union, "Aims and values," https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en.
[145] Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Eastward enlargement of the European Union and the identity of Europe," *West European Politics* 25, no. 2 (2002): 19-54.
[146] Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 1-26.
[147] Andrew Hammod, "Balkanism in Political Context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU," Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture 3 (2006): 6-26.

weak Ottoman Empire through sustained diplomatic and military assistance, going back on their previous policies of national liberation. Economic interests, namely access to the Near East and continued trade with the Ottoman Empire, far outweighed national aspirations so desired by the Balkan peoples.[148] These changing policies reflective of European national interests at the expense of the Serbs, cloaked in national aspirational rhetoric, serve as the basis for modern characterizations of Europeans as self-interested and untrustworthy.

Jumping to today, contemporary Serbian perceptions of EU hypocrisy center on inconsistent policies and mutual disengagement in the accession process. Serbian law professor Vladimir Čolović argues Serbia's territorial dispute with Kosovo should not disqualify Serbia from EU membership since territorial disputes exist in most EU member states, including Northern Ireland, Gibraltar, and Cyprus, highlighting perceived double standards.[149] Serbian political elites describe EU policy as fundamentally inconsistent, creating a situation where "Serbia pretends to reform while the EU pretends to be interested in accepting Serbia."[150] The perceived hypocrisy is compounded by the EU's failure to invest in media organizations that could counter SNS, leaving the field open for ruling party media to ignore positive aspects of EU membership while emphasizing European inconsistencies and double standards.[151]

Nikola Mladenović employs discourse analysis to explain the discrepancy between Serbia's acceptance of the 2013 Brussels Agreement normalizing Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the subsequent anti-EU rhetoric of its leadership. To compensate for local voter loss, Serbian authorities employed rhetoric to suggest anti-EU attitudes as a strategy of ambiguity. The rhetoric deliberately exploited the already existing political culture of the West's self-interested intentions and constant "scheming against Serbia and the country's consequent suffering." This anti-West rhetoric sought to build the image that Serbian President Vučić only reluctantly concluded with the Brussels Agreement, reinforcing the Serbian Self as fighting against "blackmail" and "humiliation" from the stronger European powers trying to separate Serbia.[152]

The second major characteristic sees the EU as imperial in character, enforcing a Western-centric identity project onto Serbia, a smaller and culturally distinct state. Filip Ejdus describes the deeply rooted historical narrative of the centuries-long struggle for emancipation under foreign conquerors as strengthening a "national-liberation" culture in Serbia. The five hundred-year-long Ottoman occupation constructs Serbian national identity in motifs of victimhood, defiance, and non-cooperation.[153] A pertinent example is the Serb-led Yugoslav

---

[148] Ibid.
[149] Vladamir Čolović, "Unresolved border disputes of the republic of Serbia with neighboring countries: double standards for entering into the European Union." *Contemporary international law: problems and challenges* (2024): 443-448.
[150] Natasza Styczyńska, "Serbia and the European Union: A Decade of Negotiating Challenges (2014–2024)." *Przegląd Politologiczny* 4 (2024): 331-342.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Nikola Mladenović, "The 2013 Brussels Agreement and the Political Discourse of the Serbian Leadership: Pro-EU Adaptation with Anti-EU Rhetoric," *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 5 (2022): 832-856.
[153] Filip Ejdus, "Security, culture and identity in Serbia," *Western Balkans Security Observer-English Edition* 7-8 (2007): 38-64.

Partizan resistance movement during WWII, considered the most successful anti-Nazi resistance movement in Europe, yet remains underemphasized in Western literature and education.[154] This omission reinforces perceptions of Western bias, aligning with narratives of the EU as an imperial Other that marginalizes Serbian contributions to European history.

Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić's infamous announcement that "the time has come to take revenge on the Turks," upon entering the Bosnian town of Srebrenica in July 1996, exemplifies the salience of external threat from Ottoman occupation in recent Serbian identity construction. The non-existence of Ottoman archeology and art history and the general impossibility of studying Ottoman heritage in Serbia[155] is further testament to the rejectionist stance Serbs hold towards their Ottoman past and foreign influence. External pressure and conditionality to EU membership fit the already constructed unfavorable and colonial Other deeply entrenched from the long period of Ottoman occupation, placed onto the Europeans, and subsequently rejected.

Taking a wider perspective, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider's chapter "East Meets West: Europe and Its Others" in *Human Rights and Memory* (2010) argues that contemporary East-West tensions are rooted in Western post national universalism and Eastern ethnic, religious, and national particularism. They argue the "civilizational undertones and Western superiority" inherent to political and economic conditionality in EU membership fuel feelings of Eastern exclusion as "second-class citizens in the European project."[156] Western European universalism ignores the particular Otherness which comes from divergent East-West historical memories. Eastern feelings of non-recognition for their experiences and memories have the unintended consequences of a need to ontologically securitize, creating further distance from Western European universalist norms and pan-European identity. In short, attempts to globalize Europeanness across the East through EU expansion undermine these goals by imposing an unshared Western European identity and strengthening nationalist tendencies on the ground.

The asymmetric power relationship between the EU and candidate countries is reinforced through conditioned adoption of a shared European memory seeking to transcend nation-state boundaries and side-lining local memory practices. Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt in *Europeanization and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans* (2020) look at how EU conditionality on dealing with the past became a tool to either support or oppose Europeanization in the Western Balkans. Failure to craft a common European identity based on a shared past, the EU has become a "memory arena and a political opportunity structure for 'uploading' domestic preferences: national narratives about the past."[157] Similar to memory and identity, local elites' "instrumental and ambivalent attitude" towards democratization created a political culture where reform was "often perceived both by citizens and political elites as a mere fulfilment of the

[154] Marko Attila Hoare, "Genocide in the Former Yugoslavia before and after Communism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 7 (2010): 1193-1214.
[155] Miloš Todorović, "The Problems of Studying Ottoman Heritage in Serbia," 4 (2021).
[156] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Human Rights and Memory* (Penn State University Press, 2010): 128.
[157] Ana Milošević and Tamara Trošt, *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 4.

Brussels conditions."[158] International pressure usually had an effect only alongside an immediate reward or punishment. This perception of external imposition and domination produces resistance to the European project, seen as externally enforced, imperial, and contesting local agency and identity.

Finally, the third characterization of the EU sees integration as fundamentally at odds with Serbian national interests, particularly regarding the status of Kosovo.[159] Marko Kovačević related Serbia's ontological insecurity after Kosovo's secession to preventing Serbia's embrace of European state identity.[160] Small state identity is both more fragile and more important because of heightened reliance on relationships, the basis of identity formation,[161] which explains the inability to Europeanize stipulated on "giving up Kosovo." Filip Ejdus in *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession* (2019) writes that Serbia's policy of "both Europe and Kosovo" represents a state of ontological dissonance that denies the fundamental contradictions between the two policy goals. Both choices–giving up Kosovo and joining the EU, or preserving its national sense of self but losing its European future–impinge on Serbia's two core identities, producing a state of extreme anxiety.[162]

Rafael Biermann points to the Serbia-EU asymmetric power relationship and the "cost-incentive gap" to explain Serbia's resistance to Europeanization, and Serbia's high domestic costs of losing Kosovo as incompatible with core Serbian national interests.[163] Jelena Subotić attributes Serbian resistance to Europeanization as "identity divergence"—Serbian domestic actors resist European norms, defining themselves against Europe due to weak European socialization, strong alternative identity narratives (deep national and cultural ties with Russia), and a historically negative relationship.[164]

In dominant discourse today, Europe is seen as a "hypocritical double-standard actor,"[165] rhetorically standing for Western, liberal values but truly motivated by national economic and political interests. Relatedly, the EU is seen as an imperial actor imposing its Europeanness throughout the East, resonating with the post-Ottoman, deeply rooted fear of external imposition. European and Serbian national interests are constructed as fundamentally incompatible, mostly related to Kosovo's independence, and thus the relationship is treated through principles of transactionalism and bilateralism. However, Serbia's proximate geographic, historical, and

---

[158] Ibid, 15.
[159] For a nuanced view of Kosovo's significance to Serbs, particularly its role in Serbian national identity tied to the 1389 Battle of Kosovo and the Serbian Orthodox Church, see Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998).
[160] Kovačević, ""What place for East and West?" 123-124.
[161] On "small state" identity, see Uriel Abulof, "''Small Peoples'': The Existential Uncertainty of Ethnonational Communities,"" *Princeton University International Studies Quarterly* 53 (2009): 227–248.
[162] Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity,* 128.
[163] Rafael Biermann, "Coercive Europeanization: the EU's struggle to contain secessionism in the Balkans," *European Security* 23, no. 4 (2014): 484-508.
[164] Jelena Subotić, "Europe is a State of Mind: Identity and Europeanization in the Balkans," *International studies quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011): 309-330, 314.
[165] Interview by author, March 28, 2025.

cultural ties to Europe have fostered positive feelings towards its promised "European destiny," outlined in the following section.

The Promised European Future

Christian Orthodox Serbs residing in the Ottoman Empire, prohibited from establishing schools and cultural institutions, were largely an illiterate people and left unexposed to European culture and ideas. This changed following the Turkish-Austrian wars at the end of the 17th century, as hundreds of thousands of Serbs fled to the Habsburg Empire (later, the Austrian and then Austro-Hungarian empires).[166] As a people deprived of religious and national rights under the Ottomans, Enlightenment thought on the protection of persecuted persons and the right to self-determination largely contributed to the First (1804-13) and Second (1815-17) Serb Uprisings.

In 1790, Serbian elites first demanded national rights and territorial autonomy based on the European concept of national identity. They appealed to Russian, Austrian, and French rulers for international guarantees, believing in a Serb nationality that transcended religion to unite all Slavic-speaking peoples into one political entity.[167] Before the threat of Russian expansion superseded the declining Ottoman empire, Serbian aspirations of self-rule were liked and supported by Europe. Finding a common enemy in the deeply entrenched image of the threatening Turk, Europe was depicted as a hopeful alternative to the ruthless enemy and foreign occupier. The plight of the Christian Slavs against the Ottoman Muslims aligned with European democratic, liberal, and Christian thought, inspiring the Serbian national-liberation culture suppressed under the Ottomans. Here, Europe is characterized as hopeful, inspiring, and fundamental to the national and cultural construction of the modern Serbian state.

Zoran Milutinović maintained that Europe, from the Serb perspective, was a set of spiritual and moral values, the principle of order, measure, clarity, and synthesis.[168] Serbian writer Jovan Skerlić's *Serbian Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (*Skerlić's Srpska književnost u XVIII veku*) (1909) saw the 18th century as the "real beginning of Serbian culture" and everything before as "barbaric and medieval Balkan darkness."[169] Europe was characterized as modern and futuristic, as anti-European Serbian Romantics turned to their history (such as old glories and victories of medieval rulers) to awaken nationalist feelings. In turn, pro-European Serbian elites, inspired by the Enlightenment, positioned themselves as "looking forward" and abandoning their inferior Oriental culture and neglected moral knowledge. They believed it was their task as cultural and political elites to institute European cultural norms and "rebuild after the 'Western model.'"[170] To them, Europe was a set of values: "energy, initiative, work,

[166] Ljubinka Trgovčević, "The enlightenment and the beginnings of modern Serbian culture," *Balcanica* 37, (2006): 103-111, 103-104.
[167] Dušan Bataković, "A Balkan-Style French Revolution? The 1804 Serbian Uprising in European Perspective," *Balcanica* 36 (2005): 113-129.
[168] Milutinović, *Getting over Europe,* 7.
[169] Ibid, 67.
[170] Ana Antić, "Living in the age of Axis internationalism: Imagining Europe in Serbia before and during the Second World War," *European History Quarterly* (2017): 1-28, 7-9.

democracy, socialism, rationalism, secularism, progress, and education."[171] The desire by an influential part of Serbian society to abandon or completely reject its Oriental and Ottoman past positioned Europe as the future for a modern Serbian culture and nation.

Filip Ejdus maintains that the *civic-democratic* strategic culture in Serbia (democracy, liberalism, rule of law) has lower temporal and mythological significance but is supported through key historical moments: adoption of liberal Candlemas Constitution (1835), the Regents Constitutions (1869), student protests (1968), and anti-Milošević demonstrations (1990-2000). He writes:

"The main axiomatic belief of this strategic culture is that Europe and the West in general unequivocally represent the cultural, political, and civilizational homeland (or destination) of Serbia. Therefore, European political heritage of individualism, democracy, liberalism, rule of law, human rights, reluctance to the use of force, etc., is a 'package' of values and norms that should be adopted and respected."[172]

Relatedly, international actors played a significant role in overthrowing the Milošević regime and Serbia's subsequent democratization and liberalization process, and the EU today is the key external financial backer of projects to improve the rule of law, build institutions, and strengthen civil society and independent media. Past historical events demonstrate that democratic desires retain local ownership despite European conditionality for reforms and an authoritarian, rejectionist government actively hostile to liberal change.

Swept into Enlightenment thought following the Serbian mass migration into the Habsburg Empire, Serbian national-liberation culture was reawakened through European Enlightenment thought. Serbian political and academic elites saw Europe as the hopeful alternative to Ottoman occupation, having a significant influence on Serbian cultural developments. Europe was depicted as the modern future for the Serbs, and this rhetoric continues to be amplified today through pro-EU actors that see Serbia's European destiny as the only path to improve the country's political, economic, and social situation. Key historical events, such as the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, demonstrate that European values like democracy and rule of law retain local support and partly construct the Serbian Self.

2.4.3 Serbia and the United States

The United States remains widely unpopular in the Serbian public because of the enduring legacy of its interventionist role in the 1990s wars and support for Kosovo's independence since 2008. For this paper, characterizations of the US are separated from Europe, although the two overlap significantly and are mutually reinforcing under the umbrella identity of "the West." The interventionist role of the US-led NATO bombing, international sanctions, and support for Kosovo's independence constructs the US as an aggressive perpetrator, fueling distrust of the US's European allies and overall negative image of the West.

---

[171] Milutinović, *Getting over Europe,* 73.
[172] Ejdus, "Security, culture and identity in Serbia," 45-46.

1999 NATO Bombing

The memory of Serbian victimhood during the 1999 NATO aggression (*NATO agresija*) is promoted as a collective trauma and a one-sided, illegal use of armed force against Serbian society, decontextualized from the ongoing conflict in Kosovo.[173] In a push spearheaded by the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and as the de facto leader of NATO, the US is blamed for the 78-day bombing campaign. The event is centralized through anti-NATO media narratives and official and unofficial memorialization, some likening this event to the "second battle of Kosovo."[174]

The 1999 NATO bombing was the only military action that took place in Serbia itself during the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution, and therefore, many Serbian civilians had only first-hand experience of war trauma, remembered as an extraordinary and life-threatening experience.[175] The wars in the 1990s were fought in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and a majority of Serbian civilians had no personal experience in the violence, as compared to civilians in other Balkan states. In combination with total government control over the media and the Serbian state's official policy of noninvolvement in the wars,[176] the NATO bombing and international sanctions are, for most Serbians, the only individual and personal war trauma. As such, the state retains a 'memory monopoly' over the NATO bombing, (re)constructing the story to sustain anti-West and anti-NATO sentiment.

Marija Mandić argues that the NATO bombings caused a suppressed national trauma institutionalized through official memorialization practices such as anniversary events and commemorative practices, maintaining the narrative of NATO as the aggressor and Serbia as the innocent, heroic victim.[177] Mladen Lazić similarly finds that the present-day Serbian collective memory of the NATO bombing emphasizes the heroic and sacrificial role of the Serbs.[178] In Orli Freidman's analysis of memories related to the 1999 NATO bombing in Belgrade, she concluded that most ordinary people in Serbia have a de-contextualized and overall lack of awareness regarding the events of the NATO bombing and its relation to Kosovo.[179] The hundreds of thousands of Albanians expelled from their homes during the conflict in 1999 or the estimated

[173] Elisa Satjukow, "The Making of 24 March. Commemorations of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Serbia, 1999–2019," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 70, no. 2 (2022): 289-309.
[174] Other victimization narratives surround health concerns due to elevated levels of depleted uranium as a side effect of the bombing campaign and the death of three-year-old Milica Rakić. See Mila Bajić, "Generation Bombing—Renarrating Myths: The Importance of the 1999 NATO Bombing on Attitudes Towards Kosovo as a Symbolic Concept," PhD diss., Central European University, 2020.
[175] Eric Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial,* 20-30.
[176] Laura Silber, "The "hero" of Dayton: Slobodan Milosevic and the politics of war and peace." *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 1 (1996): 63-69.
[177] Marija Mandić, "Official Commemoration of the NATO Bombing of Serbia. A Case Study of the Fifteenth Anniversary," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 64, no. 4 (2016): 460-481.
[178] Mladen Lazić, "Mnemonic battles over the NATO bombing of Serbia – analysis and critique," *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 166-173, 172.
[179] Orli Fridman, "Memories of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Belgrade, Serbia," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 64, no. 4 (2016): 438-459.

10,000 Albanian war casualties are not mentioned in public discourse.[180] To generalize by quoting one interviewee, "In school, I learned that Tito died and then NATO bombed us."[181]

Instead, the NATO bombing is officially remembered as the consequence of an illegal secessionist armed rebellion by Albanians in internationally recognized and historically Serbian territory.[182] Indeed, its legality is hotly debated even outside of Serbia, proponents justifying the intervention to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide in Kosovo, and opponents claiming it violated international law by impeding on Yugoslavia's territorial integrity and side-stepping the necessary UN Security Council (UNSC) authorization.[183] The Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) concluded that the NATO intervention was "illegal but legitimate," highlighting its violation of international law due to the lack of UNSC approval, yet justifying it as a response to prevent "systematic and gross violations of human rights" in Kosovo.[184]

Other scholars believe the bombing was a concerted policy initiated by the US to dismember Yugoslavia into a cluster of weak nation-states to install a free-market economy.[185] During the Cold War, the US provided over $1 billion in aid to Yugoslavia to maintain its non-alignment as a buffer against the Soviet bloc.[186] After the Soviet collapse, this strategic need vanished, enabling the US to target Serbs as the largest nationality opposed to Yugoslavia's breakup.[187] Amid the proliferation of alternative theories, the 1999 NATO aggression is a key historical event characterizing the US as aggressive and immoral, fueling the Serbian perpetual Western-victimhood identity. This perceived US betrayal enables elites to frame the Western-aligned civil society as radical Others, furthering public distrust.

International Sanctions (1992-2001)

In 1992, international sanctions led by the US froze all trade to and from Yugoslavia, resulting in hyperinflation, mass unemployment, the collapse of the healthcare system, and food shortages.[188] The sanctions were first established to discourage warfare, then to bring compliance

[180] Mladen Lazić, Mnemonic battles over the NATO bombing of Serbia – analysis and critique," 171
[181] Interview by author, 23 October 2024**.**
[182] Lazić, Mnemonic battles over the NATO bombing of Serbia," 171.
[183] The United Nations Charter permits states to use armed forces against other states when through a UN Security Council Resolution (which was blocked by Russia and China) or when the state is acting in self-defense; See Aaron Schwabach, "The legality of the NATO bombing operation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," *Pace Int'l L. Rev.* 11 (1999): 405-418.
[184] Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned* (Oxford University Press, 2000): 4.
[185] Michael Parenti, "The Rational Destruction of Yugoslavia," in *Imperialism, Crisis, and Class Struggle: The Enduring Verities and Contemporary Face of Capitalism* ed. Henry Veltmeyer (The Netherlands: Library of Congress, 2010): 255-272.
[186] Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War, 1945–1960* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 5.
[187] Richard Becker, "The role of sanctions in the destruction of Yugoslavia," in *NATO in the Balkans: Voices of Opposition* ed. Ramsey Clark (New York: International Action Center, 1998): 107-130.
[188] Ibid, 107-130.

with the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, and finally to oppose Milošević's actions in Kosovo.[189] After Serbia withdrew the Yugoslav armed forces from Kosovo, the US imposed new conditions to end the sanctions regime: full cooperation with the ICTY through extraditing those indicted for war crimes to The Hague.[190]

Economic sanctions as a tool of warfare are subject to much scholarly and policy debate over their effectiveness and humanitarian consequences. Jovan Babić and Aleksandar Jokić maintain that the political and economic consequences of sanctions on civilians produce morally reprehensible consequences that undermine their moral justification, arguing that "international economic sanctions are an immoral means of achieving primarily political goals."[191] In the case of US-led international sanctions against the former Yugoslavia, sanctions supported a paternalistic posture that the UN knew what was in the best interest of the Yugoslavs, directly contradicting the liberal assumption of equality and human dignity.[192]

Peter Andreas argues that sanctions in Yugoslavia contributed to the criminalization of the state, economy, and civil society, ultimately increasing organized crime and corruption.[193] Similarly, Alessandra Pinna maintains that punitive economic sanctions halted Serbian democratization by provoking hyperinflation, corruption, and criminal organizations.[194] Short-term hardships and long-term deteriorated quality of life for many Serbians caused by US-led sanctions on Yugoslavia led to the portrayal of the US as an aggressive and powerful perpetrator.

Additionally, the US's changing policy towards Serbia during and after the 1990s wars affirms the West as untrustworthy and hypocritical. American leadership relied on Milošević to guarantee the Bosnian Serbs would follow the Dayton Accords and end the bloodshed in Bosnia, abandoning its previous stance harshly blaming the Serbian leader for starting and sustaining the Yugoslav Wars. Indeed, the Western press initially described Milošević as a guarantor of peace,[195] only later to be nicknamed the "Butcher of the Balkans"[196] and internationally condemned. Further, the US (and the EU, namely Germany and the Vatican) support for Croatian nationalist and undemocratic leader Franjo Tudjman to contain Serbian expansion is seen as one-sided and unfair.[197]

---

[189] Richard Garfield, "Economic Sanctions, Humanitarianism, and Conflict After the Cold War," *Social Justice* 29, no. 3 (2002): 94-107.
[190] Proroković, "Nato in the Balkans," 126.
[191] Jovan Babić and Aleksandar Jokić, "The Ethics of International Sanctions: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Fletcher F. World Aff* 24 (2000): 87-100.
[192] Ibid, 89-90.
[193] Peter Andreas, "Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions: Embargo Busting and Its Legacy," *International Studies Quarterly* (2005): 335-360.
[194] Alessandra Pinna, "US Democracy Promotion in Serbia and Croatia," in *Global Perspectives on US Foreign Policy: From the Outside In* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013): 173-199.
[195] The New York Times, "Peace in the Balkans Now Depends on the Man Who Fanned Its Wars," October 31, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/31/world/peace-in-the-balkans-now-depends-on-the-man-who-fanned-its-wars.html.
[196] The Chicago Tribune, "The Butcher of the Balkans," August 21, 2021, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2006/03/13/the-butcher-of-the-balkans/.
[197] Pinna, "US Democracy Promotion in Serbia and Croatia," 179-180; York Norman, "Alija Izetbegović's Islamic Declaration and Populism in Bosnia," in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and*

Kosovo's Declaration of Independence (2008)

The third interrelated and formative event, and perhaps the most salient to the US-Serbia relationship due to its temporal proximity and ontological weight, is the US's recognition of Kosovo's independence from Serbia in 2008. Kosovo's contested state status would not be possible without the intervention and support of Western international institutions,[198] the basis for the Serb position that blames external forces for the loss of Kosovo. Official US policy recognizes Kosovo on the principle of self-determination and for the safety and stability in the region. Critics point to the large American military base in Kosovo, which can only be maintained if Kosovo remains a weak state separate from Serbia.[199] President Vučić claims that the US and EU want to stop Serbia's economic development by establishing a Greater Albania. Ivan Krastev argued that Serbians hate America for being pro-Islamic and pro-Albanian.[200]

Perparim Gutaj maintains that Serb anti-Americanism is a recently constructed phenomenon in response to American troops stationed in Kosovo and their support for the new state. He sees Serb resistance in northern Kosovo as a "Serbian elite construct, made of and crammed with anti-Americanism sentiments."[201] Serbs during the 1990s, angered by the American-led NATO campaign and other violence against the Serb minority in Kosovo, adopted Milošević's hatred towards American power and policies. Serbian president Tomislav Nikolić (2012-2017) continued Milošević's stance opposing the occupation of Kosovo by Americans as an imperialist attempt to enslave the Serbs. The center of the resistance in northern Kosovo lay in the Serbian elite's antagonism towards American policy and power, and Serb resistance is constructed as a social and political phenomenon against Americanism. For Serbs, the US is seen as seeking to maximize its military power in the region by challenging the largest Balkan state through recognition of Kosovo.

2.4.4 Serbia and Russia: The Slavic Brotherhood

In Neumann's chapter on "The Russian Other," major European characterizations of Russia significantly overlap with those of Serbia. Russia is defined as a perpetual "learner" of European economic and political practices, an expansionist power, and at the geographic and cultural crossroads between the East and the West.[202] Like Russia, Serbia is cast in the West as an unsuccessful learner of European norms, represented by its unpromising EU accession. Milošević's nationalist pursuit of a "greater Serbia" is widely blamed for the dissolution of

---

Recent Tendencies ed. John Abromeit, Bridget María Chesterton, Gary Marotta, York Norman and Contributors, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 90–102.

[198] Nina Caspersen, "The pursuit of international recognition after Kosovo," *Global Governance* 21 (2015): 393-412.

[199] Yoko Hirose, "Unrecognized States in the Former USSR and Kosovo: A Focus on Standing Armies," *Open Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2015): 67-82, 77.

[200] Ivan Krastev, "The anti-American century?" *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 5-16, 6.

[201] Perparim Gutaj, "Beyond independence: Anti-Americanism and the Serb resistance in Kosova," *Iliria International Review* 3, no. 1 (2013): 183-214.

[202] Neumann, *Uses of the Other,* 107-108.

Yugoslavia in the 1990s,[203] and Serbia's current unwillingness to accept Kosovo's independence cements the country's international reputation as expansionist.[204] Finally, both Serbia and Russia occupy an ambiguous geographic and cultural crossroads between the West and the East.

Shared Orthodox religion and socio-cultural values (Slavic language, conservatism, patriarchy, post-communism, historical mythology) characterize Russia in Serbia (and to a lesser extent, in Russia) as its cultural kin and elderly brother figure. Russia's great power status and historical defense of the Serbs against the Ottomans and the West positions it as an ideologically and ontologically comfortable alternative to Western external pressure and mistreatment. Among Serbian citizens, there is a widespread belief that Russia will side with Serbia against the West, in response to the ICTY in the past and to claims over Kosovo and NATO expansion in the present.[205] Shared Slavic culture and Orthodox religion characterize Russia as an ideologically aligned "protector" and Serbia's "natural partner" against shared Western enemies.

Protection Against the West

In the 1820s, Russian intellectuals experienced an "identity crisis" and started advocating for greater Russian power and leadership in the Balkans as a "bulwark against Western hostility," inspiring Russian foreign policy-makers to coordinate uprisings against the Ottomans, sending thousands of Russian volunteers to fight the Turks.[206] Siniša Atlagić argues that Russian military, political, financial, and educational support in the fight for liberation against the Ottomans constitutes the current basis for Serbian sympathies towards Russia, forming the image of the "Russian protector."[207] Throughout the 19th century, Russia was characterized as Serbia's brotherly patron, based on familial-like links between the two nations, believed to transcend realpolitik as Serbia's eternal ally and future liberator. Mystical Russian imagery as "Russia-the-Savior" or the "Russian Messiah" made a strong ideological argument for a foreign policy dependent on Russian goodwill and great power ability to protect the smaller Orthodox Slavic nation from its shared hostile enemies.[208]

This so-called Pan-Slavic sentiment faded as Serbia "Westernized" and was largely absent from discourse between the two World Wars, while Yugoslavia, as a kingdom, was firmly in the anti-Communist camp. After a short period of close foreign policy and ideological alignment with the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1948, communist Yugoslavia left the Communist bloc (Tito-Stalin split in 1948) and briefly aligned with NATO indirectly through the

[203] Clark, *Serbia in the Shadow of Milošević*.
[204] Ethem Çeku, "The policy of Serbian expansionism, with specific reference to Albanians in the decade preceding the Balkan Wars," *The International History Review* 41, no. 1 (2019): 23-38.
[205] Vuk Vuksanovic, "Systemic pressures, party politics and foreign policy: Serbia between Russia and the West, 2008-2020." PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021.
[206] Susan Baker, "Pan-Slavism in the Balkans: A Historical View," in *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* ed. Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, and Vladimir Đorđević (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 77-100, 64-65.
[207] Grigorev and Żakowska, "Russia in Serbian national mythologies since XIX century until the First World War and its influence on the modern international relations," *Каспийский регион: политика, экономика, культура* vol. 57, 4 (2018): 116-125.
[208] Ibid, 119.

Balkan Pact in 1953 in response to fears of Soviet aggression.[209] The relations normalized after Stalin died in 1953, but Yugoslavia continued its own path to socialism and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).[210] After the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia and the international isolation from the West, Milošević turned towards Russia and mythologized the brotherhood between the two nations, juxtaposing the Slavic world and its distinction from the West.[211] In this way, the Ottoman threat was replaced with the Western threat, jumping to the natural assumption that Russia would again come to protect Serbia.

Mikhail Suslov argues that the Pan-Slavic identity is secured against the powerful and threatening Western hegemonic project by "saving brother Slavs from external enemies or [through] promoting integrationist projects."[212] Artem Patalakh maintains that Serbia's attraction to Russia intensifies during Serbia-West conflicts, positioning Serbia and Russia as joint victims of Western-inflicted national traumas. Even though Serbia is geographically quite distant from Russia, Ana Russell-Omaljev writes that Russia is still positioned as the "first friendly Other in the anti-European debates."[213] This Pan-Slavic movement continues today through cultural and political projections, becoming an ideologically charged political tool instrumentalized by Serbian elites to protect national interests and preserve the Slavic identity against the West.

Finally, Serbia's energy sector is heavily reliant on Russia and exclusively imports natural gas from Russia.[214] The current Serbian government maintains Serbia's energy dependency on Russia as favorable, with President Vučić calling Russia the "guarantor of Serbia's energy security,"[215] sustained by claims that without Russian energy, economic collapse and increased cost of living would ensue.[216] However, many scholars disagree, criticizing Serbia's complete dependence on gas from Russia for the industry's lack of transparency, patronage, and corruption.[217] Serbian oligarchs are able to exploit this lack of transparency in a Russian-owned energy sector and therefore reject gas diversification strategies, as they would likely lose their influence and be criminally liable.[218] Since the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, Serbia's refusal to comply with EU sanctions on Russia is one major reason for the absence of additional open

---

[209] Marija Krstić, "The SFR Yugoslavia during the cold war and current Serbian foreign policy," *Antropologija* 11, no. 1 (2011): 21-44.
[210] Svetozar Rajak, *Yugoslav-Soviet relations, 1953-1957: normalization, comradeship, confrontation*, London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom), 2004.
[211] Dejana Vukasović and Miša Stojadinović, "On pan-slavism, brotherhood, and mythology: The imagery of contemporary geopolitical discourse in Serbia, " In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, pp. 123-153. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023.
[212] Suslov, "New Wine in an Old Wineskin," 78.
[213] Russell-Omaljev, *Divided We Stand,* 55.
[214] Dejan Brkić, "Serbian energy sector in a gap between east and west." *Energy Exploration & Exploitation* 42, no. 1 (2024): 330-340.
[215] Valentina Bajić, "Serbia's Vučić eyes new gas deal with Russia after meeting Putin," May 12, 2025, https://seenews.com/news/serbias-vucic-eyes-new-gas-deal-with-russia-after-meeting-putin-1275029.
[216] Brkić, "Serbian energy sector in a gap between east and west," 330-340.
[217] Vujo Ilić, "Serbia's energy dilemma: Navigating geopolitical tensions, Russian ownership, and the path to renewable transition," (2023), 11.
[218] Marta Szpala, "Russia in Serbia–soft power and hard interests," *Centre for Eastern Studies Commentary* no. 150, (2014): 1-8.

chapters or clusters on Serbia's EU accession.[219] Other scholars find that Russian-owned companies' incentive to maintain their gas supply monopoly has prevented Serbia's green transition,[220] further hindering the country's European integration process.

Shared Culture and Orthodoxy

In the 18th century, Serbian intellectuals could be broadly divided into two camps: pro-Westerners, who glorified and favored Western European culture and thought, and anti-Western, Russophiles/Slavophiles. Serbian linguist and father of Serbian folk-literature scholarship, Vuk Karadžić's "cultural revolution" popularized Serbia's affiliation with the "*Slavia Orthodoxa*" civilization that severed Serbian culture from Western Europe and rooted it in "Slavophile" themes of Russian origin.[221] Historical myths, tribal and patriarchal "original genius," Serbian folklore, and religious morality contrasted with the Western European Enlightenment, the ability to doubt oneself, rationality, and immorality. These anti-Western thinkers believed in the cultural mission of the Slavs and desired a Pan-Slavic society rooted in similar ethnic and spiritual values.[222]

Mladenov Jovanović argues that narratives about Russia are "at the level of dominant social stereotypes/myths, which have been present in Serbian culture for two centuries and which have become part of the collective mentality."[223] Dejana Vukasović and Miša Stojadinović maintain that "Pan-Slavic" ideas in Serbia emerged within the specific geopolitical context of the Balkan states striving for freedom under Ottoman rule and intertwined with anti-Ottoman sentiment. This was constructed as a "special relationship" based on cultural kinship and closeness between the two Slavic Orthodox nations.[224] Similarly, Suslov calls "Pan-Slavism" a concept close to Russophila "expressed in the discursive construction by political elites of Serbian-Russian ethnocultural and religious closeness through the concepts of friendship and brotherhood, including solidarity, strong national emotions, [and] mutual sacrifice."[225] Grigorev Alexandr and Żakowska Magdalena write that Russia is "a source of inspiration and an example

[219] Brkić, "Serbian energy sector in the global political landscape amid the Russia-Ukraine war: a focus on perspectives of integration into the European Union," 29.
[220] Ibid, 18.
[221] Aleksandar Pavlović and Srđan Atanasovski. "From myth to territory: Vuk Karadžić, Kosovo epics and the role of nineteenth-century intellectuals in establishing national narratives," *Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 2 (2016): 357-376.
[222] Dorota Gil, "Reflections of the anti-occidentalism idea in Serbian cultural texts of the 20th century," *Slavia Meridionalis* 22 (2022): 1-13.
[223] Mladenov Jovanović Srđan, "Confronting Recent History: Media in Serbia During Aleksandar Vučić's Ministry of Information in the Milošević Era (1998–1999)," *Hiperboreea* 6, no. 1 (2019): 61-74.
[224] Dejana Vukasović and Miša Stojadinović, "On pan-slavism, brotherhood, and mythology: The imagery of contemporary geopolitical discourse in Serbia," In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023): 123-153, 129.
[225] Mikhail Suslov, "New Wine in an Old Wineskin: Slavophilia and Geopolitical Populism in Putin's Russia," in *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions* ed. Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, and Vladimir Đorđević (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 77-100, 125.

by virtue of their own cultural attainments."[226] Pan-Slavism, Russophila, and Slavophilia are interconnected and deeply rooted in Russian-Serbian cultural and spiritual kinship.

While shared language and a traditional culture bond the two Slavic nations, Orthodoxy and the Church underwrite the influence of this relationship. Under Ottoman rule, all Serbian political organization and civic participation had to be conducted through the Orthodox Church, cementing Orthodoxy to Serbian national identity.[227] Indeed, Orthodox Christianity for both Serbs and Russians has been closely linked to the creation of the state and preservation of national identity.[228] Russian and Serbian ethnic foundational myths (*mythomoteurs*) center on their Orthodox communities as distinct from the empires that ruled them. In Russia, the community of Orthodox peasantry created a sense of belonging distinct from the Russian Empire and imperial state. Similarly, Serbia's ethnic myth emerged in the differentiation between the Orthodox peasantry and the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. The legacy for Russians and Serbians is a "historically rooted vision of the state as an alien, autocratic and coercive entity" separate from the Russian/Serbian people.[229]

The literature describes the Pan-Slavic ideas about Serbian-Russian relations as rooted in the mythologization of historical experiences of solidarity, strong national emotions, and a common fate (mutual sacrifice/struggle and Western injustice), along with shared Byzantine heritage, traditional/conservative culture, and strong patriarchal values, positioning Russia more like the Serbian Self. This described ideological closeness fuels feelings of distinctiveness and separation from the West, furthering Othering pro-Western local actors as the radical Other and opposed to the Serbian Self.

2.4.5 Conclusions

The above literature points to Serbian identity as in-between the East and the West, underpinned by characterization of the EU and the US as untrustworthy, self-interested, and aggressive, contrasting the socio-culturally similar and therefore rationally aligned Russian Other. European disillusionment related to the abandonment of Serbian national liberation under the Ottomans, failed EU accession, and EU tolerance for the authoritarian Vučić regime contributes to a strong anti-EU and anti-West Self. Major historical national traumas inflicted on Serbians by the US (1999 NATO aggression, international sanctions, recognizing Kosovo) similarly contribute to anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism. The Russian Other, due to shared Slavic culture, Orthodox religion, position between the West and the East, and mutual suspicion

---

[226] Grigorev Alexandr and Żakowska Magdalena, "Russia in Serbian National Mythology since 19th Century until the First World War and Its Influence on the Modern International Relations," *Каспийский регион: политика, экономика, культура* 4 (2018): 117.
[227] Artem Patalakh, "Emotions and Identity as Foreign Policy Determinants: Serbian Approach to Relations with Russia," *Chinese political science review* 3, no. 4 (2018): 495-528.
[228] Srđan Barišić, "The Role of the Serbian and Russian orthodox churches in shaping governmental policies," In *The Warp of Serbian Identity*: *Anti-westernism, Russophilia, Traditionalism*, ed. Sonja Biserko, (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2016): 105-127.
[229] Jasna Dragovic-Soso, "Review of Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Russian and East European Government Politics and Policy' [Book Review]," *Reviews in History* (2016).

of Western interests, characterizes it as protectionist and a viable Western alternative. This leaning towards the East via positive characterizations of Russia will be used to explain the failure of a Western-backed civil society to gain the trust of the Serbian public.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a poststructuralist framework to analyze why Serbian civil society faces widespread distrust and how it is discursively constructed as a "radical Other." Poststructuralism, rooted in the philosophical interventions of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, challenges fixed meanings and stable identities, emphasizing their contingent, discursive, and power-laden construction. Rooted in this poststructuralist philosophy and extended through Iver Neumann's Self-Other theory and Lene Hansen's degrees of Otherness as applied to International Relations (IR), this framework examines how Serbian identity is relationally formed against external "Others" (Europe, the US, Russia) and internal actors (civil society), shaping perceptions of legitimacy and distrust.

3.1 Poststructural Foundations

Poststructuralism rejects essentialist notions of identity, viewing it as a product of discursive practices that are inherently unstable and contested. Hegel's (1809) Master-Servant Dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit* provides the foundation for Self-Other theories, positing that self-consciousness emerges through recognition by another as an inherently social and political process.[230] Hegel argues that self-consciousness, when met with the Other, sees itself as both self and not-self, or as "its own self in the other." Group identity ("us") requires a contrasting "them," often imbued with negative traits to valorize the Self.[231] I argue that in Serbia, state discourses position the Serbian Self as not wholly Western, while framing an oppositional civil society as fully Western, and therefore opposed to this identity, to discourage local support.

Derrida's (1976) concept of *deconstruction* builds on Hegel's theory, arguing that meaning is never fixed but emerges through difference–the simultaneous deferral and differentiation of signs.[232] He challenges the traditional view of language and meaning, suggesting a method of revealing the inherent instability and contradictions within systems of thought. In the context of Serbian identity, deconstruction reveals how narratives of "Self" (Western victimhood) and "Other" (Western-backed civil society) are not natural and fixed realities but constructed through oppositional relations that suppress alternative meanings. For example, the label "anti-Serb" for civil society relies on a binary that privileges the Serbian Self over the Western Other.

Foucault's (1972, 1980) work on discourse and power further grounds this framework. He argues that discourses, defined as systems of knowledge and language, produce subjects and

[230] Georg Wilhelm Freidrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807], trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 178–196.
[231] Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography,* (London: Routledge, 1998): 61.
[232] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158–159.

truths through power relations.[233] In Serbia, political elites and state media discourses of historical Western victimhood construct Western-supported civil society as a threat to the Self to maximize political power and counter Western criticism of democratic backsliding.[234] Foucault's concept of *governmentality*[235] illuminates how Western-conditioned TJ imposes disciplinary norms that clash with local identity narratives (e.g., victimhood status during the 1990s wars), rendering civil society in support of such policies framed as suspect. This power-knowledge dynamic is central to understanding the ontological disconnect between most Serbians and civil society and the discursive construction of civil society as a radical Other.

3.2 Self-Other Theory in International Relations

Iver Neumann's (1999) *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* applies poststructuralism to IR, arguing that identities are formed through relational differentiation. Neumann posits that European identity emerges by constructing "the East" as its Other, a dynamic relevant to Serbia's ambiguous positioning between East (Russia) and West (Europe, US). Extending this to the domestic sphere, civil society aligned with Western values is discursively positioned as a "radical Other," clashing with narratives of Serbian victimhood and sovereignty.[236] Neumann's poststructural approach aligns with Derrida and Foucault by emphasizing discursive contingency over fixed identities or causal links, as seen in the re-application of the "foreign mercenaries" narratives from civil society to the current student protest movement.

Lene Hansen's (2006) poststructural approach furthers Neumann's framework by introducing "degrees of Otherness," moving beyond binary Self-Other dichotomies to a spectrum of difference.[237] Hansen argues that identities are constructed through processes of linking (affirming shared traits) and differentiation (highlighting differences), with varying levels of Otherness shaping the construction of Self and Other. In her analysis of the Bosnian War, Hansen contrasts the "Balkan discourse" (constructing the Balkans as a less radical Other, linked to regional stability) with the "Genocide discourse" (implying a more radical moral Otherness), showing how degrees of Otherness influence policy without deterministic outcomes.[238]

This study adopts Hansen's concept to define "radical Other" and "less-than-radical Other." Here, the *radical Other* is defined as an entity discursively constructed as fundamentally antagonistic to the Self and threatening to its core identity. In Serbia, civil society is a radical

---

[233] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 38–39.
[234] Freedom House, "Serbia Freedom in the World 2025," https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2025/
[235] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972–1977, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 93–94.
[236] Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).
[237] Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006).
[238] Ibid, 189.

Other, labeled as “traitors” and “foreign mercenaries” for promoting Western norms that clash with characterizations of the West as imperial, hypocritical, and aggressive perpetrators. On the other hand, the *less-than-radical Other* is an entity differentiated from the Self but not wholly antagonistic, allowing partial alignment or engagement. Europe and the US are less-than-radical Others, desired for EU accession and democratization, but resisted for past and present grievances. These concepts enable analysis of Serbia’s ambiguous identity–neither fully Western nor Eastern–where elites exploit degrees of Otherness to delegitimize civil society while maintaining flexible relations with external powers.

This framework, grounded in Hegel, Derrida, Foucault, Neumann, and Hansen, examines the discursive structure of Serbian identity through differentiation from less-than-radical Others (Europe, US, Russia) and the radical Other (civil society). Foucault’s power-knowledge dynamics explain how nationalist discourses, through by the state-controlled media, delegitimize civil society to maintain elite power. Derrida’s deconstruction reveals how these discourses suppress alternative narratives, such as local discontent with corruption or the desire to join the EU. Hansen’s degrees of Otherness are used to analyze how elites construct civil society as radical Others through discourses of betrayal, while portraying Europe/US as the less-than-radical Others to reap the benefits in pursuing pro-Western and pro-Russian policies. This framework sets the stage for Chapter 4's analysis using poststructural discourse analysis (PDA), which will trace these discursive constructions to explain civil society’s distrust and delegitimization in Serbia.

Chapter 4: Methodological Framework

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining Lene Hansen's (2006) poststructural discourse analysis (PDA) single-Self, second model with semi-structured interviews to investigate low levels of trust and participation with civil society in Serbia. Grounded in the poststructural Self-Other framework (Chapter 3), this methodology analyzes how Serbian identity is discursively constructed against external Others (Europe, US, Russia) and internal actors (civil society). By integrating discourse analysis of official, media, and oppositional discourses with 19 interviews of civil society actors, the study addresses three research questions: Why do most Serbians distrust local civil society? How do media and pro-government actors construct civil society as a "radical Other"? And, what are the lasting effects of Western-conditioned transitional justice and external funding dependency on civil society legitimacy?

PDA is combined with a qualitative interview component to investigate why Serbians largely distrust and disengage from local civil society. The qualitative component consists of 19 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors conducted in Belgrade from October 2024 to May 2025. These interviews explore civil society actors' internal perceptions of their roles, legitimacy, and the public distrust they face, all contextualized within Serbia's identity positioned between East and West. This dual approach supports the theoretical framework by enabling a nuanced exploration of the intersection between external discourse and internal organizational perspectives to fuel local distrust and disengagement. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for probing emergent themes and letting the conversation naturally flow to what interests the interviewees, aligning with poststructural theoretical and methodology focus on identity and discursive construction. This ensures a comprehensive picture that bridges theoretical insights with empirical evidence, addressing both the "why" and "how" of civil society distrust.

4.1 Poststructural Discourse Analysis (PDA)

Adopting Lene Hansen's (2006) poststructural discourse analysis (PDA), this study theorizes "facts" and "events" (e.g., the 1999 NATO bombing, Kosovo's independence, and EU conditionality) as discursively constituted phenomena that shape Serbian identity and public distrust toward civil society. As Hansen notes, "discourse analysis is not adverse to the importance of 'facts' and 'events,' but… once established as such, 'facts' and 'events' might be mobilized by critical discourses that challenge official representations."[239] Through a discourse analysis of Serbian historical narratives, the study will argue that the West is constructed as Serbia's less-than-radical Other, allowing local pro-Western actors (civil society here, but also independent journalists, the student protest movement, opposition political actors) to be constructed as Serbia's "radical Other." I argue that Serbian political elites simultaneously

[239] Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 190.

maintain pro-EU/pro-US and pro-Russia policies by constituting the Serbian Self as in-between the East and the West, labelling Others that go 'too far' towards the West as traitors, anti-Serb, and ultimately the radical Other. This positioning enables local elites to reap political benefits from the West and the East while maintaining public support by framing actors who align too closely with the West as traitors, thereby circumventing potential 'identity backlash' from a public that identifies neither fully Western nor Eastern.

Hansen's PDA provides the primary methodological framework, analyzing identity construction across multiple discursive arenas. PDA assumes identities are produced through processes of *linking* (affirming shared traits) and *differentiation* (highlighting differences), with "degrees of Otherness" shaping legitimacy.[240] In Serbian discourse, Russia is linked as sharing cultural and religious traits and as a joint victim of the West and NATO. On the other hand, the EU and the US are differentiated from Self as selfish perpetrators fundamentally misaligned with Serbian cultural values and historic victimhood. This aligns with the theoretical framework's emphasis on Hegel's relational ontology and Neumann's Self-Other theory, which conceptualizes Serbia's in-between identity–neither fully Western nor Eastern–with Europe/US as less-than-radical Others, Russia as a like Self, and civil society as the radical Other.

This is a single-Self study of Serbian national identity and employs Hansen's second intertextual model, which analyzes official political discourse, wider media debates, oppositional political parties, and corporate groups.[241] This model captures both official and competing discourses, revealing how pro-European actors in Serbia adopt similar narratives of Western "hypocrisy" and "imperialism" as those found in official discourse. Hansen's third model, which includes popular culture and marginal political discourses, was excluded due to my limited Serbian language proficiency, constraining access to such sources.

Hansen suggests studying the discourses of both Self and Other to inform the "discursive and political room of maneuver" in foreign policy.[242] While comparing Serbian discourses with those in EU member states about Serbia could offer interesting insights, such an approach would not be entirely relevant for the focus of this study on local perceptions of Serbian civil society. Instead, the research examines EU-related discourses in Serbia as a foundation for understanding their application to civil society but intentionally avoids broadening the analysis to external perspectives. A single-Self study can highlight the contested and unstable nature of Serbian identity and emphasize transformations and contestations within the Self.[243] Focusing on Hansen's second model, the study finds "re-articulations of the official national Self"[244] through differentiation from the "hypocritical" and "imperial" West.

The analysis centers on discourses from 2020 to the first half of 2025, a period chosen for growing political unrest, discontent with the Vučić regime, and disillusionment with stalled EU accession. I chose 2020 as the starting year because of Serbia's democratic backsliding,

[240] Ibid, 52-56.
[241] Ibid, 66.
[242] Ibid, 68.
[243] Ibid, 69.
[244] Ibid.

increased government control over the media, attacks on civil society, and erosion of judicial independence. This is reflected in Freedom House downgrading Serbia's status from "Free" to "Partly Free" in its Freedom in the World 2019 report.[245] This temporal focus captures a salient "moment" in Serbian politics while referencing key historical events–such as the 1999 NATO bombing, Operation Storm, and Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence–that continue to shape contemporary narratives. A shorter timeframe, rather than a longer historical analysis, is justified by the persistent reproduction of these events in Serbian discourse.

Finally, textual selections follow Hansen's research design by taking texts from the time under study (2020-2025) and historical material tracing the genealogy of dominant representations (1999 NATO bombing, Kosovo's declaration of independence). Second, I include frequently quoted key texts, giving priority to the study of primary texts, such as presidential statements, speeches, and interviews, and reportage and editorials for the study of pro-government and oppositional discourses.[246]

4.2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

From October 2024 to May 2025, I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors in Serbia; 18 in Belgrade and 1 in Novi Sad. Participants were defined as individuals currently or previously employed in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and research institutes/think tanks focused on human rights, TJ, reconciliation, rule of law, and democracy promotion. The interview data represents well-known and active NGOs, including Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), Heartefact, Center for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD, *Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju*), Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM, formerly Yugoslav Lawyer Committee for Human Rights), Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA), Belgrade International Law Circle, A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, research institutes/think tanks such as Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BSCP) and Center for Holocaust Research and Education (CHRE), and academics in related fields (human rights, philosophy) who previously worked in NGOs or other non-profit institutions. The diversity of organizations represented in this data aims to capture what outsiders perceive as civil society, as most would usually not differentiate between different NGOs or think tanks, instead categorizing all actors taking part in this space as "civil society."

Initial contacts for participants were established through professional and personal networks (contacts through the Faculty of Political Science, LinkedIn messaging) and snowball sampling, where participants recommended colleagues. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes, was conducted in English, and took place in-person (in cafes or offices around Belgrade). Interviews followed a guide with open-ended questions exploring participants'

[245] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat," 2019, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/democracy-retreat.
[246] Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 73-74.

perceptions of civil society, public distrust, Western influence, state narratives, and how Serbia should deal with its past.

The conversations were structured around the participants' field of interest and past and current work experience, based on research conducted prior to the interview. The interviews began with questions about their organization and its activities and programs related to TJ and dealing with the past, and then to outside perceptions of Belgrade's civil society and identifying shortcomings related to public distrust within the organization and civil society at large.

Questions included: *How do you combat the challenge of reaching new people who would benefit the most from this work?* And *what is the environment civil society organizations operate in Belgrade?* Along with more critical questions: *Explain the role of Western funding in the civil society sector in Belgrade and Serbia. How does this play out "on the ground*? And *what are the shortcomings of civil society?* The conversations were very flexible and evolved naturally to probe emergent themes. Interviews followed a self-created guide informed by preliminary research on the participants' past work experiences and interests, with questions that included *How did you become interested in this field?* The open-ended nature of the questions was intended to explore participants' perceptions of civil society as an actor in Serbian society.

4.2.1 Limitations

In conducting this research, it becomes essential to recognize its inherent limitations, which are crucial for maintaining the study's integrity and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of its outcomes. The research faces several significant constraints delineated between methodological and theoretical limitations, detailed below.

Firstly, the decision not to record the interviews and instead rely on handwritten notes during the interviews poses a significant limitation. This choice was made to foster a natural conversational atmosphere, as recording might have inhibited participants in Serbia's political context, marked by rising digital surveillance and repression against civil society actors. However, note-taking likely resulted in less comprehensive data, as nuances and direct quotes may have been missed. To mitigate this, I typed my handwritten notes directly after the interview.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in English without the presence or use of a translator, a non-native language for most participants, potentially limiting the depth of expression. Although all participants were fluent or near fluent in English, subtle nuances in their perspectives may have been lost compared to interviews in Serbian. This was mitigated by allowing participants to clarify responses and using follow-up questions to probe complex ideas, yet the fluency of participants minimized this constraint.

The study relies on interviews with civil society actors currently or previously employed in NGOs, think tanks, and research institutes, offering an "inside" perspective on civil society characterizations. While this approach provides valuable depth, insider perspectives may overemphasize internal challenges or external pressures, while underrepresenting public or non-civil society viewpoints on distrust. This limits the study's ability to capture the broader public's

perceptions directly. To mitigate this bias, the analysis was based on Self-Other theory, which offers a theoretical grounding to understand Serbian identity used to contextualize civil society narratives. Secondary sources, such as public opinion studies and media reports, were used to triangulate findings. The inclusion of three former civil society actors who left due to dissatisfaction (and thus, are highly critical of civil society) additionally rectifies this limitation by including more critical perspectives as a type of "dual actor" (as both a civil society insider and outsider).

The participants were not recruited in any systematic way; they were recruited based on professional and personal connections and availability, and willingness to participate. This convenience sampling may introduce selection bias, as participants might share similar viewpoints or be more open to discussing TJ issues. To mitigate this, the interviews came from a diverse background from 8 NGOs (covering topics such as human rights, peace, dealing with the past, social and political issues, alternative education, rule of law, EU integration, war crime documentation, minority social rights), 4 research and education institutions/think tanks (security policy, democracy, international law, history, political science), and 3 scholars (human rights, philosophy, social theory, economics).

The study's focus on Belgrade, Serbia's capital, and the concentration of NGOs and research institutes, restricts its representation of civil society perspectives across Serbia. Regional variations, such as those between Vojvodina and southern Serbia, may reflect different dynamics of distrust or Othering, limiting the generalizability of findings to Serbia as a whole country.

Finally, the interviews were conducted during a period of massive and widespread civil unrest in Serbia. Fortunately, this did not complicate my ability to find willing and able participants; rather, there seemed to be renewed energy and hope among civil society actors and people in general. However, the lack of European acknowledgement and continued support of the authoritarian regime despite massive political unrest may have contributed to increased negative EU perceptions.

Chapter 5: Analysis

The literature review (Chapter 2) reveals how the dominant nationalist discourse constructs the West as imperial, hypocritical, and aggressive, while positioning Russia as Serbia's protective, cultural kin. This section demonstrated how negative Western characteristics are transferred to Serbian civil society through their association with Western funding and priorities. This represents the core process by which international support for pro-Western policies and values becomes weaponized as evidence of foreign manipulation and domestic treachery.

Using mainstream media reports, elite interviews, political speeches, and public opinion polling, combined with qualitative insights from 19 interviews with Serbian civil society actors, the following discourse analysis will reveal how contrasting characterizations of Western and Russian actors create a framework that is then applied to perceptions of civil society. The dichotomous framing of the "untrustworthy West" versus the "protective Russia" establishes the conceptual foundation upon which civil society actors are later evaluated and categorized.

I first look at public opinion polling and domestic discourse in Serbia by pro-government and opposition actors related to the EU, the US, and Russia. Although opposition actors are the strongest supporters of Serbia's EU accession, the hypocritical, imperial, and perpetrator characterizations of the EU and the US are maintained in both government and oppositional discourses. Based on the selected discourse and insights from the interview transcripts, I then identify three interrelated characterizations of Serbian civil society as foreign-funded, misaligned with local priorities, and against Serbian national interests. I end this chapter with suggestions for action from the interviewees, early insights from the ongoing student protest movement, and areas for future research.

5.1 Constructing the Western Other and Russian Self

Discourses framing the EU as a self-interested and imperial actor emphasize its hypocrisy and complicity in Serbian suffering, aligning civil society with a duplicitous West. In President Vučić's September 2023 UN General Assembly speech, he accused the "powerful West" of "violating [the] norms of international law but also basic human moralities" in their adamant support for Ukraine on the grounds of territorial integrity, while infringing on Serbia's territorial sovereignty through support for Kosovo's independence in 2008.[247] He criticized Western hypocrisy, stating, "They didn't laugh out loud when the Russian President used the very same words, justifying his attack against Ukraine… It is only a bit sad that all the big ones… call upon

[247] Aleksandar Vučić, "Address by the President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić at the General Debate of the 78th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations," Speech presented at the United Nations General Assembly, New York, NY, September 21, 2023. https://www.predsednik.rs/en/press-center/news/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-serbia-at-the-general-debate-of-the-78th-session-of-the-general-assembly-of-the-united-nations.

different principles in different circumstances." Vučić dichotomizes power asymmetries through antonyms: "small Serbia" versus the "most powerful"/"big ones," framing the EU as an imperial actor applying "dual standards" due to geopolitical dominance and ideological superiority.

A 2025 RTS (the main pro-government state television and the most trusted media outlet in Serbia) article on "Operation Storm" (the 1995 ethnic cleansing of Croatian Serbs from the Kraljina), began by emphasizing Croatia's EU and NATO membership: "Croatia, a member of the EU and NATO, is experiencing an atmosphere of celebration and glorification of persecution," and noting that, "many in Europe do not mind the fact that unburied bones from World War II and Operation Storm still lie scattered throughout the country."[248] By framing Croatia's actions as representative of the EU and NATO, the narrative transfers historical trauma from the 1990s Yugoslav wars to these larger actors, portraying it as participatory in Serbian suffering. It claims, "the bodies of murdered civilians… have never been investigated," reinforcing feelings of unfairness and hypocrisy related to post-conflict justice measures, associated with civil society as the core local implementers.

Oppositional discourse in Serbia maintains perceptions of EU hypocrisy related to the lack of EU support for local activism around the environment, anti-corruption, and democracy as core European values. In 2022, the Anglo-Australian mining company Rio Tinto began negotiations with Serbia's government to begin a massive mining project in western Serbia,[249] projected to have high environmental consequences on the local land and water.[250] As such, pro-European and pro-democracy oppositional actors claimed the mining project contradicted European environmental objectives, due to economic and political gains from owning the supply chain in lithium battery production. The prioritization of individual EU states' interests over environmental concerns and European values supports the narrative of the West as hypocritical and imperial, inspiring around tens of thousands of protesters in Belgrade against the project.[251]

The independent media outlet *Vreme* published an article titled "Silent: The "Jadar" project [Rio Tinto] is being pushed by a "bunch of hypocrites from the EU."[252] The article quotes the president of a Serbian environmental NGO stating that the Rio Tinto project is "proof that it is a bunch of hypocrites, actually greedy people, who have been supporting Aleksandar Vučić all these twelve years."[253] The article adopts the same discursive framework of pro-regime elites: we must protect "us" (the Serbs) from "them" (the EU), playing on Serbian identity as victims of larger, external powers. The NGO president is further quoted telling *Vreme,* "We will defend our country whoever attacks it… Those who include such projects in their agendas, be it the

[248] RTS, "Operation Storm – are there acceptable crimes?" July 8, 2025, https://www.rts.rs/vesti/merila-vremena/4473127/operacija-oluja--da-li-postoje-prihvatljivi-zlocini-.html.
[249] Balkan Insight, "Rio Tinto Spends Million Euros on Serbian Land since Mine Cancellation," 2021, https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/23/rio-tinto-spends-million-euros-on-serbian-land-since-mine-cancellation/.
[250] BBC, "Thousands protest against lithium mining in Serbia," 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cged9qgwrvyo.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Vreme, June 4, 2025, https://vreme.com/en/vesti/cuta-projekat-jadar-gura-gomila-licemera-iz-eu/.
[253] Ibid.

European Union or Russia, do not wish us well."[254] The political unrest the Rio Tinto project amassed is a testament to the strength of any argument that can position a more powerful actor 'taking advantage' of Serbia's weakness on the global stage, evidenced in the previously analyzed UN speech.

The following year, in 2024, students across the country organized massive protests demanding government accountability, anti-corruption, and transparency after a train station canopy collapsed in Novi Sad, killing 16 people. Again, these protests have been met with scant acknowledgement or support from the EU. Posters plastered in front of blockaded school buildings sum up this message clearly (written in English, compared to almost all other signs written in Serbian): "EU/EC DON'T BE AV COMPLICIT! LEARN EUROPEAN VALUES FROM SERBIAN STUDENTS!"[255] Taken together, the economic and political gains benefitting individual European countries and the EU are seen as outweighing support for supposed European values, exposing the hollowness of the European ideal and breeding feelings of hypocrisy and unfairness.

The *European Western Balkans,* an independent online portal that focuses on EU enlargement policy, published an article titled, "EU criticized for staying silent on momentous protests in Serbia."[256] It reports on a leaked message from the EU Director-General that after meeting with Serbian opposition and civil society, the EU would not accept or support a change of power in Serbia. It references US politician Richard Grenell's post on X that there is no support for "those who undermine the rule of law or who forcefully take over government buildings,"[257] despite the overwhelmingly peaceful student protests at the time this paper is being written in July 2025. This positions the West on the side of the government and against the student protests for believing Vučić's false narratives of violent student protestors, confirming their hypocritical and self-interested character.

The Balkan European Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) published an article written by a Serbian professor at the University of Graz in Hungary, Marko Kmezić, criticizing the EU's lack of support for the protests. He blames the "EU's stabilitocratic approach to the region over the past decades" for having engendered "a new generation of autocrats."[258] He evidences the EU's duplicity: supporting Serbia's autocratic president for not posing a danger to destabilizing the Balkans, while punishing Serbia for its lack of democracy and corruption. These media reports demonstrate the increasing frustration within Serbia's pro-EU and pro-democracy minority, while at the same time, a call for external help to transition the country towards a democratic future.

---

[254] Ibid.
[255] Observation by author, April 20, 2025.
[256] European Western Balkans, "EU criticized for staying silent on momentous protests in Serbia," January 29, 2025, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/01/29/eu-criticized-for-staying-silent-on-momentous-protests-in-serbia/.
[257] N1, "Grenell on Serbia protest> We do not support those who forefully take over government buildings," January 26, 2025, https://n1info.rs/english/news/grenell-on-serbia-protest-we-do-not-support-those-who-forcefully-take-over-government-buildings/.
[258] Marko Kmeszić, "Student protests in Serbia: The eleventh hour for EU fundamentals," September 2008, https://www.biepag.eu/blog/student-protests-in-serbia-the-eleventh-hour-for-eu-fundamentals.

Anti-Americanism and the 1999 NATO Bombing

Anti-American sentiment runs deeper, rooted in collective trauma from the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. Nearly 60% of Serbian citizens see the US as having a negative influence on Serbia, 69% believe the US only invests in Serbia because of economic interests, and not because of friendship with Serbia, and the US ranks third as the biggest enemy of Serbia (after Croatia and Albania).[259] In 2020, public opinion polling showed that 80% of Serbians were against NATO membership, 54% had a negative opinion about NATO,[260] and 75% perceived NATO enlargement as a threat.[261] In a separate opinion poll from 2024, more than two-thirds of Serbians opposed any cooperation with NATO,[262] and 70% viewed the US as the greatest security threat to Europe.[263]

On the 25th anniversary of the bombing in 2024, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) reported:

> "Air attacks by NATO forces on Serbia, that is, the then FRY, began on this day 25 years ago - March 24, 1999. It is estimated that around 2,500 civilians died, including 89 children, and around 6,000 people were wounded. Bridges were destroyed, infrastructure was destroyed, schools were bombed, health facilities, media houses, embassies, cultural monuments, churches, and monasteries were destroyed, and there is almost no city that was not targeted by NATO bombs."[264]

This collective trauma is institutionalized through education and media, with primary school students reading texts declaring:

> "NATO attacked our country because we were determined to defend our freedom and the right to independently determine our internal affairs. The main aim of the aggressor was to destroy our country and enslave our people.'"[265]

Anti-NATO discourse began under the Milošević regime and has been re-institutionalized in the last decade by President Vučić, condemning the campaign as an illegal

---

[259] Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BSCP), "Many Faces of Serbian Foreign Policy Public Opinion and Geopolitical Balancing," November 20, 2020, 8-9, https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/many-faces-of-serbian-foreign-policy-public-opinion-and-geopolitical-balancing/.
[260] European Western Balkans, "Survey: 80% of Serbian citizens against NATO membership, but only 33% against cooperation," November 17, 2020, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/11/17/survey-80-of-serbian-citizens-against-nato-membership-but-only-33-against-cooperation/.
[261] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Serbia: Security Radar 2025 Europe – Lost in Geopolitics," https://peace.fes.de/security-radar-2025/country-profiles/serbia.html.
[262] Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BSCP), "Public Perception of Serbian Foreign Policy in the Midst of the War in Ukraine," December 14, 2022, https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.
[263] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Serbia: Security Radar 2025 Europe – Lost in Geopolitics," https://peace.fes.de/security-radar-2025/country-profiles/serbia.html.
[264] Radio Television Serbia (RTS), "Navršava se 25 godina od početka NATO agresije," March 24, 2024, https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5396819/navrsava-se-25-godina-od-pocetka-nato-agresije.html.
[265] Mandić, "Official Commemoration of the NATO Bombing of Serbia," 466.

attack and a collective trauma that demonstrates Serbian strength and defiance.[266] Serbians today are more opposed to NATO than they were in the years directly after the bombing campaign in 1999, which many attribute to the increasing negative media coverage of NATO since 2012/2014.[267] The Council for Strategic Policy in Belgrade found that nearly 60% of total front-page news stories about NATO are in the context of the bombing in 1999.[268] This supports the study's methodological choice in PDA, as the growing negative opinions towards NATO alongside decreasing temporal significance indicate the salience in discursive construction for public opinion formation.

In another example, Belgrade's current refusal to join in on sanctions against Russia highlights strategic interests over Kosovo, identification with Russian anti-NATO sentiments, and the enduring legacies of sanctions in Serbia today. In 2022, 80% of Serbians were against imposing sanctions on Russia, with 44% citing the reason of having lived under sanctions,[269] parroting Vucic's justification for refusing sanctions because "we (Serbia) know from our own experience what it feels like when sanctions are imposed on you."[270] Implicitly, this discourse positions Serbia and Russia as the collective Self, victim of unjustified Western sanctions, by contrasting with the Western sanctions imposers.

The 1999 NATO bombing and international sanctions led to Serbia's eventual defeat, and the EU and US are the main funders and supporters of Serbia's post-conflict justice and democratic transition. After the 1990s wars, civil society became TJ and democratization advocates, pushing Serbia to deal with the past and take accountability for war crimes and abuses. Most civil society actors and organizations support the NATO bombing to end the war and human rights abuses in Kosovo[271] and are key implementers in Western TJ and democracy-building projects. The suffering and loss felt during the war and in the post-conflict period related to the failed promises of TJ and democracy are constructed as part of the Serbian Self and in opposition to the West and civil society Others. The negative feelings associated with the traumatic event are discursively sustained and transferred to civil society as supporters of the intervention and Western post-conflict policies.

Russia, The Slavic Brother

[266] Perparim Gutaj, "Beyond independence: Anti-Americanism and the Serb resistance in Kosova," *Iliria International Review* 3, no. 1 (2013): 183-214; Satjukow, Elisa. "The Making of 24 March. Commemorations of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Serbia, 1999–2019." *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 70, no. 2 (2022): 289-309.
[267] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Serbia: Security Radar 2025 Europe – Lost in Geopolitics," https://peace.fes.de/security-radar-2025/country-profiles/serbia.html.
[268] European Western Balkans, "NATO and Serbia – Discrepancy between media narrative and the existing cooperation, February 26, 2021, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/02/26/nato-and-serbia-discrepancy-between-media-narrative-and-the-existing-cooperation/.
[269] BCSP, "Public Perception of Serbian Foreign Policy in the Midst of the War in Ukraine," December 14, 2022, 12, https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.
[270] Euractiv, "Vučić reiterates refusal to sanction Russia: 'A friend in need is a friend indeed,'" February 21, 2024, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/vucic-reiterates-refusal-to-sanction-russia-a-friend-in-need-is-a-friend-indeed/.
[271] Interview by author, February 18, 2025.

In stark contrast, Russia is constructed not as an "Other" but as an extension of the Serbian Self. Polls reflect the largely pro-Russian Serbian public: 51% of Serbians believe Russia is the closest foreign policy partner of Serbia, 65.8% see Russia as a "friend" to Serbia, and 47% believe cooperation with Russia is an alternative to the EU.[272] Russia's great power status presents an ideologically and ontologically comfortable alternative to the above-described Western external pressure and mistreatment. Among Serbian citizens, there is a widespread belief that Russia will side with Serbia against the West, specifically in response to Kosovo and NATO expansion.[273] Shared Slavic culture and Orthodox religion characterize Russia as a "protector" and "natural partner" against shared enemies, namely the EU and the US.

Vučić's Moscow visit for the "80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War" emphasized Russia's "great support to the territorial integrity of Serbia" and expressed his gratitude to the Red Army for liberating the country from the Nazi invaders. Vučić positioned both countries as partners against Western historical revisionism, drawing on WWII cooperation between the Red Army and the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army. In response to European condemnations for Vučić's Moscow visit, he stated that the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church have "always worked together" in a "symphony between them for decades."[274] Putin recalled the "friendship of our brotherly peoples forged during those harsh war years,"[275] supporting the cultural and familial kin-like relationship sustaining pro-Russian discourse and policies in Serbia.

In an analysis on Russian soft power in Serbia, the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BSCP) found that Russia's "enormous popularity" is not based on the attractiveness as a political and social model, but "on the fact that the majority of the public in Serbia sees Russia as an alternative to the West, by which it feels betrayed, abandoned and never fully accepted." Russia's popularity and "soft power capital" in Serbia is the product of bitter memories of the 1990s, rejection by the West, Kosovo's independence, and the idea of Russia as a counterforce to Western primacy. In sum, "Russia's soft power may not reflect Russia as it is, but it does serve as a powerful antidepressant-like narrative that comforts the Serbian society by confirming its own entrenched beliefs."[276]

In 2025, RTS reported on the Russia-Ukraine war titled, "If the West wanted peace, it would not send weapons to Ukraine, three dead in attack on Dnipropetrovsk," summarizing Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.[277] The speech uses "the collective

---

[272] BCSP, "Public Perception of Serbian Foreign Policy in the Midst of the War in Ukraine," December 14, 2022, https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.
[273] Vuk Vuksanovic, "Systemic pressures, party politics and foreign policy: Serbia between Russia and the West, 2008-2020." PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021.
[274] https://www.nin.rs/english/news/75152/vucic-i-will-go-to-moscow-for-the-may-9-parade.
[275] APT, "Serbia's Vucic Tells Putin: 'We Must Prevent the Revision of History' During V-Day Talks," May 10, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qwrvcvHlrA.
[276] https://bezbednost.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/How-does-Russian-soft-power-in-Serbia-really-work.pdf.
[277] RTS, "Zakharova, If the West wanted peace, it would not send weapons to Ukraine, three dead in attack on Dnipropetrovsk," July 26, 2025, https://www.rts.rs/vesti/ratu-u-ukrajini/5758228/zaharova-da-zapad-zeli-mir-ne-bi-slao-oruzje-ukrajini-troje-mrtvih-u-napadu-na-dnjepropetrovsk.html.

West" and "NATO" interchangeably, associating the negative memories of the NATO bombing with "the West," again creating a dichotomy of Serbia and Russia as one Self against the Western Other. The shared Western victim identity is reinforced by Putin's claims that blame the West and NATO expansion for his invasion of Ukraine.[278]

The dichotomous discursive framing of Russia as the only viable alternative to the West makes Russian discourse in Serbia crucial for understanding discourse on the West and civil society. As one interviewee explained, "Serbia loves Russia for what it is not… it is not the West."[279]Almost all European countries condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea (2014) and invasion of Ukraine (2022), but Serbia continues to remain neutral. Serbian policy-makers defend their policy as realpolitik, but a more critical analysis should consider Serbia's competing identity narratives between belonging to Europe and its historical Russian brotherhood.[280]

Having established how Serbian discourse constructs the Western Other as untrustworthy and imperial while positioning Russia as protective and culturally aligned, we can now turn to examine how these same discourses are applied to a pro-Western civil society. The opposing framing identified above–Western hypocrisy and aggression versus Russian protection and cultural kinship–provides the conceptual infrastructure through which Serbian society evaluates domestic civil society actors.

5.2 Discourses on Civil Society

The Vučić regime discredits civil society through perpetuating a narrative that depicts the opposition as foreign mercenaries and enemies of Serbia through its reliance on Western finances. The prominence of these narratives in media and their ability to leverage an identity built on ambiguity, victimization, and external imposition sustains the widespread distrust and disengagement with civil society in Serbia. The logic appears straightforward: organizations receiving funding and supporting the hypocritical, aggressive, and manipulative Western states cannot authentically represent Serbian interests. As one interview participant explained, this narrative "sticks" because of the "troubling relationship with the West" rooted in "painful memories of the 1990s," frustration with Kosovo's independence, and "all the failures and disappointment of the post-Milošević transition."[281] The Serbian government exploits this fertile terrain by ensuring that Western funding becomes interpreted through the lens of Western malevolence rather than Western support. The following subsections are divided into the three overlapping narratives that dominate the discourse on Serbia's civil society: foreign funding, misalignment with local priorities, and anti-Serb traitors.

---

[278] John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 77.
[279] Interview by author, April 28, 2025.
[280] Filip Ejdus, "Beyond National Interests: Identity Conflict and Serbia's Neutrality toward the Crisis in Ukraine," *Südosteuropa* 62, no. 3 (2014): 348-362.
[281] Interview by author, April 28, 2025.

5.2.1 Foreign Funding

The most pervasive mechanism for Othering civil society operates through narratives that equate foreign funding with foreign control. This discursive strategy exploits the same suspicions of Western self-interest and manipulation that characterize broader anti-Western sentiment in Serbia. Put simply, organizations that receive funding from the EU and the US cannot genuinely serve Serbian interests, as they are beholden to their Western sponsors who have historically demonstrated hostility toward Serbia.

The 2020 so-called "List case" exemplifies this strategy's targeted nature. The Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering published a list of 20 individuals and 37 organizations' financial transactions from the national bank. The list only included anti-regime movements, excluding hundreds of other donation-based organizations such as religious communities, sports associations, and nationalist movements that support the government or are non-political. After the Ministry of Finance refused to provide an accurate explanation of their selection criteria, the UN, CoE, and EU condemned this publication as "clear targeted pressure of civil society."[282]

In February 2025, the Serbian authorities and mainstream media and tabloids used the US administration's public condemnation and shutdown of USAID to label local organizations receiving USAID funds as "criminals" laundering money to destabilize and meddle in local elections. The Higher Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade ordered a police raid of three NGOs (the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA), the Trag Foundation, and the Center for Practical Policy), seizing all documents related to this funding.[283] The pro-government media (*RTS*, *Telegraf*, and *Novosti*) immediately and falsely reported that the seized documents found that CRTA received 190,000 euros from USAID to sow political unrest by funneling funds to the Serbian political opposition party named "Let the stinks go away" ("*Da smradovi odu*").[284] These reports were later retracted after CRTA filed a criminal complaint against the President and the Chief Public Prosecutor for the use of unverified, fabricated, and false information, wrongfully stating that the organization attempted to overthrow the government. CRTA received 190,000 dinars (around 1,600 euros) for an environmental project to map environmental issues

[282] Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BSCP), "Attacks on Civil Society and Organizations in Serbia in 2020," June 10, 2021, https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/attacks-on-civil-society-activists-and-organizations-in-serbia-in-2020/.
[283] Serbian Monitor, "Serbian prosecutors investigate NGOs over USAID funding," February 27, 2025, https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/serbian-prosecutors-investigate-ngos-over-usaid-funding/#google_vignette.
[284] Republika.rs, "BIĆE JOŠ MNOGO IZNENAĐENJA NAREDNIH DANA! Vučić: USAID plaćao 190.000 evra organizaciji "Da smradovi odu,"" ("There will be many more supresises in the coming days! Vučić: USAID paid 190,000 euros to organization "Let the smell go away,"") March 9, 2025, https://www.republika.rs/vesti/politika/636602/aleksandar-vucic-veza-usaid-i-crta**;** Balkan Insight, "USAID Shutdown Empowers Online Attacks on NGOs and Free Media," March 31, 2025,"https://balkaninsight.com/2025/03/31/usaid-shutdown-empowers-online-attacks-on-ngos-and-free-media/; CRTA, "Criminal complaint against President Vučić and others over leaked information from the investigation against CRTA," March 13, 2025, https://crta.rs/en/criminal-complaint-against-president-vucic-and-others-over-leaked-information-from-the-investigation-against-crta/.

and the lack of access to drinking water in Zrenjanin, Serbia, years before the student protests began.[285]

Reflecting scholars such as Fagan and Belloni, one participant believed that NGOs' reliance on foreign funding is a "systematic problem" because organizations are "not accountable to anyone but foreign governments, which have different national interests than Serbia."[286] However, another civil society activist characterized funding as "always a problem," arguing that equivalent foreign financing received by the government faces no comparable scrutiny.[287] This asymmetry illustrates the power of discursive construction: while both state and civil society actors receive substantial US and EU funding, only civil society organizations are subjected to systematic delegitimization based on their financial sources. However, an interviewee employed at the International Republican Institute (IRI), a prominent American democracy promotion organization, reported experiencing minimal suspicion or resistance from colleagues outside the civil society sector regarding her employment at a US-funded NGO.[288] She attributed this relative acceptance to the organization's explicit transparency about its American funding sources, suggesting that open acknowledgment of Western ties can partially mitigate public skepticism when organizations do not attempt to obscure their international connections.

This narrative is particularly effective because it builds upon existing suspicions of Western motives established through historical grievances, as described in Chapter 2. Just as the US-led sanctions of the 1990s are remembered as collective punishment of the Serbian people, contemporary Western funding of civil society organizations is framed as a continuation of Western attempts to undermine Serbia. The discourse transforms legitimate development assistance into evidence of ongoing Western infringement on Serbia, making civil society complicit in this perceived assault on Serbian sovereignty.

5.2.2 Misalignment with Local Priorities

Beyond funding concerns, Serbian civil society faces criticism for prioritizing Western-imposed agendas over authentic Serbian needs. This second mechanism of Othering operates through claims that civil society organizations have become so aligned with Western interests that they no longer represent the Serbian people they ostensibly serve. The critique centers on two main areas: the focus on TJ initiatives that challenge Serbian historical narratives, and reconciliation work over immediate economic concerns.

Interview participants consistently identified this misalignment as a source of public skepticism. As explained by one interviewee, public opinion polls reflect that citizens' largest concerns are economic problems (e.g., employment, salary, inflation, and corruption), yet

[285] CRTA, "Criminal complaint against President Vučić and others over leaked information from the investigation against CRTA," 13 March 2025, https://crta.rs/en/criminal-complaint-against-president-vucic-and-others-over-leaked-information-from-the-investigation-against-crta/.
[286] Interview by author, December 2, 2024.
[287] Interview by author, November 21, 2024.
[288] Interview by author, October 8, 2024.

identity, memorialization, and reconciliation work are the focus of most NGOs and research institutes.[289] This is directly linked to the rejection of TJ, since, as one researcher stated, organizations are "simply more likely to get funding for TJ or reconciliation work."[290] One participant suggested that civil society should be "more grounded in the society you come from and ask what are the needs of the people here, [and] frame it more based on that."[291]

The TJ insistence proves particularly problematic because it requires confronting aspects of Serbian involvement in the 1990s conflicts that contradict dominant narratives of Serbian victimization. One participant noted there is "no money in talking about Serbian suffering,"[292] suggesting that Western funding priorities push civil society toward addressing Serbian-perpetrated crimes over than crimes experienced by Serbians. This creates a fundamental tension: addressing Western concerns about Serbian accountability versus addressing Serbian concerns about recognition of Serbian suffering. In another interesting example, one participant explained that NGOs receiving funding from the US and German governments refuse to advocate for an end to the genocide in Gaza, reflecting the pro-Israeli stance of both foreign governments.[293] The identified problem is that, rather than root economic and political issues being addressed, which would more closely reflect the needs of ordinary citizens, memorialization and identity issues proliferate.

An activist from Heartefact identified a crucial gap in civil society representation, noting that Serbian civil society "falls on the far-left and nationalists are on the far-right, leaving a huge mass of the Serbian population in between and not represented by either."[294] This observation suggests that civil society's Western orientation has contributed to its isolation from mainstream Serbian opinion, creating space for government narratives that position civil society as fundamentally alien to Serbian values and interests.

5.2.3 The "Anti-Serb" Traitors

The most aggressive mechanism for Othering civil society involves direct character assassination through accusations of treachery and anti-Serbian sentiment. This strategy moves beyond questioning funding sources or priorities to fundamentally challenging the patriotism and loyalty of civil society actors. President Vučić's televised statement that "Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) hates everything which is Serb"[295] exemplifies this approach, which seeks to position civil society organizations as enemies of the Serbian people rather than merely misguided or foreign-influenced. In a more subtle, indirect manipulation of the perceptions of civil society, one activist working at YIHR was interviewed on RTS and condemned the violence

[289] Interview by author, December 2, 2024.
[290] Interview by author, February 7, 2025.
[291] Interview by author, November 18, 2024.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Interview by author, February 18, 2025.
[295] Interview by author, October 2, 2024.

committed by Kosovar Albanians against ethnic Serbs.[296] As this does not align with the narrative that civil society is one-sided against Serbs, the interview was never aired.

Outside official media channels, distrust is spread through governmental non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), which "are formed in every sector to exploit the rules that reward state-NGO cooperation."[297] One example of such an organization is the Center for Social Stability (CZDS - *Centar za društvenu stabilnost*),[298] producing documentaries such as "NGO Dossier" and "Evil Times" (*Zlo Doba*) to "expose the Western manipulation of Serbian society."[299] This same NGO submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Court in Belgrade against the current student protests for prohibiting the guaranteed right of citizens to education,[300] representing a typical tactic of filing criminal complaints against opposition forces on behalf of the government. These organizations support and defend the government through varied media publications while attacking and discrediting criticism of the government. One participant described such blatant attacks against civil society:

> "The normal operating environment has gradually turned hostile, and many have turned to cooperating with the state or closing. Our site is regularly attacked, and we have received threats in our post box. [But] nothing on the level YIHR, Krokodil, or Woman in Black is facing."[301]

The re-application of the Western-financed, anti-Serb narrative to the current student protest movement undermines its credibility and reveals its intent to suppress political dissent. In February 2025, during President Vučić's counter-rally in Sremska Mitrovica in opposition to the anti-government student protests in Kragujevac, he declared "the Western-backed colored revolution" ("*obojene revolucije*") financed by organizations such as USAID, NED, and the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) has failed.[302] Vučić repeatedly claims on national

---

[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] European Western Balkans, "Kampanja protiv organizacija civilnog društva u novom zaletu, uključene i vladine "nevladine" organizacije," ("The campaign against civil society organizations is on a new rampage, including governmental "non-governmental" organizations,") March 31, 2025, https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/kampanja-protiv-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-u-novom-zaletu-ukljucene-i-vladine-nevladine-organizacije/.
[299] Center for Social Stability (CZDS), "Dosjie NVO" ("NGO Dossier"), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI4ceoTDjj4; N1, "Vucic orders the most dangerous attack on United Media outlets, unprecedented violence in media space," April 6, 2025, https://n1info.rs/english/news/vucic-orders-the-most-dangerous-attack-on-united-media-outlets-unprecedented-violence-in-media-space/.
[300] Vreme, "A "fantastic" non-governmental organization complained to the Constitutional Court about school blockades," February 13, 2025, https://vreme.com/en/drustvo/fantasticna-nevladina-organizacija-se-zalila-ustavnom-sudu-zbog-blokada-skola/; European Western Balkans, "GONGOs: A serious obstacle to public debate on EU integration in Serbia," October 16, 2019, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/10/16/gongos-a-serious-obstacle-to-public-debate-on-eu-integration-in-serbia/.
[301] Interview by author, February 11, 2025.
[302] Vreme, "Vučić in Sremska Mitrovica: Your colored revolution has failed," February 15, 2025, https://vreme.com/en/vesti/vucic-u-sremskoj-mitrovici-propala-vam-je-obojena-revolucija/.

television and in international interviews that the student protests are "mainly financed from abroad" as part of the West's desire to weaken Serbia.[303]

In response to the student protest movement in 2024, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Porfirije traveled to Moscow to accept a theological award for strengthening the ties between the two sister churches.[304] Meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Porfirije expressed his hopes "that Serbia will overcome the temptation of a "color revolution" in the face of Western attempts to influence Serbians identity and culture. He then affirmed that Serbians "have a place in the "Russian world" and thanked Putin for his "level of values" making it possible for Serbians to live.[305] The Church's outsized role in Serbian national identity construction and local and international politics heightens the importance of shared religious values, positioning pro-democracy forces against traditional Serbian values and the Serbian Self.

In response to the student protest movement's week-long blockade of the RTS building in April 2025, the political tabloid *Alo* reported that "journalist associations, the non-governmental sector, and the students are direct participants of the colored revolution."[306] In December 2024, the tabloid *Informer* reported that a "fake student" was directly paid from abroad to overthrow the Serbian state through the NGO *Krovna organizacija mladih* (Youth umbrella organization).[307] In another article titled, "Unmasking! We reveal the scheme by which Americans finance Proglas [a Serbian NGO] to cause chaos in Serbia," *Informer* writes that the American NGO NED is a direct financier of the protests to attempt regime change.[308] On the government's use of an illegal sound cannon against protesters, RTS reported the state's investigation denying the possession of such weapons by dismissing NGO reports confirming its use as financed by Western states, framing NGOs and student protestors as working together against Serbia.[309]

---

[303] RTS, "Vučić za Veltvohe: Sve što je Zapad uradio Srbiji 1999, vraća im se kao bumerang," ("Vučić for Veltvohe: Everything that the West did to Serbia in 1999, comes back to them like a boomerang,") March 28, 2025, https://rts.rs/lat/vesti/politika/5681892/vucic-za-veltvohe-sve-sto-je-zapad-uradio-srbiji-1999-vraca-im-se-kao-bumerang.html.

[304] N1, "Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Porfirije traveling to Moscow," April 21, 2025, https://n1info.rs/english/news/serbian-orthodox-church-patriarch-porfirije-traveling-to-moscow/.

[305] Vreme, "Porfirije to Putin: Serbia will overcome the temptation of a "colored revolution," April 23, 2025, https://vreme.com/en/vesti/porfirije-putinu-srbija-ce-pobediti-iskusenje-obojene-revolucije/.

[306] Alo!, "NOVINARSKA UDRUŽENJA DIREKTNI UČESNICI OBOJENE REVOLUCIJE Vučić: Ne znam šta su gradjani očekivali od njih," April 16, 2025, https://www.alo.rs/vesti/politika/1050679/novinarska-udruzenja-direktni-ucesnici-obojene-revolucije-vucic-ne-znam-sta-su-gradani-ocekivali-od-njih/vest.

[307] Informer, "Ko plaća nasilnika Ristića? Pogledajte tabelu priliva iz inostranstva - ovo je dokaz da je on nemački plaćenik i rušitelj Srbije! (FOTO)" December 13, 2024, https://informer.rs/politika/vesti/971109/nikola-ristic-placanje-inostranstvo.

[308] Informer, "Raskrinkavanje! Otkrivamo šemu po kojoj Amerikanci finansiraju Proglas da izaziva haos u Srbiji," https://informer.rs/politika/vesti/964469/proglas-finansijska-sema#google_vignette.

[309] RTS, "CRTA: Eksperti tvrde da su prepoznali "vorteks"; Vučić: To u Srbiji niko nema, niti je ikada imao," ("CRTA: Experts claim to have recognized "vortex"; Vučić: There is no one in Serbia that has that, nor ever had,") March 17, 2025, https://rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5675185/crta-earshot-vucic-zvucni-top-studenti-protesti-blokade.html.

5.3 Discussion

Since the assassination of Zoran Đinđić (2006) and Vučić and SNS's consolidation of power (2012/2014), Serbia has followed a trend of democratic backsliding marked by eroding political rights and civil liberties, state capture of the media, electoral fraud, and increasing authoritarianism and nationalism.[310] Post 2000, the media remained in service to the ruling party along with the proliferation of political tabloids (*Kurir*, *Informer*, *Pink*, *Blic*) loyal to Vučić's SNS.[311] RTS, the most trusted and watched television service in Serbia, will generally not report on anything other than the successes of the administration.[312] Its management board is staffed with government loyalists and is constantly under pressure from the SNS to produce pro-government content.[313] Further, the regime discredits independent media and journalists by blaming them for disseminating disinformation and attacks through legal harassment, civil lawsuits, and denying access to information.[314] These tactics have largely been successful, as public opinion polling maintains similar levels of distrust towards both pro-government and independent media outlets.[315] The state of media capture addresses the second research question (How do media and pro-government actors construct civil society as a "radical Other"?) by explaining the mechanisms the government employs to construct civil society as a "radical Other" and foreign-aligned threat to Serbian identity.

The political environment of the 1990s was detrimental to the public attitude towards civil society, cementing the narrative that civil society is at fundamental odds with Serbian national interests, weaponizing Serbia's historic distrust of and defiance to external, foreign powers based on the five hundred-year-long struggles of the Serbian people for emancipation. In continuation of the Milošević regime, the current government uses a range of tactics to build this widespread negative perception of civil society and any opposition movements through media smear campaigns, publicized "lawfare" against civil society, political speeches and interviews,

---

[310] Neven Andjelić, "Western Balkans regimes between European democracy and autocracy," *Covid-19, State-Power and Society in Europe: Focus on Western Balkans* (2022): 37-58; Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Report, Serbia," 2023, https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2024; Humanitarian Law Center Foundation, "Revisionism about the 1990s Wars in Serbia," 2023, https://hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Revizionizam_eng%5B46094%5D.pdf; Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), "Civil society and media will not give up the fight for a democratic and free Serbia," July 28, 2020, https://yihr.rs/en/civil-society-and-media-will-not-give-up-the-fight-for-a-democratic-and-free-serbia/.

[311] Izabela Kisić, "The Media and Politics: The Case of Serbia," *Southeastern Europe* 39 (2015): 62-96, 70; Megan Duffy and Samuel Green, "Organised Chaos: Russian influence and the state of disinformation in the Western Balkans," *Special Paper Series Fall* (2020): 1-44, 16-17.

[312] Eve Meadow, "Media Censorship in Serbia under President Vucic," *Democratic Erosion Constorum*, 22 February 2022, https://www.democratic-erosion.com/2022/02/25/media-censorship-in-serbia-under-president-vucic/.

[313] Dragomir and Horowtiz, "Epistemic violators," 162.

[314] Duffy and Green, "Organised Chaos," 16-17; N1, "EU-Serbia Civil Society Committee: Support for student demands, concerns over EXPO, Jadar," April 7, 2025, https://n1info.rs/english/news/eu-serbia-civil-society-committee-support-for-student-demands-concerns-over-expo-jadar/; N1, "EU-Serbia Civil Society Committee: Support for student demands, concerns over EXPO, Jadar," April 7, 2025, https://n1info.rs/english/news/eu-serbia-civil-society-committee-support-for-student-demands-concerns-over-expo-jadar/.

[315] Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA), "Media Audit 2023," https://crta.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Media-Audit-Uncovering-the-relevance-and-importance-of-media-December-2023.pdf, 42.

and government non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). In the last decade, civil society, independent journalists, and political protesters have faced verbal and physical threats, intimidation, and violence[316] , and are the victims of smear campaigns, defamation, verbal attacks, political pressure, and hate speech.[317] These strategies are relevant for my first research question, explaining why most Serbians avoid participation in civil society, as Serbian identity is largely built on suspicion and defiance against external powers.

This analysis has illuminated the intricate mechanisms through which Serbian discourse constructs a polarized narrative that positions the West as an imperial, hypocritical, and aggressive "Other" while framing Russia as a protective, culturally aligned "Self." These contrasting characterizations of Western and Eastern Others inform the discourse used for evaluating Serbian civil society. By associating civil society with Western funding and priorities, the Serbian state and pro-government media discourse portray civil society actors as foreign-controlled, misaligned with local needs, and traitorous to Serbian national interests. This discursive strategy exploits Serbia's collective trauma and skepticism towards the EU and the US, marginalizing civil society and undermining its legitimacy.

The findings reveal three interrelated narratives–foreign funding dependency, misalignment with local priorities, and more direct accusations of anti-Serb treachery–that dominate perceptions of civil society and help answer the paper's research question for the widespread distrust and disengagement in Western-backed and pro-democracy NGOs and movements. The case of the 2024 student protests and the Rio Tinto mining project exemplifies how the hypocritical and self-interested Western Other was maintained in oppositional media discourse and popular movements. In contrast, Russia's constructed role as a cultural and ideological ally provides a powerful counter-narrative that resonates with Serbia's sense of victimization and desire for sovereignty.

In Serbia, local civil society is constructed within mainstream nationalist and pro-government discourse with the Western Other, a perception rooted in their reliance on foreign aid from the EU and the US and their role as primary partners of rejected Western-conditioned TJ efforts, sustaining the pervasive narrative labelling the pro-Western civil society as "foreign agents," anti-Serb, and the radical Other in contrast to the Serbian Self. While separated in the analysis, the overall discourse is as follows: Western funding dictates civil society project focus, resulting in misalignment with local priorities that resist confronting a traumatic past and incompatibility with Serbian national interests. While elements of truth can be identified, this narrative is sustained and exaggerated through state discourse, repression, and attacks specifically aimed at Othering civil society to maintain state control and sideline opposition

[316] Jana Juzová, Nikola Burazer, and Oszkár Roginer, "Serbia's EU Accession Path: Integration without Democratization?" EUROPEUM, December 2022, https://europeum.org/data/articles/serbias-eu-accession-path-european-integration-without-democratization.pdf.
[317] Jubjana Vila and Ingrit Melani, "Mapping the role of civil society across the western Balkans," *SHAPING THE EUROPEAN FUTURE: INSTITUTIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND DIGITAL CHALLENGES*: 127; Laura-Maria , "Does social learning lead to reconciliation in Serbian–Kosovar relations? The role of civil society in Serbia," *IVIL* (2023): 53-68, 61.

voices. The analysis will conclude with suggestions for action on how to bridge the local-civil society gap to build trust and engagement with the Serbian population, briefly including the ongoing student protest movement in Serbia.

5.4 Suggestions for Action

Consistently emerging across my interviews was the population's lack of education and knowledge, faulting the inadequate formal history education in Serbia about major historical events related to the fall of Yugoslavia, and a lack of critical thinking and media literacy skills. Serbian history textbooks are "one-sided and ethnocentric"[318] with major parts of history, most notably the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, completely missing or glossed over, generally only highlighting Serbian victims. One interviewee from Heartefact explained how she grew up less than 100 km from Srebrenica but only found out what happened there 11 years later.[319]

Many NGOs actively combat this through publications, educational exchanges, trips to other ethnic groups' sites of suffering, and inter-ethnic dialogue workshops. One example is YIHR's book "Shared Narratives: Supporting Reconciliation by Bridging the Gaps in Divisive Narratives," created by youth from all the former Yugoslav republics to build a collective critical review of formal and informal versions of the history of the 1990s wars.[320] However, one participant at BSCP expressed her concern about the civil society-led "dominant alternative narrative" that equally simplifies everything that happened in the 1990s to Serbian nationalism, while Yugoslavia had many other problems (e.g., economic hardships, class structure, collapse of communism) that provided the fertile ground for nationalism to take over.[321]

Regardless, initiatives such as YIHR's "Shared Narratives" fail to gain the reach needed to make a significant and generational impact, highlighting the emerging problem of civil society's exclusion of critical voices and inability to expand civil society circles. This was my original research idea (based on one year of peacebuilding NGO work in Sarajevo)– I wanted to know how civil society could expand outside the so-called "peacebuilding bubble." In other words, the people who show up to the conferences and workshops are those already "bought-in" to the idea. For example, before being employed at an NGO, one interviewee explained her reluctance to attend a local NGO event that interested her because she was unsure if she could "just show up" as it seemed to be a "closed event."[322] Having now worked in different NGOs for years, she further criticized the space:

---

[318] Interview by author, October 7, 2024.
[319] Interview by author, February 18, 2025.
[320] Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), "Presentation of the Book: 'Shared Narratives: Supporting Reconciliation by Bridging the Gaps in Divisive Narratives,'" June 2022, https://yihr.hr/en/presentation-of-the-book-shared-narratives-supporting-reconciliation-by-bridging-the-gaps-in-divisive-narratives.
[321] Interview by author, February 18, 2025.
[322] Interview by author, October 3, 2025.

"We [are] only communicating with ourselves and like-minded people, treating Serbians outside civil society as different than us… There are many more people who you can talk to and will listen to understand, but we only talk with people who have the same views as us."[323]

Another participant described this as a "huge failure of our work" since the 1990s.[324] They contended that while civil society was able to enjoy so much success in legislation against police brutality, war crimes, and refugee rights, they ignored the growing local antagonism towards themselves. In another example, I attended a conference with Serbian human rights activists on increasing state-led digital surveillance and repression in May 2025. In the final workshop, the participants split into groups, with one group presenting on how to raise public awareness and advocacy. Tellingly, the group suggested coordinating meetings between organizations for presentations at the EU and the European Commission (EC) and building institutional capacities for communication with international institutions and donors. In the presentation, no participants discussed how to reach out to Serbians and increase local support for their work.[325]

A participant from BSCP identified that the student protest movements' inclusivity explains their majority support across Serbia, stating:

"If we take a look at student protests, we don't know where all of this is leading. But they have achieved more in a couple of months than the opposition political parties in 12 years because they have gone local, they have communicated with people, they went there with messaging which resonated with people, they are going to secluded towns and villages which most people in Serbia have never even heard of, let alone foreigners. So, I think a little bit more empathic approach, which deals much more with communicating with people, not necessarily trying to hammer your version into them, but trying to basically communicate with them about their everyday realities and their problems. I think it is much more effective on them."[326]

In sum, civil society could fight public distrust through more focus on education, critical thinking skills, and media literacy to combat discourse aimed to discredit pro-democracy or pro-Western actors. Many interviewees condemned the exclusive nature of civil society, suggesting putting more effort towards widening the audience to people outside the so-called "civil society bubble" and coming from a posture of empathy and a desire to hear everyday realities and problems. This is important because groups from rural, neglected towns are the largest targets of disinformation campaigns and constitute most of the government's support and voter base. Finally, I will conclude with the cursory insights from the ongoing student protest movement as a potential catalyst for a new local civil society in Serbia.

[323] Ibid.
[324] Interview by author, February 18, 2025.
[325] Observation by author, May 18-20, 2025.
[326] Interview by author, April 28, 2025.

5.4.1 Civil Society's Revival? Student Protest Movement (2024-present)

While conducting this research, what is now known as the student protest movement took hold of the country. In reaction to the Novi Sad train station collapse on November 1, 2024, killing 16 people, students at the University of Novi Sad occupied and blockaded the university buildings and took to the streets in protest of corruption, nepotism, and lack of transparency that resulted in the tragedy.[327] Since then, faculties have stopped working, and students have walked, biked, and organized the largest protests in Serbia's recent history, culminating in estimates of over half a million people gathered in Belgrade on March 15, 2025.

Despite uncertainties on the future of these protests at the time of writing this, the student protest movement demonstrates two things relevant for this study. First, the students have explicitly distanced themselves from civil society, despite being part of civil society theoretically, and NGOs helping them in a myriad of ways. This demonstrates the pervasive and widespread distrust towards civil society, supporting the thesis's initial assumption. For example, one participant, both an activist at YIHR and a student at the Faculty of Philosophy, was banned from attending her faculty's plenums (the decision-making meetings organized at each faculty) despite supporting the protests.[328] In another example, an activist at Heartefact was asked to organize a speech at the Faculty of Political Science about activism and human rights, but felt she had to refuse, explaining that even though "there is nothing more I want to do than talk about this, it will cause polarization and the most important [for the students] is to stay united." [329] Indeed, many consider the students' independence from civil society to be one of the greatest strengths, and how they have gained and sustained majority support throughout Serbia.[330] As one NGO activist explained, "civil society is so controversial, the students should put them aside, [they] are not relevant in mobilizing the whole country."[331]

The second important takeaway is that it shows that what civil society represents and demands–democracy, rule of law, government transparency–is still widely supported throughout Serbian society. Despite continued state efforts, these Western ideals are not Othered and continue to retain local agency and support. However, civil society is still seen as an extension of Western geopolitical interests, which are Othered as opposed to Serbian national and geopolitical interests. In other words, current discourse dissociates Western values from interests. It constructs Western *values* as constituting Self–and are therefore "good"–while Western *interests* are constructed as the Other–and hence "bad." When asking a researcher working at an NGO if civil society does a good job representing the "ordinary Serbian" who doesn't work in civil society, they turned the question back to me, asking, "And who is that ordinary Serbian? Until three months ago, those were the students, the teachers, the farmers, the people who support and

[327] Reuters, "Serbian protesters pressure government over railway disaster," March 1, 2025, https://reuters.com/world/europe/serbians-hold-silent-protest-honour-railway-station-victims-2025-03-01/.
[328] Interview by author, April 26, 2025.
[329] The interviewee explained that the Faculty of Political Science was one of the only facilities supportive of civil society, as many students were engaged in activism prior to the protests. Interview by author, February 18, 2025.
[330] Interview by author, April 28, 2025.
[331] Interview by author, March 10, 2025.

greet them... Now they are all changing themselves and the society, step by step, as effectively, the largest NGO ever seen here."[332]

[332] Interview by author, February 11, 2025.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study set out to explore why Serbians distrust and disengage with civil society. Indeed, I wanted to know why even the term "*civilno drustvo*" is considered a "dirty word" or an insult among many Serbians outside civil society. Through a year of informal engagement with non-governmental organization (NGO)-led conferences, panels, and activities, and formal interviews with civil society actors, I conclude that civil society is discursively constructed by the current Serbian regime as the radical Other for being pro-Western, strategically positioned with the same negative Western characteristics as self-interested, untrustworthy, and at odds with Serbia's national interests.

In Chapter 2's (Literature Review) analysis of existing scholarship around key events and historical narratives, I explained the characteristics of Serbia's closest Others–Europe and the US as the West and Russia as the East–to see how this reflects on the Serbian Self. This chapter aimed to demonstrate Serbia's ambiguous identity positioned between victimhood and aspiration of the Western Other while highlighting the negative characteristics (hypocritical, self-interested, and aggressive) of the West, later applied to civil society. The second part looks at the existing literature explaining the failures of transitional justice (TJ) in Serbia related to Western conditionality and local civil society's funding dependency on the EU and the US.

Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework) describes poststructural philosophy and Neumann's Poststructural Self-Other theory, situating my analysis of Serbian identity as constructed against external Others (EU, the US, Russia) to be applied to internal Others (civil society). Chapter 4 (Methodological Framework) explains Hansen's poststructural discourse analysis (PDA), second intertextual model to operationalize Self-Other Theory through analysis of Serbian discourse on the EU, the US, Russia, and how this is then applied to local civil society, along with the data collection methods for the 19 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors from 15 different Serbian civil society organizations.

The final chapter (Analysis) uses a discourse analysis of primary sources of Serbian political and religious elites and pro-government and opposition media sources, combined with insights from my interview data, to explain how civil society is discursively constructed with these unfavorable traits of the Western Other. It identified three main narratives around civil society: foreign funding skepticism, misalignment with local priorities, and incompatibility with Serbian national interests. I argue that anti-Western sentiment related to the interventionist role played during and after the 1990s wars, specifically related to the failures of TJ, is transferred to sideline pro-democracy, pro-Western local actors as unrepresentative of the local population, and as such, the Vučić regime is successfully positioned as the local population's protector.

The success of this radical Othering strategy reveals the power of linking domestic political opponents to negatively characterized foreign Others. By transferring the negative characteristics attributed to the Western Other–hypocrisy, aggression, self-interest, and manipulation–to Serbian civil society, the government effectively delegitimizes these potential sources of opposition while reinforcing broader anti-Western sentiment. The result is a political

environment where civil society organizations struggle to maintain relevance and legitimacy within the societies they seek to serve.

The discourse in Serbia maintains that civil society's dependence on Western funding and promotion of Western-conditioned, failed, and rejected TJ has resulted in a misalignment with local priorities and a lack of ownership over efforts to deal with the legacies of the 1990s war. This can be true, while it is also true that this identity is discursively weaponized, exaggerated, and perpetuated by the state-controlled media through discourse aimed to discredit an oppositional civil society. This successfully plays on Serbia's troubled relationship with the West to sideline civil society through the placement of the untrustworthy and self-interested characterizations of the Western Other, leaving the population distrustful and disengaged.

While impossible to decide the outcome of the student protest movement at the time of writing, there is a renewed momentum around individual agency, hope in the next generation, and Serbia's path towards development and democratization. Broadly, Serbia's civil society has led the way in these efforts, despite state attacks, repression, and a distrustful and disengaged population. Civil society should capitalize on the local trust and momentum the student protests accumulated in these past months, communicating with the population that the same discrediting, "Western agents" discourse against civil society was and is used against student protestors.

Perhaps the student protest movement will be the much needed rebrand for Serbia's civil society– one unassociated with Western-conditioned reconciliation and blame for the 1990s wars, or with short-term EU and US funding projects unreflective of the immediate needs and desires of the local population. Immediately catalyzed by the tragedy in Novi Sad, this organic, grassroots movement maintains deeper roots in local resistance to the last decade of increasing authoritarianism, corruption, and state repression, demonstrating country-wide support for more democracy, accountability, and rule of law. Maybe this student-led movement will be the much-needed "local turn" for local civil society, and the students' majority support can renew trust and engagement in Serbia's institutionalized civil society by constructing an identity that is both pro-democracy and pro-Serbian.

Bibliography

Abulof, Uriel. "'Small Peoples': The Existential Uncertainty of Ethnonational Communities." *International Studies Quarterly* 53 (2009): 227–48.

Adam, Frane. "O tri pristupa pojmu 'civilno drustvo'" (On Three Approaches to the Concept of 'Civil Society'). *Pogledi*18 (1988): 163–76.

Adam, Frane, Darka Podmenik, and Mateja Rek. "Trans-nationalisation and European Context of Organised Civil Society." In *Elite Networks, NGOs and Governance*, 103–37. 2007.

Andjelić, Neven. "Western Balkans Regimes between European Democracy and Autocracy." In *Covid-19, State-Power and Society in Europe: Focus on Western Balkans*, 37–58. 2022.

Andreas, Peter. "Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions: Embargo Busting and Its Legacy." *International Studies Quarterly* (2005): 335–60.

Antić, Ana. "Living in the Age of Axis Internationalism: Imagining Europe in Serbia before and during the Second World War." *European History Quarterly* (2017): 1–28.

Arato, Andrew, and Jean Cohen. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

Arms Control Association. "UN Lifts Arms Embargo on Yugoslavia." October 2001. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2001-10/un-lifts-arms-embargo-yugoslavia.

Babić, Jovan, and Aleksandar Jokić. "The Ethics of International Sanctions: The Case of Yugoslavia." *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 24 (2000): 87–100.

Bajić, Mila. "Generation Bombing—Renarrating Myths: The Importance of the 1999 NATO Bombing on Attitudes Towards Kosovo as a Symbolic Concept." PhD diss., Central European University, 2020.

Baker, Gideon. "The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society." *Democratization* 6 (1999): 1–29.

Baker, Susan. "Pan-Slavism in the Balkans: A Historical View." In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, edited by Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, and Vladimir Đorđević, 77–100. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. "About BIRN." https://birn.eu.com/about-birn/.

Barišić, Srđan. "The Role of the Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches in Shaping Governmental Policies." In *The Warp of Serbian Identity: Anti-Westernism, Russophilia, Traditionalism*, edited by Sonja Biserko, 105–27.

Bataković, Dušan. "A Balkan-Style French Revolution? The 1804 Serbian Uprising in European Perspective." *Balcanica*36 (2005): 113–29.

Becker, Richard. "The Role of Sanctions in the Destruction of Yugoslavia." In *NATO in the Balkans: Voices of Opposition*, edited by Ramsey Clark, 107–30. New York: International Action Center, 1998.

Beissinger, Mark R. “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259–76.

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BSCP). “Attacks on Civil Society and Organizations in Serbia in 2020.” June 10, 2021. https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/attacks-on-civil-society-activists-and-organizations-in-serbia-in-2020/.

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BSCP). “Many Faces of Serbian Foreign Policy: Public Opinion and Geopolitical Balancing.” November 20, 2020. https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/many-faces-of-serbian-foreign-policy-public-opinion-and-geopolitical-balancing/.

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BSCP). “Public Perception of Serbian Foreign Policy in the Midst of the War in Ukraine.” December 14, 2022. https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.

Belloni, Roberto. “Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2 (2001): 163–80.

Belloni, Roberto. “Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions.” In *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, 182–210. 2008.

Bernstein, Richard. “Political Trial in Yugoslavia: Putting Openness to the Test.” *The New York Times*, December 15, 1984. https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/15/world/political-trial-in-yugoslavia-putting-openness-to-the-test.html.

Bieber, Florian. “The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: Roots of the Delayed Transition in Serbia.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 73–90.

Biermann, Rafael. “Coercive Europeanization: The EU’s Struggle to Contain Secessionism in the Balkans.” *European Security* 23, no. 4 (2014): 484–508.

Bilić, Bojan. “A Concept That Is Everything and Nothing: Why Not to Study (Post-) Yugoslav Anti-War and Pacifist Contention from a Civil Society Perspective.” *Sociologija* 53, no. 3 (2011): 297–322.

Brkić, Dejan. “Serbian Energy Sector in a Gap between East and West.” *Energy Exploration & Exploitation* 42, no. 1 (2024): 330–40.

Brkić, Dejan. “Serbian Energy Sector in the Global Political Landscape amid the Russia-Ukraine War: A Focus on Perspectives of Integration into the European Union.” *Discover Energy* 4, no. 1 (2024).

Caspersen, Nina. “The Pursuit of International Recognition after Kosovo.” *Global Governance* 21 (2015): 393–412.

Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA). “Criminal Complaint against President Vučić and Others over Leaked Information from the Investigation against CRTA.” March 13, 2025. https://crta.rs/en/criminal-complaint-against-president-vucic-and-others-over-leaked-information-from-the-investigation-against-crta/.

Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability (CRTA). “Media Audit 2023.” https://crta.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Media-Audit-Uncovering-the-relevance-and-importance-of-media-December-2023.pdf.

Chandhoke, Neera. “Civil Society–Conceptual History from Hobbes to Marx.” *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4–5 (2007): 607–14.

Clark, Janine. *Serbia in the Shadow of Milošević: The Legacy of Conflict in the Balkans*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.

Crang, Mike. *Cultural Geography*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Čeku, Ethem. “The Policy of Serbian Expansionism, with Specific Reference to Albanians in the Decade Preceding the Balkan Wars.” *The International History Review* 41, no. 1 (2019): 23–38.

Čolović, V. “Unresolved Border Disputes of the Republic of Serbia with Neighboring Countries: Double Standards for Entering into the European Union.” 2024.

David, Lea. *The Past Cannot Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

David, Lea. “The Emergence of the ‘Dealing with the Past’ Agenda: Sociological Thoughts on Its Negative Impact on the Ground.” *Modern Languages Open* 1 (2020).

Delević, Milica. “Economic Sanctions as a Foreign Policy Tool: The Case of Yugoslavia.” *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2019). https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol3_1/Delvic.htm?gmuw-rd=sm&gmuw-rdm=ht.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

DeWiel, Boris. “A Conceptual History of Civil Society.” 2007.

Dimitrijević, Vojin, and Jelena Pejić. “UN Sanctions Against Yugoslavia: Two Years Later.” In *The United Nations in the New World Order*, edited by Dimitris Bourantonis and Jarrod Wiener, 124–53. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995.

Dragomir, Marius, and Minna Aslama Horowitz. “Epistemic Violators: Disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe.” In *Epistemic Rights in the Era of Digital Disruption*, 155–70. Springer International Publishing, 2024.

Dragović-Soso, Jasna. “The Impact of International Intervention on Domestic Political Outcomes: Western Coercive Policies and the Milošević Regime.” In *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995*, edited by Peter Siani-Davies, 120–35. London: Routledge, 2003.

Dragović-Soso, Jasna. “Review of *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia: Russian and East European Government Politics and Policy*.” *Reviews in History* (2016).

Duffy, Megan, and Samuel Green. “Organised Chaos: Russian Influence and the State of Disinformation in the Western Balkans.” *Special Paper Series Fall* (2020): 1–44.

Egholm, Liv, and Lars Bo Kaspersen, eds. *Civil Society: Between Concepts and Empirical Grounds*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021.

Ehrenberg, John. “Marxism and Civil Society: The Left and the Politics of Decay.” *Contemporary Issues in Education* 14, no. 1 (1995): 73–84.

Ejdus, Filip. “Beyond National Interests: Identity Conflict and Serbia’s Neutrality toward the Crisis in Ukraine.” *Südosteuropa* 62, no. 3 (2014): 348–62.

Ejdus, Filip. *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity*: *Serbia’s Anxiety over Kosovo’s Secession*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2020.

Ejdus, Filip. “Security, Culture and Identity in Serbia.” *Western Balkans Security Observer-English Edition* 7–8 (2007): 38–64.

Ekiert, Grzegorz, and Jan Kubik. “Civil Society From Abroad: The Role of Foreign Assistance in the Democratization of Poland.” Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, February 2000.

European Parliament. “European Parliament Resolution of 7 May 2025 on the 2023 and 2024 Commission Reports on Serbia.” May 7, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0093_EN.html.

European Parliament. “Reconciliation in the Western Balkans: The Difficulty of Emulating the EU Model.” April 2019. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637964/EPRS_BRI(2019)637964_EN.pdf.

European Union. “Aims and Values.” https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en.

European Western Balkans. “EU Criticized for Staying Silent on Momentous Protests in Serbia.” January 29, 2025. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/01/29/eu-criticized-for-staying-silent-on-momentous-protests-in-serbia/.

European Western Balkans. “Kampanja protiv organizacija civilnog društva u novom zaletu, uključene i vladine ‘nevladine’ organizacije.” March 31, 2025. https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/kampanja-protiv-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-u-novom-zaletu-ukljucene-i-vladine-nevladine-organizacije/.

European Western Balkans. “NATO and Serbia – Discrepancy between Media Narrative and the Existing Cooperation.” February 26, 2021. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/02/26/nato-and-serbia-discrepancy-between-media-narrative-and-the-existing-cooperation/.

European Western Balkans. “Roadmap for RECOM Presented: Political Support the Basic Precondition.” May 23, 2018. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/05/23/roadmap-recom-presented-political-support-basic-precondition/.

European Western Balkans. “Survey: 80% of Serbian Citizens against NATO Membership, but Only 33% against Cooperation.” November 17, 2020. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/11/17/survey-80-of-serbian-citizens-against-nato-membership-but-only-33-against-cooperation/.

Fagan, Adam. “Taking Stock of Civil-Society Development in Post-communist Europe: Evidence from the Czech Republic.” *Democratization* 12, no. 4 (2005): 528–47.

Ferguson, Adam. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. London: T. Cadell, 1767.

Freedom House. “Freedom in the World 1999–2000.” 2000. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_1999-2000_complete_book.pdf.

Freedom House. “Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat.” 2019. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/democracy-retreat.

Freedom House. “Freedom in the World Report, Serbia.” 2023. https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2024.

Freedom House. “Serbia Freedom in the World 2025.” https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2025/.

Fridman, Orli. *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories*. Amsterdam University Press, 2022.

Fridman, Orli. “Memories of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Belgrade, Serbia.” *Comparative Southeast European Studies*64, no. 4 (2016): 438–59.

Fridman, Orli. “It was like fighting a war with our own people': anti-war activism in Serbia during the 1990s.” *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 4 (2011): 507-522.

Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert. “Serbia: Security Radar 2025 Europe – Lost in Geopolitics.” https://peace.fes.de/security-radar-2025/country-profiles/serbia.html.

Fuchs, Dieter, and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. “Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe.” *West European Politics* 25, no. 2 (2002): 19–54.

Fukuyama, Francis. The End of History and the Last Man. New York: Free Press, 1992.

Garfield, Richard. “Economic Sanctions, Humanitarianism, and Conflict After the Cold War.” *Social Justice* 29, no. 3 (2002): 94–107.

Gil, Dorota. “Reflections of the Anti-Occidentalism Idea in Serbian Cultural Texts of the 20th Century.” *Slavia Meridionalis* 22 (2022): 1–13.

Goldstone, Jack, Leonid Grinin, and Andrey Korotayev, eds. “The Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia.” In *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century: The New Waves of Revolutions, and the Causes and Effects of Disruptive Political Change*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2022.

Gordy, Eric. “CRDA and Civil Society in Serbia.” In *Paper for Workshop on New Approaches to Sustainable Democracy-Building, Watson Institute, Brown University*, 19–20. 2003.

Gordy, Eric. *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial: The Past at Stake in Post-Milošević Serbia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Gordy, Eric. “Serbia’s Bulldozer Revolution: Conditions and Prospects.” *Southeast European Politics* 1, no. 2 (2000): 78–89.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1891–1937)*. Edited and translated by Derek Boothman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Grigorev, Alexandr, and Magdalena Żakowska. "Russia in Serbian National Mythologies since XIX Century until the First World War and Its Influence on the Modern International Relations." *Каспийский регион: политика, экономика, культура* 4 (2018): 116–25.

Gutaj, Perparim. "Beyond Independence: Anti-Americanism and the Serb Resistance in Kosova." *Iliria International Review* 3, no. 1 (2013): 183–214.

Hammod, Andrew. "Balkanism in Political Context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 3 (2006): 6–26.

Hansen, Lene. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit [1807]*. Translated by Arnold Vincent Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Herța, Laura-Maria. "Does Social Learning Lead to Reconciliation in Serbian–Kosovar Relations? The Role of Civil Society in Serbia." *IVIL* (2023): 53-68.

Hirose, Yoko. "Unrecognized States in the Former USSR and Kosovo: A Focus on Standing Armies." *Open Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2015): 67–82.

Hoare, Marko Attila. "Genocide in the Former Yugoslavia before and after Communism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 7 (2010): 1193–1214.

Howell, Jude, and Jenny Pearce. *Civil Society & Development: A Critical Exploration*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

Human Rights Watch. "Yugoslavia: Link U.S. Aid to Cooperation with Tribunal." April 30, 2001. https://www.hrw.org/news/2001/04/30/yugoslavia-link-us-aid-cooperation-tribunal.

Humanitarian Law Center (HLC). "Media and Revisionism about the 1990s' Wars in Serbia." March 2023.

Humanitarian Law Center Foundation (HLC). "Revisionism about the 1990s Wars in Serbia." 2023. https://hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Revizionizam_eng%5B46094%5D.pdf.

Independent International Commission on Kosovo. *The Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Jakir, Aleksandar. "Workers' Self-Management in Tito's Yugoslavia Revisited." *Moving the Social* 33 (2005): 137–55.

Janković, Slobodan. *Relations between the United States and Serbia: Asymmetric Confrontation and Relations*. Budapest: National University of Public Service Press, Dialog Campus, 2019.

Jovanović, Mladenov Srđan. "Confronting Recent History: Media in Serbia During Aleksandar Vučić's Ministry of Information in the Milošević Era (1998–1999)." *Hiperboreea* 6, no. 1 (2019): 61–74.

Judah, Tim. *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Juzová, Jana, Nikola Burazer, and Oszkár Roginer. "Serbia's EU Accession Path: Integration without Democratization?" *EUROPEUM*, December 2022. https://europeum.org/data/articles/serbias-eu-accession-path-european-integration-without-democratization.pdf.

Kaldor, Mary. "The Idea of Global Civil Society." *International Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2003): 583–93.

Keane, John. *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*. London: Verso, 1988.

Keane, John. *Democracy and Civil Society*. London: Verso, 1988.

Keane, John. *Global Civil Society?* Cambridge University of Press, 2003.

Kisić, Izabela. "The Media and Politics: The Case of Serbia." *Southeastern Europe* 39 (2015): 62–96.

Joksić, Mladen. "Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution Reconsidered: Examining the Consequences of Pacted Transition in Cases of Regime Hybridity." Master's thesis, International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, 2008.

Kostovicova, Denisa. *Reconciliation by Stealth: How People Talk about War Crimes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023.

Kostovicova, Denisa. "Civil Society and Post-communist Democratization: Facing a Double Challenge in Post-Milošević Serbia." *Journal of Civil Society* 2, no. 1 (2006): 21–37.

Kovačević, Marko. "What Place for East and West? Discourses, Reality and Foreign and Security Policies of Post-Yugoslav Small States." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 110–31.

Krastev, Ivan. "The Anti-American Century?" *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 5–16.

Križan, Mojmir. "Civil Society—a New Paradigm in the Yugoslav Theoretical Discussion." *Praxis International* 9, no. 1+2 (1989): 152–63.

Križan, Mojmir. "'Of' Civil Society' and Socialism in Yugoslavia." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 37, no. 4 (1989): 287–306.

Lampe, John. *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lazić, Mladen. "Mnemonic Battles over the NATO Bombing of Serbia – Analysis and Critique." *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 166–73.

Lees, Lorraine M. *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War, 1945–1960*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Levy, Daniel, and Natan Sznaider. *Human Rights and Memory*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010.

Locke, John. "Of Political or Civil Society." In the *Second Treatise of Government*. 1690.

Malcolm, Noel. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan, 1998.

Mandić, Marija. "Official Commemoration of the NATO Bombing of Serbia. A Case Study of the Fifteenth Anniversary." *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 64, no. 4 (2016): 460–81.

Mearsheimer, John. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin." *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014): 77.

Memišević, Hamza. "Views on Freedoms Between Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Case of Serbia." *UPRAVA stručni časopis* 25 (2021): 125–47.

Mijatović, Dunja. *Report on Serbia: Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe following Her Visit from 13 to 17 March 2023, CommHR(2023)25*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2023. https://rm.coe.int/report-on-serbia-by-dunja-mijatovic-commissioner-for-human-rights-of-t/1680ac88cc.

Mikuš, Marek. "Indigenizing 'Civil Society' in Serbia: What Local Fund-Raising Reveals about Class and Trust." *Focaal*, no. 71 (2015): 43–56.

Milivojević, Zdenka. "Civil Society in Serbia: Suppressed During the 1990s - Gaining Legitimacy and Recognition After 2000." *CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Serbia*, 2006.

Milojević, Ana. "Three Decades Later: From Self-Managed to State-Captured Media in Serbia." In *Three Decades Later: The Media in South East Europe after 1989*, 265–89. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021.

Milošević, Ana, and Tamara Trošt. *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Milutinović, Zoran. *Getting over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011.

Mladenović, Nikola. "The 2013 Brussels Agreement and the Political Discourse of the Serbian Leadership: Pro-EU Adaptation with Anti-EU Rhetoric." *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 5 (2022): 832–56.

Neumann, Iver B. *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Norman, York. "Alija Izetbegović's Islamic Declaration and Populism in Bosnia." In *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies*, edited by John Abromeit, Bridget María Chesterton, Gary Marotta, and York Norman, 90–102. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Nowosielski, Michal. “Revival of the Civil Society: Development of the Third Sector in Poland 1989–2008.” *IZ Policy Papers* 2 (2009).

Orentlicher, Diane. *Some Kind of Justice: The ICTY’s Impact in Bosnia and Serbia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Parenti, Michael. “The Rational Destruction of Yugoslavia.” In *Imperialism, Crisis, and Class Struggle: The Enduring Verities and Contemporary Face of Capitalism*, edited by Henry Veltmeyer, 255–72. The Netherlands: Library of Congress, 2010.

Patalakh, Artem. “Emotions and Identity as Foreign Policy Determinants: Serbian Approach to Relations with Russia.” *Chinese Political Science Review* 3, no. 4 (2018): 495–528.

Pavlović, Aleksandar, and Srđan Atanasovski. “From Myth to Territory: Vuk Karadžić, Kosovo Epics and the Role of Nineteenth-Century Intellectuals in Establishing National Narratives.” *Hungarian Historical Review* 5, no. 2 (2016): 357–76.

Pearce, Jenny. “NGOs and Social Change: Agents or Facilitators?” *Development in Practice* 3, no. 3 (1993): 222–27.

Petrovic, Jelena. “The Return of the Serbian Other: Interpretative Repertoires of Nationalism and Identity Politics in Online News Discourses on Serbia’s Integration in the European Union.” 2013.

Pinna, Alessandra. “US Democracy Promotion in Serbia and Croatia.” In *Global Perspectives on US Foreign Policy: From the Outside In*, 173–99. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Presnall, Aaron. “Which Way the Wind Blows: Democracy Promotion and International Actors in Serbia.” *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 661–81.

Rajak, Svetozar. *Yugoslav-Soviet Relations, 1953–1957: Normalization, Comradeship, Confrontation*. London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004.

Rajković, Nikolas Milan. “The Limits of Consequentialism: ICTY Conditionality and (Non) Compliance in Post-Milosevic Serbia.” *Review of European and Russian Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2008): 27–72.

Ramet, Sabrina. “The Denial Syndrome and Its Consequences: Serbian Political Culture since 2000.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007): 41–58.

Rangelov, Iavor. “EU Conditionality and Transitional Justice in the Former Yugoslavia.” *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy* 2, no. 1 (2006): 365–75.

Rennebohm, Max. “Serbians Overthrow Milosevic (Bulldozer Revolution).” *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, 2000. https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/serbians-overthrow-milosevic-bulldozer-revolution-2000.

Russell-Omaljev, Ana. *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in ‘First’ and ‘Other’ Serbia*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2016.

Satjukow, Elisa. “The Making of 24 March: Commemorations of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Serbia, 1999–2019.” *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 70, no. 2 (2022): 289–309.

Saurugger, Sabine. “The Professionalisation of Interest Representation: A Legitimacy Problem for Civil Society in the EU.” *Civil Society and Legitimate European Governance* (2006): 260–76.

Savić, Bojan. “Where Is Serbia? Traditions of Spatial Identity and State Positioning in Serbian Geopolitical Culture.” *Geopolitics* 19, no. 3 (2014): 684–718.

Schwabach, Aaron. “The Legality of the NATO Bombing Operation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.” *Pace International Law Review* 11 (1999): 405–18.

Silber, Laura. “The ‘Hero’ of Dayton: Slobodan Milosevic and the Politics of War and Peace.” *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 1 (1996): 63–69.

Smith, Adam. The Wealth of Nations. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776.

Sokolić, Ivor. “Civil Society in Post-Yugoslav Space: The Test of Discontinuity and Democratisation.” In *The Legacy of Yugoslavia: Politics, Economics and Society in the Modern Balkans*, edited by Othon Anastasakis, Adam Bennett, David Madden, and Adis Merdzanovic, 1–39. London: IB Tauris, 2020.

Sokolić, Ivor, Denisa Kostovicova, and Adam Fagan. “Civil Society in Post-Yugoslav Space: The Test of Discontinuity and Democratization.” *The Legacy of Yugoslavia: Politics, Economics and Society in the Modern Balkans* 375, no. 95 (2020): 1–39.

Stojić, Marko. “Anchoring or Undermining Democracy: The European People’s Party and Democratic Backsliding in Serbia.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 62, no. 2 (2024): 546–63.

Subotić, Jelena. *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Subotić, Jelena. “Europe Is a State of Mind: Identity and Europeanization in the Balkans.” *International Studies Quarterly*55, no. 2 (2011): 309–30.

Subotić, Jelena. “The Appropriation of Holocaust Memory in Post-Communist Eastern Europe.” *Modern Languages Open* 1 (2020): 22.

Suslov, Mikhail. “New Wine in an Old Wineskin: Slavophilia and Geopolitical Populism in Putin’s Russia.” In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, edited by Mikhail Suslov, Marek Čejka, and Vladimir Đorđević, 77–100. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

Swedberg, Richard. “The Idea of ‘Europe’ and the Origin of the European Union - A Sociological Approach.” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 23, no. 5 (1994): 378–87.

Szpala, Marta. “Russia in Serbia–Soft Power and Hard Interests.” *Centre for Eastern Studies Commentary* no. 150, (2014): 1-8.

Teitel, Ruti. *Transitional Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Todorović, Miloš. “The Problems of Studying Ottoman Heritage in Serbia.” 2021.

Todorović, Sofija. “Balkan Youth Deserve the Truth About the Past – Not Denials.” *Balkan Insight Network (BIRN)*, June 30, 2023. https://balkaninsight.com/2023/06/30/balkan-youth-deserve-the-truth-about-the-past-not-denials/.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America, Volumes One and Two (1835, 1840)*. Translated by Henry Reeve. Pennsylvania State University, 2002.

Trgovčević, Ljubinka. “The Enlightenment and the Beginnings of Modern Serbian Culture.” *Balcanica* 37 (2006): 103–11.

Trošt, Tamara, and Lea David. “Renationalizing Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Region.” In *Patriotic History and the (Re) Nationalization of Memory*, 74–85. Routledge, 2023.

Varty, John. “Civic or Commercial? Adam Ferguson’s Concept of Civil Society.” *Democratization* 4, no. 1 (2007): 29–48.

Vetta, Théodora. “Democracy Building’ in Serbia: The NGO Effect.” *Southeastern Europe* 33 (2009): 26–47.

Vila, Jubjana, and Ingrit Melani. “Mapping the Role of Civil Society across the Western Balkans.” In *SHAPING THE EUROPEAN FUTURE: INSTITUTIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND DIGITAL CHALLENGES*, 127.

Vladisavljević, Nebojša. “Serbia’s Turbulent Democratization.” In *The Post-Socialist Transition of Serbia: Economic Policy, Democracy, and European Integration*, edited by Ivan Vujačić. Palgrave Macmillan, 2025.

Volf, Miroslav. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.

Vučetić, Radina. *Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018.

Vukasović, Dejana, and Miša Stojadinović. “On Pan-Slavism, Brotherhood, and Mythology: The Imagery of Contemporary Geopolitical Discourse in Serbia.” In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: Origins, Manifestations and Functions*, 123–53. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023.

Vuksanović, Vuk. “Systemic Pressures, Party Politics and Foreign Policy: Serbia between Russia and the West, 2008–2020.” PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). “Civil Society and Media Will Not Give Up the Fight for a Democratic and Free Serbia.” July 28, 2020. https://yihr.rs/en/civil-society-and-media-will-not-give-up-the-fight-for-a-democratic-and-free-serbia/.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). “Presentation of the Book: ‘Shared Narratives: Supporting Reconciliation by Bridging the Gaps in Divisive Narratives.’” June 2022. https://yihr.hr/en/presentation-of-the-book-shared-narratives-supporting-reconciliation-by-bridging-the-gaps-in-divisive-narratives.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). “Report: ‘State of Denial – Serbia 2023: Lessons on Patriotism from War Criminals.’” December 20, 2024. https://yihr.rs/en/report-state-of-denial-serbia-2023-lessons-on-patriotism-from-war-criminals/.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). “‘Truths That Are Denied’ Manual for the Improvement of Commemorative Practices and the Fight against the Glorification of War Criminals.” https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/230228-YIHR-Manual-Truths-that-are-Denied.pdf.

Zarakol, Ayse. *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Zukin, Sharon. “Self-Management and Socialization.” In *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, edited by Sabrina Ramet, 116. New York: Routledge, 1985.