

Marek Mikuš¹

Rerunning the Transition: Democratisation, Civil Society-Building and Europeanisation in Serbia²

Abstract: This paper presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks of a forthcoming ethnography of democratisation, European integration and the transformation of ‘governance’ in Serbia, to be conducted in two transnational development projects and in the broader social settings where they might have effect. This anthropological study explores the everyday practices involved in introducing democracy at the point where state, civil society and transnational forces intersect; looks at the relationships between ‘cultural styles’ and ‘political subjectivities’ through which people engage with these projects and policies; and investigates ‘civil-society building’ in its setting of the elite cultures of ‘democratisation brokers’. Political change in Serbia is conceptualised as involving a series of shifting and contested alliances between institutional structures such as ‘the state’ and ‘the EU’ on the one hand and ‘society’ on the other. The research connects political economy with political culture by exploring the relationships between formal and less formal institutions (the state, the EU, and the black economy) and social groupings (‘civil society’ and the grey economy) on the one hand, and languages of stateness, ‘myths’ of socialism, nationalism and democracy, and popular or folk perceptions of politics on the other. As the studied projects are funded by, and mirror the international development aid priorities of, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, it also examines the specificities of postsocialist-to-postsocialist transfers.

1. The author is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science. E-mail: m.mikus@lse.ac.uk. Correspondence: 174C Camberwell Grove, London SE5 8RH.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks of my forthcoming ethnography of democratisation, European integration and the transformation of ‘governance’³ in Serbia, conducted in two transnational development projects and in the broader social settings where they might have effect. The empirical part of the research will take place in Belgrade, Serbia and other sites from August/September 2010 over a period of 12 to 18 months. This anthropological study explores the everyday practices involved in introducing democracy at the point where state, civil society and transnational forces intersect; looks at the relationships between ‘cultural styles’ and ‘political subjectivities’ through which people engage with these projects and policies; and investigates ‘civil-society building’ in its setting of the elite cultures of ‘democratisation brokers’.

Political change in Serbia involves *a series of shifting and contested alliances between institutional structures* such as ‘the state’ and ‘the EU’ on the one hand *and ‘society’* on the other. Members of these alliances pursue common visions of governance and politics. But neither the nature of structures of ‘governance’, nor that of societal groups cast or self-identified as their allies, is self-evident. To enhance the credibility and workability of alliances, both types of actors mobilise interrelated social and ideological resources. For instance, pro-democratic politicians may try to enlist the support of middle-class city dwellers and civil-society associations by presenting their agendas as ‘urban’, and such symbolic linkages may be underpinned structurally, e.g. by informal networks. An ethnographic focus on the practices and interpretations of particular actors, and on the development projects as both objects of interest in themselves and windows on the broader field of Serbian politics, will enable me to understand this ‘rerun’ of the transition in Serbia.

3. In the 1990s, the term ‘governance’ emerged as a highly ‘elastic’ buzzword of the discourse of large development donors like the World Bank which assume that ‘good governance’ (contrasted with ‘poor governance’) can be quantified and created in developing countries through political conditionalities (Doombos 2001). I do not wish to subscribe to this ‘dev-talk’ and merely use the term as a shorthand for the process of governing through and by a variety of institutions, including central government, local administration, and non-state actors such as NGOs.

The projects to be studied are funded by, and mirror the international development aid priorities of, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The research thus explores postsocialist-to-postsocialist influences on development, and is informed by an emphasis on *transnationality*, but with a focus on its local effects. The research also connects *political economy* with *political culture*. That is, it seeks ways to understand the relationships between formal and less formal institutions (the state, the EU, and the black economy or ‘shadow state’) and social groupings (‘civil society’ and the grey economy)⁴ on the one hand, and languages of stateness, ‘myths’ of socialism, nationalism and democracy, and popular or folk perceptions of politics on the other. To avoid both cultural determinism and rationalist instrumentalism, I follow scholars working on similar issues in Serbia who attend to discourses and cultural frames, but also show what political and economic factors activate these symbolic elements (Vujacic 2004; Greenberg 2006a, 2006b & 2007; Vladisavljević 2008).

2. ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING⁵

Republika Srbija is a country in the Western Balkans with a population estimated at 7.35 million in 2008 (*Prirodno...* undated). From the 16th century, most of medieval Serbia was occupied by the Ottoman Empire. A Serbian kingdom re-emerged in the 19th century and joined the first (monarchic) Yugoslavia in 1918. After World War II, former partisan leader Josip Broz Tito became the Secretary-General of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and served as Prime Minister and President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) until his death in 1980. The SFRY was a multi-national socialist federation of six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. The political changes in the 1960s and 1970s, especially the adoption of a new constitution in 1974, created a radically decentralised and rather unstable confederation (Vladisavljević 2008: 32–5). The constitution also upgraded the status of Serbia’s ‘autonomous provinces’ of

4. I use the term ‘black economy’ for *illegal* strategies of wealth accumulation, and the ‘grey economy’ for *a-legal* survival strategies of masses. While obvious difficulties preclude me from investigating black or grey economies, I review relevant literature as they significantly shape my setting.

5. Much of the historical discussion is based on Pavlowitch (2002).

Vojvodina and Kosovo to one of *de facto* republics, thus undermining republic-level governance in Serbia.

During the economic decline of the 1970s and 1980s and following Tito's death, the confederation's functioning became increasingly difficult, and by 1985 Yugoslav Communism was seen as having failed (Pavlowitch 2002: 188). In the aftermath of the 1988–89 'antibureaucratic revolution', nationalist mobilisations resulted in a disintegration of the SFRY which formally dissolved in 1992. In the rump Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with Serbia and Montenegro as the only constituent republics, the president of Serbia Slobodan Milošević established a semi-authoritarian regime dominated by his Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). He founded the SPS in 1990 as a merger of the League of Communists of Serbia (LCS) and the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Serbia. Initially enjoying popular support, Milošević presided over a series of wars. In 1991–95, he supported Serbian militias and para-states in multiethnic regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in an effort to create a 'Greater Serbia'. The second sequence of hostilities in Kosovo resulted in the NATO bombings in 1999. Milošević was ousted when massive protests forced him to concede his defeat in the October 2000 presidential elections. In 2003, Montenegro declared independence. Kosovo (under the United Nations interim administration since 1999) followed in 2008, but Serbia and some other countries (including Slovakia) refuse to recognise it.

By 1989, the SFRY was the most affluent socialist state. Development, however, was uneven, with Slovenia and Croatia far ahead, Serbia close to the federal average and other regions lagging behind. Under Milošević's mismanagement, Serbia's GDP per capita at current prices fell dramatically, and only started to pick up again after the 2000 regime change (UN Statistics Division 2008; IMF 2009). Although by 2007 GDP p.c. at current prices exceeded its 1990 level, the unemployment rate continued to rise (UNDP 2008: 220). According to the state Statistical Office, the poverty rate halved in 2002–07 (Republički zavod 2008: 12), but it is still perceived as a grave issue.

Post-Milošević leaders declared as their foreign policy objective the 'normalisation' of relationships with the West. Serbia, a 'potential candidate' country, signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in April 2008 (European Commission 2008). In September 2008 the Netherlands, unsatisfied with Serbia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), froze the SAA. In December 2009, it lifted its veto and Serbia formally applied for membership (*Srbija...* 2009). However, the

political situation remains ambiguous. Relations with the ICTY, the status of Kosovo, and political-elite conflicts are amongst the most contentious issues. The assassination of reformist prime minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003 highlighted the persisting influence of Milošević-era informal structures, members of which had reacted to Đinđić's attempt to eradicate them (Gordy 2004; Pavlaković 2005). The support for EU integration proved shaky – at the time Serbia applied for membership, only 50% of Serbs thought that joining the EU would be a 'good thing' (*Serbia...* 2010). Compared to other Balkan countries, their 'identification' with the EU and assessment of its 'friendliness' is less favourable (*Gallup...* 2010). Various big international donors provided funding to help smooth Serbia's way to Europeanisation and democratisation. But many are now withdrawing, leaving the way clear for new, postsocialist-to-postsocialist projects such as those that I study. It is against the backdrop of this striven-for 'normalisation', coupled with the tenuous relationship to Europe, that my research is set.

My primary field sites, where I will conduct intensive participant observation, are two transnational development projects which can be described as sites of 'knowledge transfers'. The first project involves a relationship between the 'EU Enlargement Fund' of the Pontis Foundation, one of Slovakia's leading grant-making and operational foundations, and their Serbian partner, the NGO Center for Democracy Foundation. Through the project, funding and seminars are offered for younger Serbian analysts and journalists to produce analyses and media stories on reforms that Serbia is intended to implement on its way to joining the EU. While the number of direct beneficiaries is limited, the indirect beneficiary could be seen as the nation.

The second project, entitled 'Strengthening Strategic Planning and Financial Sustainability of Serbian Charities', is implemented by the Czech Republic VIA Foundation (which shares the same US mother organisation with the Pontis Foundation) and their Serbian partner, the Balkan Community Initiative Fund. Its activities centre on 'knowledge transfer' in the field of civil-society building. In a context where big international donors have started to withdraw from Serbia, it aims to help NGOs become more 'autonomous' and 'sustainable' through developing their fundraising capacities.

The projects must be seen in the context of aid programmes of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, emerging donor countries. Aid discourses in Slovakia and the Czech Republic frame Serbia as being in a transition phase which they have already overcome and argue that

this, and historic, ethnic and linguistic connections, enhances their ability to transfer relevant knowledge. Serbia is a priority target of Slovak aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003a: 8) and my research concerns two of its interest areas: civil society, ‘social animation’⁶ and regional development; and integration into international organisations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003b). Serbs recently assessed Slovakia as the second most ‘friendly’ to Serbia out of eleven countries (*Gallup...* 2010). The Czech Republic’s aid policy toward Serbia also classifies it as a priority country and pursues its integration into the EU; transfer of transformation experiences; state-building; and civil-society strengthening (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí undated).

3. RESEARCH THEMES

3.1. POSTSOCIALIST ‘TRANSITION’ AND STATE TRANSNATIONAL REFORM

Conceptualisation and contextualisation

What does it mean to investigate political reforms attempted by transnational forces and funded by international donors while Serbian political economy and its accompanying political culture continue to hold sway at very fundamental levels? The projects to be studied mobilise particular – partly externally imposed – representations of government, the state and democracy. But these representations are mediated through existing practices and political cultures.

Three analytic lenses – anthropology of postsocialism; anthropology of the state; and critical scholarship on Europeanisation – will enable me to explore the postsocialist, postauthoritarian and post-conflict politico-economic context of Serbia.

‘*Postsocialist*’ is a useful heuristic device to illuminate Serbia’s ‘socialist legacy’ and avoid excessively idiosyncratic explanations of it. The term rests on the assumptions that ‘real’ socialism was deeply pervasive; that public and covert practices, institutions and ideologies, which were effectively ‘actually existing’ socialisms, shared a basic unity derived from Marxist political theory and Leninist practice; and that a ‘sudden and total emptying

6. This term seems to be a literal translation of the Slovak expression *sociálne oživenie*.

out' of one way of life and its substitution by another is impossible (Humphrey 2002: 12). Anthropologists recognised that 'the similarities of socialist institutions imposed a layer of uniformity on top of all this diversity' (Hann 2002: 8) without overlooking the diversity itself. Contrary to normative and over-simplifying models of 'transition' that expected ex-socialist societies to undergo a predictable and rapid conversion to a market economy and liberal democracy, the anthropology of postsocialism has empirically captured how relationships, concepts and strategies of the socialist past are locally and actively reconfigured to achieve present ends (Bridger, Pine *et al.* 1997; Burawoy, Verdery *et al.* 1999; Hann *et al.* 2002; West, Raman *et al.* 2009).

In Serbia, both 'socialism' and 'transition' describe real phenomena whose effects may be observed in society and in governance. However, an overemphasis on either runs the risk of ignoring what lies beyond (Buyandelgeriyn 2008). Anthropology must follow its subjects when they adopt new modes of engaging with their presents and futures. There is a sense in which transition has been concluded and people are moving on – prompting Sampson to talk of 'post-postsocialism' in the Balkans as soon as 2002.

Ethnographies of postsocialism, rich in micro-level detail, were less substantial in mapping out relationships between local phenomena, government policies and transnational forces (Verdery 1995; Phillips *et al.* 2005). These topics, in contrast, form a key aspect of my research, which emphasises *state reformation and transformation* as central to understanding postsocialism generally. To begin with, transition was ushered in by the collapse of macro structures and ideologies of state communism (Verdery 1996; Yurchak 2003). However, it is never enough to say just that the state has been or is being weakened. This is particularly true in Serbia where state transformation involved a reform of its authoritarianism; rather gradual democratisation; the development of a strong informal economic sector linked to the state; and the reconfiguration of the multi-national Yugoslavia and its territorially contested successor states. The complex working out of this process still deeply preoccupies Serbia.

There is a rich seam of anthropological writing which endeavours to understand 'the state'. Following Abrams, anthropologists are aware of the shortcomings of Marxist political scientists like Poulantzas and Miliband who revealed the interests linking the political with the economic and the state's legitimating purpose while still buying into the notion of its

thingness.⁷ Given this realisation, anthropologists have focused on everyday representations and practices which contribute to the *performative 'cultural constitution' of the state* (Sharma & Gupta 2006) and which help enact its 'vertical encompassment', while being complemented, resisted or supported by governance structures not commonly viewed as a part of the nation-state, e.g. international NGOs, which are conceptualised as constituting 'neoliberal governmentality' (Ferguson & Gupta 2002). I intend to explore the state's discursive self-constitution through official 'languages of stateness', i.e. registers of governance and authority, while combining this with an ethnography of its localised manifestations and contestations, in order to trace the genealogy of the contemporary Serbian state 'as a historically specific configuration of a range of languages of stateness, some practical, others symbolic' (Blom Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 7). Elements of these languages of stateness enter Serbia in transnational ideological flows, where they are subjected to local translations and recombinations.

The projects I examine aim to 'reform governance' within the framework of *Europeanisation*. This involves relatively palpable processes of governance change. For instance, the EU's 'twinning' projects, with little awareness on the part of citizens, significantly transform the structure and functioning of Serbian ministries under the banners of 'administrative co-operation' and 'institution building' (Slobodan Naumović, personal communication; *Twinning...*). However, I see Europeanisation not primarily in terms of a set of self-evident European institutions 'impacting' on national institutions, but more importantly as an interactive supranational construction characterised by multiplicity and contestation. I follow the approach outlined by Lendvai, for which Europeanisation is a political, two-way and open-ended encounter of 'political-cultural formations (...) and ways of governing and being governed through language, practices and techniques' (2007: 26), that is, one involving governmentality in the Foucauldian sense. Not simply an objective agent of change, 'the EU' is also a perspectively experienced system of signs. While the government

7. According to Abrams, the state's definition and coherence derives from its ideological reification or the 'state-idea' – 'the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice [but is] itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is' (1988: 82). Nevertheless, Mitchell (1999) argued that subtracting the 'state-idea' from the state's existence as a system of material practice makes the limits of the 'state-system' difficult to locate and define. Therefore, following Mitchell, I approach the 'state-system' and 'state-idea' as *two analytically separated aspects of the same empirical process* of the 'state effect' in which the state/society boundary is constructed and the state becomes something abstract and nonmaterial.

and some civil-society actors may present its policies as bringing more democratic governance, oppositional voices may criticise them for missionising and imposing values that are alien to Serbian notions of political society.

The EU Enlargement Fund seeks to transfer and locally produce knowledge which is ‘relevant’ and ‘useful’ for Serbia’s EU integration (Kinga Dabrowska, the Pontis Foundation, personal communication). This offers an opportunity to study the ‘exemplary’ forms of governance transmitted by the donors as well as those ‘received’ by the beneficiaries, and to see whether, how and why they are copied and/or transformed by the actors involved. It exemplifies how Europeanisation opens new policy spaces in which individuals operate as agents of change (Deacon & Stubbs 2007) and as translators between various, sometimes contradictory goals and bodies of knowledge (3.2.).

Understanding the reform of Serbian governance, then, requires a perspective which combines the frameworks of postsocialism, transition and Europeanisation. Some aspects of the socialist past lingered on although they were radically altered in the 1990s to yield new concerns after 2000 which, mediated through Milošević’s regime, related less directly to the socialist legacy. Literature suggests both peculiar and generic conditions enabling the SFRY’s collapse. This was clearly a party state emphasising core communist ideologies, but its central features such as ‘corporatist structures, limited pluralism, relaxed cultural policies, a measure of charismatic leadership and highly selective repression, *likened it to non-communist authoritarianism*’ (Vladislavljević 2008: 49, my emphasis). Verdery’s (1996: 31–5) argument that the main structural reason why socialism fell was the increasing articulation of some Eastern European regimes with global capitalism since the 1970s in an effort to solve their economic problems – by borrowing, importing Western capital, or limited liberalisation – resonates particularly well in Yugoslavia which accumulated large foreign debt and has economically struggled since the 1970s (Vladislavljević 2008: 46). The gap widening between workers and apparatchiks highlighted the failure of socialist egalitarianism and boosted the formation of workers’ identity.

It was primarily growing social inequality, rather than the authoritarian character of the regime, which prompted the ‘antibureaucratic revolution’ of 1988–89. Workers could use legitimate channels for dissent as the regime was relatively tolerant of their protests (so as to maintain its legitimacy) and of protests revolving around ethnic relations (due to Yugoslav multi-nationalism). In the ‘revolution’, precisely these two motives were activated,

respectively, by the declining living standards and by the long-standing conflict between the Serb minority and Albanian majority in Kosovo, formerly a taboo subject brought to the spotlight by the 1980s nationalist surge (Dragović-Soso 2002; Gagnon 2004). Short of challenging the regime as such, protesters demanded ethnic equality, social security and accountability of key officials. While Gagnon (2004) portrays the ‘revolution’ as orchestrated by Milošević’s party conservatives to consolidate their power against progressives and divert attention away from calls for radical reforms, Vladislavljević (2008) convincingly argues that non-elite actors also played a significant role. However, their accounts concur in that ‘[t]he focus was on the reform of Yugoslavia’s authoritarianism and state, rather than on democratization’ (*ibid.*: 205), unlike in the Central European ‘velvet revolutions’.

The transition had to encompass a restructuring of the multi-national state. This violent process followed the logic of ‘constitutional nationalism’ which ‘envisions a state in which basic sovereignty [and privilege] resides with a particular nation’ (Hayden 1999: 68). Slovenian and then Croatian constitutional amendments of 1989–90 implemented the principle of republican supremacy and aimed at the establishment of sovereign ethnonational states. This interacted with the ambiguous position of Serbian nationhood in the federation – as potentially ‘hegemonic’, its expressions were discouraged (Bowman 1994; Pavlowitch 2002: 161–2). In contrast to other Yugoslav sub-nations, Serbs developed an identity that was most unmarked and interchangeable with Yugoslavism, but they also retained the republican institutions to which they could revert when Yugoslavism failed (Vujacic 2004). The 1974 constitution weakened Serbia’s position vis-à-vis other republics and the federal government. As a result, Serbs had, objectively and subjectively, more to lose in the breakup.

Milošević’s conservatives exploited the dynamism of ‘revolution’ and nationalist mobilisations to establish a regime *fusing socialist and nationalist elements*, thus forfeiting the purity of communist ideology for their continued incumbency (Vujačić 2003). This ‘nationalist authoritarianism’ (Gordy 1999) or ‘hybrid/competitive authoritarianism’ (Gould & Sickner 1999) maintained *a façade of democracy*. Institutional continuity with the LCS was apparent – the SPS inherited its personnel, infrastructure and control of the electronic media (Pavlaković 2005: 23). Especially after the project of ‘Great Serbia’ had unambiguously failed, the regime focused on safeguarding the power of Milošević’s family and allied mafias and ‘tycoons’ through authoritarian methods such as the control of media, security and military apparatuses, and strategic redistribution in an ‘insider privatisation’.

The 2000 regime change, despite a relatively consistent shift in official policies, is often seen as a *failed transition redux*. The former opposition quickly returned to its previous disunity, capturing and reinforcing contradictory sentiments of the electorate. The main divide was between the proponents of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ transition, with the latter inclined to keep the authoritarian system intact (Gordy 2004). Commentators criticise the government’s inability to face the criminal past, its problematic relationship with the ICTY (Dimitrijevic 2008) and a slow pace of democratisation. Kalandadze and Orenstein (2009: 1421) explain even this modest progress by a ‘consistent external pressure to democratize’ associated with the perspective of EU membership rather than attributing it to the success of the ‘electoral revolution’. I examine this claim by studying the forms ‘democratisation’ assumes in the studied projects and policies.

What partly accounts for this indecisive change is Serbia’s political economy. In competitive authoritarianisms, endemic rent-seeking creates crises encouraging economic agents to reconsider their loyalty to the regime, but a fully-fledged market democracy cannot be assumed to necessarily result (Gould & Sickner 2008). In Serbia, such reconsideration was further enabled by the consolidation of power of the economic elites to the point that they did not need to control the state anymore, only negotiate non-interference with the new government (Gagnon 2004: 128; Gould & Sickner 2008: 761). In sum, despite a change in formal politics, much of the ‘shadow’ elite conserved its privilege and wealth for the time being.

Informal forms of economic sociality significantly shape globalisation and state transformation in Serbia. They share basic characteristics across postsocialist contexts (Wedel 2003) and their effects are inherently *paradoxical* – they compensate for deficiencies and inconsistencies in the formal order, while simultaneously subverting it (Ledeneva 2006). While their ethnographic study is beyond the reach of the current project, I briefly mention them here since they significantly shape how the reform of governance may proceed. In the 1990s Serbia, structures that were relatively stable but highly ‘deviant’ (from the normative transition perspective) evolved at the level of both the ‘black economy’ – *illegal* elite strategies of wealth accumulation, often state-based (Miljković & Hoare 2005) – and the ‘grey economy’, *a-legal* household-based ‘survival strategies’ of the rapidly impoverished masses (Mrkšić 1995). The *wars*, rather than detours on the path to transition or incidents of social breakdown, were themselves processes of ‘social transformation’ (Duffield 2001: 136–60)

and means of state reordering by the logic of constitutional nationalism set into motion by elite and non-elite actors. The ‘illiberal’ war economy developed as a more functional and globalised alternative to the formal sector marginalised by recession and sanctions (Sörensen 2003). Its legacy is *transnational informal networks* which exploit the weakness of post-conflict Balkan states and undermine formal structures and attempts at their reform, including Europeanisation (Kostovicova & Bojičić-Dželilović 2006).

To analyse the various forms taken by the ‘everyday state’ in the postsocialist, postauthoritarian and post-conflict setting of Serbia requires attention to these uneven processes of transition (or non-transition) and to the political and economic factors which underpin these. It involves exploring how the development projects are rooted in existing political and economic realities while their personnel simultaneously attempt to transcend some of these. The concept of neoliberal governmentality requires an examination of not only state but also non-state actors, and of the ways in which these interact to produce effects that appear to lie in the realm of ‘governance’. The following section outlines the methods to be used in such an exploration.

Methods

In the context of the two projects, I will explore symbolic (linguistic, ideological) and pragmatic (relational, political) aspects of governance transformation at the interfaces of the state, civil society and transnational forces. In the first project⁸, through participant observation, discourse analysis and interviewing, I will examine how and what kinds of knowledge about desirable state transformation are ‘transferred’ between the participants, emerge in their interactions (e.g., in seminars, study trips, informal contexts) and materialise in the resultant artefacts. At the project’s various stages, I will repeatedly interview the implementers and grantees to enquire into what influenced their practices (3.3.). After the project’s completion, I intend to ‘follow’ the generated policy recommendations in their (non-) implementation, by interviewing officials of relevant institutions, such as ministries and the Office for the EU Integration which is entrusted with the task of coordinating similar projects and providing legal, institutional and strategic frameworks for democratisation and Europeanisation. In this later stage, considering that the EU Enlargement Fund will be

8. The second project concerns ‘civil-society building’ as another aspect of governance reform (3.2.).

completed in mid-2011, I will also assess the possibility of conducting participant observation in and of other practices of transnational state reform, such as ‘twinning’ projects, seeking the assistance of my informants and local anthropologists in accessing these ‘sites’.

During and after my fieldwork, I will juxtapose the findings of discourse analysis with data on practices within the governance processes in order to identify congruities, discrepancies and silences. I will probably rely on interviews more than in traditional ethnographies, as participation in elite and insider activities can be difficult. In terms of methodological sequencing, interviews should come later, as discussing some of the relevant issues requires a good rapport with informants (which suggests a need to repeat interviews, working gradually towards more sensitive topics) and considerable cultural competence.

3.2. CIVIL-SOCIETY BUILDING, EUROPEANISATION AND ITS BROKERS

Conceptualisation and contextualisation

Alongside those factors intrinsic to Serbian society which might be seen to impede reform, I will explore those which promote it: specifically the intention to ‘Europeanise’ and, in the process, to promote the building of civil society. Even here, however, the presence of mediating brokers presents an uneven picture which complicates the image of a smoothly rerun ‘transition’. I trace within the projects how particular organisational forms materialise and elite cultures form, and how that reflects – or influences – transnational civil society building and Europeanisation. Going beyond formal organisations is necessary not to overestimate their impact on society (Hann 2003). In particular, I will study the practices and values of the project participants as brokers of democratisation and globalisation. Below, I theorise about civil society and development elites, placing them in the setting of the projects.

Standard political science accounts represent postsocialist democracies as enfeebled by *the weakness of civil society* and explain this by the communist legacy and the constraints of nationalism (which may be a part of that legacy). Citizens avoid participating in present-day voluntary organisations because of their experience with the communist ones. Informal networks of friends and kin retain their prominence which, unlike impersonal networks, are said not to contribute to the building of an efficient, impartial state. Thus a set of conceptual assumptions and ideological associations knits the ideas of democratisation, civil-society

building and European integration together into a relatively coherent discourse in postsocialist Europe (Verdery 1996: 104). The processes of transition, including development initiatives, are seen to fit into this narrative.

There has not been much academic analysis of international aid to postsocialist countries. But what research is available shows that a lack of understanding of the specificities of these countries, together with ideological misconceptions of transitology (Stubbs 2002), have frequently led to unimpressive results. The aid community tended to blame the socialist legacy without recognising its own contribution to the perpetuation of such a legacy – because the practice as well as local interpretations of aid were highly politicised, it reinforced the networks bridging political and economic spheres characteristic of socialist systems which fought over aid resources (Creed & Wedel 1997: 262). Are transfers from other postsocialist countries, especially from countries like Slovakia whose relationship with Serbia is characterised by amity and structural closeness, better suited than those from Western ones to overcome past mistakes?

The discourse of *civil-society building*, much favoured by donors, has been trenchantly criticized by anthropologists. It has often been interpreted as the 'exporting' of a hegemonic notion which privileges associational voluntarism over ascriptive ties (Hashmi 2006), and formal, stable, structured organisations over informal, loose and fluctuating groups and networks (Nuijten 2001), without recognizing the very different conditions which might obtain in the setting to which the model is imported. Civil society and its building, if it can be a valid object of study, must be viewed more inclusively so as to encompass local modes of association, including those not overtly political. In Eastern Europe, academicians and former dissidents typically defined civil society negatively, 'as a homogenised and unified realm, mirroring the homogenising and unifying state to which it ostensibly stands opposed' (Hann 1996: 17). I follow Hann and other anthropologists in defining it *positively* as consisting of ideas and practices which establish co-operation and trust in social life.

In the Balkans, development agencies attempted to replace local 'parallel structures' and models of loyalty (such as kinship, clans, social networks etc.) with their own 'magical' concepts (Sampson 1996, 2004). Such policies represent a governmentality promoting specific 'technologies of the self' (Shore & Wright 1997: 29) – the model democratic citizen is being conditioned to forsake his old allegiances for participation in 'proper' kinds of organisations. These may be defined not only formally but also by reference to the agendas

they endorse. The ‘NGOization’ of social movements in globalising and neo-liberalising Croatia emphasised ‘issue-specific interventions and pragmatic strategies with a strong employment focus, rather than the establishment of a new democratic counter-culture’ (Bagić 2004: 222 in Stubbs 2007: 161). Civil society-building in Albania was documented to aim at qualitative changes, such as ‘transparency’, ‘sustainability’ or ‘autonomy’ of organisations (Sampson 1996: 129). Some of these are objectives of the second project to be studied.

Civil society, in fact, ‘thrived’ in the SFRY (Stubbs 2001) but only within limits set by the party (Bieber 2003a). The generic assumption that state communisms nearly abolished the private sphere is less applicable to Yugoslav selectively repressive authoritarianism. Especially important was the implementation of decentralisation and ‘self-management socialism’ following the 1974 constitution which is ‘of immense interest as an experiment in “participatory socialism”’ (Stubbs 2007: 166). In the 1980s, younger leaders, particularly in Slovenia and Serbia, grew increasingly tolerant of cultural and political dissent and of the proliferation of feminist and ecological movements, independent media and cultural and intellectuals’ initiatives (*ibid.*; Vladislavljević 2008).

This suggests Serbia’s considerable experience of participation in a relatively autonomous and organised public sphere. The international donors’ mistake thus appears to be opting for a ‘clean slate’ approach instead of helping adapt viable older associations for new ends. But stopping here risks reading the pro-democratic potential of local civil society too uncritically. In the Balkans, ideas about how different groups should live together seem underpinned by ‘negative tolerance’ – a pragmatic politics of coexistence which does not seek to eliminate inter-group differences and potential conflicts and involves indifference to others rather than their positive evaluation. As it is closely linked with ‘civil religion’, meaning religion in citizens’ everyday lives, ‘the key units [of post-socialist civil society] seem not to be enlightenment individuals but ethno-religious collectivities’ (Hann 2003: 73).

The ‘Other Serbia’ was that which defined itself in opposition to the Milošević regime and its supporters (3.3.). It was the main recruitment base for resistance movements and NGOs (Bieber 2003b). Its views are now seen as being promoted by the politicians to whom the elites and most voters moved their support. This picture of a new ‘progressive’ alliance is, however, marred by the slow progress of democratisation and by the existence of an ‘*illiberal*’ civil society which expanded owing to the more democratic environment coupled with a lack of consensus on Serbia’s future. It promotes ‘an even more exclusive version of

Serbian nationhood (...) built on a radical critique of the failure of Milošević's project rather than of the project itself' (Kostovicova 2006: 31). In other words, the version of Serbian nationhood they espoused far outstripped the version endorsed by the Milošević regime. The groups which constitute this sector of civil society adopt organisational and communication strategies of pro-democratic initiatives to pursue Christian right-wing, ethnonationalist and conservative programmes. Some evidence exists of their links to mainstream institutions, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church which sees European integration and (most) NGOs as a threat to Serbian Orthodox values and traditions (Malešević 2006) and to parts of the new political establishment, including Koštunica's Democratic Party (Byford 2002, 2003). For instance, the 'Dignity' Patriotic Movement participates in or even organizes gatherings attended by Church dignitaries, like commemorations of the founding of Orthodox monasteries (*Lelić* 2010) or of the Battle of Kosovo (*Vidovdan* 2009). The inaugurations of some of its regional branches have reportedly taken place in the Democratic Party's offices (Byford 2002: 54). Recently, it held meetings in support of suspected war criminals General Mladić (*Kordonom...* 2010) and former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić (*Radovana...* 2008). Attending such events should enable me to study 'rural' or 'semi-urban' practices and conservative, nationalist identities, and to achieve a more comprehensive picture of governance-society alliances and the political visions they strive to performatively constitute.

On the other hand, my project also involves studying the *elites* who are active in civil society in its more liberal sense. While I engage with literatures on elites in development and postsocialist contexts, I avoid assuming too much about the social status of actors like employees of smaller NGOs whose positions in educational and cultural fields – that is, their 'cultural capital' – are likely to be more favourable than their economic position might suggest. Furthermore, in anthropology it is problematic to use 'elite' as an external social label; a group's members must develop and share an 'elite culture' and self-identification to be identifiable as elite (Shore 2002). However, I do posit that professional involvement in development is typically a successful mobility strategy entailing integration into a specific socio-cultural 'world of projects' (e.g., Mandel 2002). I aim to explore whether and how a similar process of elite building based on roles played in projects takes place in my field.

In Serbia, the socialist elite conserved its political and economic privilege through the 1990s (Sørensen 2003: 74) even on a larger scale than in other postsocialist societies (Müller *et al.* 1999; Highley, Lengyel & *et al.* 2000). Elite continuity paralleled regime continuity in

that the economic and political ruling classes remained relatively undifferentiated. The old elite effected its '*adaptive reconstruction*' – fast and large-scale Bourdieuan conversions of political, economic and social capital, mostly into economic capital (Lazić 2000: 130). The 'new middle class' of businessmen, in contrast to the impoverished and opposition-leaning 'old middle class' of urban professionals, mostly operated symbiotically with the regime. In 1988, a privatisation programme was announced but, already in 1991, the privatised enterprises were effectively renationalised and put under indirect control by the SPS (Djuric-Kuzmanovic & Zarkov 1999: 31; Gould & Sickner 2008: 760). Milošević went on to buy off foes and reward friends with directorships which they subsequently often abused to enrich themselves.

Arguably, in the present 'post-postsocialist' phase of the Balkan transition, the 'old' postsocialist elites became obsolete and were replaced by a new elite configuration (Sampson 2002a). Its constituent groups form key channels through which globalisation enters the region, although in different ways. Development professionals, described as a '*comprador bourgeoisie*', consist of 'a pliable, effective local elite which not only carries out orders from the centre but whose ultimate allegiance and frame of reference also lies with the centre' (*ibid.*: 299). The 'old middle class' is its likely recruitment base (Sørensen 2003). Mirroring the overall pattern of globalisation in the Balkans, its activities may be integrative, e.g. by promoting EU membership, but also fragmenting. Aid resources become the object of elite struggles, and local managers of international projects may 'lift off' in their values and worldview from their own society, or even decide to emigrate physically, thus diminishing the ranks of national elites.

I approach the project participants as 'democratisation brokers' whose role, equivalently to 'development brokers' (Mosse & Lewis 2006) or 'development agents' (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 169–72) is to translate between different knowledges and interests and thus sustain the whole development network. I will study their actions, perceptions and interests to achieve an actor-oriented perspective on the production and negotiation of relevant goals and meanings within the projects.

Methods

I envisage doing research in two kinds of settings. The first constitutes the ‘elite cultures’ of the development workers. I will further study the ‘organisational environments’ of the NGOs for which these people work, i.e. ‘how the world outside influences the world inside organisations’ (Van Maanen 2001: 247), in order to investigate the privileging and actualisation of particular organisational forms by the projects. Especially relevant will be the second project; through interviews with representatives of the beneficiary NGO, I will enquire to how the knowledge being transferred transforms these. I will also conduct discourse analysis of project documentation and participant observation in the settings in which such knowledge is being transferred (e.g., seminars).

The second setting consists of the activists and sympathisers of the nationalist movements like ‘Dignity’ who are difficult to identify before my entry into the field. I plan on approaching them by attending nationalist and traditionalist rallies, concerts of *turbofolk* music and so forth. Visiting places considered popular with such ‘kinds of people’ or participating in relevant virtual networks are other possible strategies. I envisage proceeding to engage in these activities after becoming more confident in Serbian and less strikingly foreign. While being open about my research activities, I will initially keep a low profile and participate passively, and will proceed to interviewing once I establish relationships of trust with informants and gain sufficient understanding of the limits of questioning.

In both cases, I will combine participant observation (limited in the second case), interviewing, discourse analysis and ‘life-projects’⁹. Overall, these methods should enable me to analyse relationships between various types of civil-society associations and the transnational and national governmentalities to be studied, as an aspect of the governance-society alliance.

9. I use this term to refer to loosely structured narratives similar to life histories, but oriented more to the present and to future ambitions.

3.3. CULTURAL STYLES, POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES AND THE BUILDING OF A DEMOCRATIC NATION

Conceptualisation and contextualisation

Exploring the reform of governance in a setting such as Serbia requires attention not only to the practices and discourses of those within the projects and not only to the process of ‘civil-society building’ in the sense intended by donors, but also to other actors and recipients of reform/transition (or non-reform/non-transition) in the broader setting which connects state (or governance or neoliberal governmentality) to society. ‘Cultural styles’ (Ferguson 1997) and ‘political subjectivities’ (Greenberg 2007) through which people engage with the examined projects and policies these reflect are a focus of my research. Cultural styles are an external, performative aspect of selfhood which can mediate *ad hoc*, transient (self-) identifications, where subjectivities refers to an internal, reflexive aspect. While the semiosis of styles can be variable, context-dependent and inconsistent, political subjectivity is a component of self-understanding and people may therefore desire to consolidate it and resolve contradictions. Project participants, I maintain, will perform a style which folk discourses associate with urbanity, modernity and pro-democratic and pro-Western subjectivities (which are, however, valorised perspectivally). These performances of actors may signify their loyalty to elites promoting democratisation and European integration whom they aspire to join or have already joined for reasons ranging from accessing economic resources to enhancing one’s political agency, i.e. participating in a performative constitution of governance. I will document both the folk discourses and the associated practices like consumption behaviour or aesthetic preferences, and relate these to actors’ ‘life-projects’. I will further examine relationships between styles and subjectivities – while many people may display pairs that ‘match’ (in folk terms), some can exhibit discrepancies, and each case requires explanation.

On the governance side of this relationship of socio-political semiosis and positioning, I approach national and transnational *policies as ‘myths’* in the anthropological sense of socially functional and productive ‘cosmological blueprints’ (Ferguson 1999: 13) or, less loftily, implicit and explicit articulations of models of society (Shore & Wright 1997: 7). All regimes strive to establish their legitimacy and authority; more successful ones do so by making their ideologies part of common sense, ‘engineer[ing] conditions so that, seemingly, consent of the

public comes "naturally" (*ibid.*: 24). In this perspective, *policies enact nation-building projects* by tapping into citizens' everyday lifeworlds and reconfiguring their subjectivities. This research concerns *the myths of socialism, nationalism and democracy*, focusing especially on the latter so as to engage with understudied symbolic and cultural aspects of the building (or non-building) of the democratic Serbian nation. I seek to understand these myths and their vernacularised versions, and how they interact with folk models of politics (discussed below) to shape styles and subjectivities.

Recent anthropological scholarship on *democracy* documents the mutual imbrication of subaltern and dominant groups in the construction of diverse forms of democracy (Lazar 2004; Paley *et al.* 2008). Correspondingly, I assume that democratic myths are not only instrumentalised by elites, but also adopted by 'ordinary people' as categories for the orientation of life-projects and interpretation of experiences in seemingly apolitical domains of life (similarly to discourses of development – Pigg 1992; Cooper & Packard 1997). As a combined result of elite manipulations and everyday engagements, citizens develop 'popular perceptions of democracy' (Banerjee 2008). Serbian urban middle-class youth came to identify democracy with electoral and consumer choice and overcoming poverty and international isolation (Greenberg 2006b: 193). How might meanings of democracy and associated styles of ordinary citizens compare with those of democratisation 'brokers', who are, presumably, closer to the official discourses promoted by the project networks of which they are members?

To account for the *transnationality* of this nation-building, I can draw on anthropological contributions on 'cultural' dimensions of the EU, such as on the relationships between how people perceive it, nationalisms, and Europeanisation (Bellier, Wilson *et al.* 2000). Anthropologists perceived the construction of European citizenship as an inherently top-down process dominated by bureaucratic elites (Shore & Black 1994; Shore 1997). Policy-makers themselves, however, undergo 'cognitive Europeanisation' (Guillén *et al.* 2002; 2004). I trace such transformations (or their shallowness) in Serbia and inquire into the subjectivities it conditions. Just who is affected by democratic discourses is likely to depend on whether they manage to employ local idioms, or simply import normative Western models as suggested for other Balkan transitional countries (Sampson 1996, 2002b, 2004; Stubbs 2002).

How does this conceptual apparatus relate to my context? From the 1990s onwards, there was much talk about deep cleavage running through society, dominated by a dichotomy of ‘*two Serbias*’. It was constructed by the opposition self-identified as the ‘Other Serbia’ – urban intellectuals and bourgeoisie – in contrast to ‘Milošević’s Serbia’ rural and semi-urban groups (Jansen 2001; Naumović 2002: 25–6). The binary reflects widespread *folk models of politics, culture and society* which draw links, on the one hand, between political orientations and aesthetic forms, and on the other hand, socio-cultural classifications; thus, they associate pro-Milošević, conservative and nationalist views with ‘peasants’, ‘peasant-urbanites’ and other ‘Balkanised’ groups (see below), whereas the cultured urban middle class is seen as inherently cosmopolitan, democratic and liberal¹⁰ (Spasić 2006; Greenberg 2006b). I relate these models to ‘Balkanism’, contemporary politics and the histories of Yugoslav modernisation and Serbian nation-building.

The progress-oriented Titoist regime largely devalued the peasantry as stagnant and sought to forge an alliance with educated urbanites. Massive rural-urban migration, however (Vujović 1995; Bougarel 1999: 165), blurred the boundaries between urban and rural society and culture. It would seem that a huge social sector could be described as ‘*semi-urban*’ or ‘peasant-urbanite’ (Simić 1973) – out of the countryside, but poorly integrated in the city and culturally rural – and that its presence objectively counters the rural/urban dualism.¹¹ However, it confirms the binary when the parties to it are defined by their ‘*culture*’ (understood *in an evolutionist sense* as civilisational progress) instead of geographic location – ‘*semi-urban*’ then simply becomes spatially misplaced ‘*rural*’. Such a positivist conceptualisation, found in Serbian folk discourses on urbanity (Spasić 2006) and scholarly accounts (Gordy 1999), is oversimplifying. For example, the 1996–97 protests were consistently urban in terms of both recruitment base and identity markers used to oppose the regime, and ideologically democratic and anti-nationalist. However, the 1999 protests – anti-NATO, and hence by implication anti-Western, nationalist and pro-regime – used the same mobilising ‘*motifs of self*’. This was achieved by organising these motifs around different

10. This is facilitated by the fact that the Serbian adjective *gradanski* translates as ‘urban’ as well as ‘civil’ (Spasić 2006: 222–3).

11. Simić (1973) described the cultural integration of rural newcomers in Belgrade as fairly easy – unlike their economic adaptation. The differences between the professional and working-class cultures appeared more pronounced than those between urban and rural working-class cultures.

categories – ‘citizens’ in the first case, ‘Serbs’ in the second (Jansen 2000). No neat mapping occurred between performances and political subjectivities, nor even between the latter and the transient and aggregate protest identities.

To transcend the confluences of folk and analytic models, I draw on Ferguson’s (1999) analysis of similarly evolutionist discourses in Zambia contrasting purportedly urban and rural lifestyles and practices. To explain the ethnographic fact of a cultural duality of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘localism’, Ferguson conceptualises them as *cultural styles* – not cultural elaborations of objective social groupings but ‘*practices that signify differences between social categories*’ (*ibid.*: 95, original emphasis). While styles are performative competences, the material and social investments one must make to achieve them constrain the possibilities of switching between them. Styles are accomplished and enacted as a ‘strategy of survival within compulsory systems’ (*ibid.*: 99). Ferguson integrates performance theory (Butler 1990) and politico-economic analysis in a ‘micropolitical economy of cultural practices’ (1999: 100) and shows that localism is actually an urban style signifying loyalty to rural allies. My usage of ‘cultural styles’ somewhat differs – the political economy which I see informing them is not necessarily ‘micro’ in the sense of being confined to one’s personal networks, and I am also interested in their relationship with individual political agency.

This leads me to study *political subjectivities*, asking

how one's self-understanding intersects with how one orients oneself in the world and the kinds of commitments, relationships and actions one values as meaningful [and] how people come to understand themselves in relationship to possibility (and desirability) of political and social action (Greenberg 2007: 24–5).

Exploring such subjectivities should generate a finer understanding of cultural styles, for many people may experience the dividing line of ‘two Serbias’ as running through their own selves. The incoherency, opacity and constant reordering of Serbian politics (Zivkovic 2007), as well as attempts to invent a plural, tolerant, European ‘new Serbia’ at a time when ethnonationalist and traditionalist ideologies of belonging remain potent (Mitrović 2008, 2010), lead people to adopt a range of ambiguous, sometimes self-consciously Balkanist identities. I hope a ‘political economy of cultural practices’ analysis can shed more light on these subjectivities.

These, however, respond not only to present politics but also to meanings from the repository of Serbian national history and political culture. One of the SFRY's organising principles, as in all communist states, was *collectivist representation*. It posited 'the people' as sharing universal interests to be represented by the party. This underlying structure persisted in the 1990s although ideologically, it 'was no longer based on the universal socialist subject but rather on a collective subject defined by ethnic belonging' (Greenberg 2006b: 184). The '*socialist nation*', a paternalist form of state–subject relation not assuming an ethnocultural similarity of subjects¹² (Verdery 1996: 63–102), was ethnicised. As elsewhere in postsocialist Europe (Verdery 1998; Hann 1999), the homogenised society lent itself to the construction of 'people-as-one' and expulsion of ethnic 'others'. Do the myths of democracy also appropriate this collectivist representational model, or do they substitute it by representing people first and foremost as individuals?

Serbian *nationalism* also influences the subjectivities and folk models I intend to study. I draw on scholarship on '*Balkanism*' in order to amend the simplistic instrumentalism of some analyses of nationalism by bringing out the deep historical roots of meanings mobilised today. Balkanism is a discourse creating a stereotype of the Balkans, developed out of the liminal position of former Ottoman territories in Europe between the 'East' and 'West' (Todorova 1994), and out of the region's status as a meeting site of empires, scripts, religions, cold war blocks (Bakić-Hayden & Hayden 1992: 4) and, at present, the EU's inside and outside. Balkanism effectuates the fragmenting logic of '*nesting Orientalisms*' which reproduces the hierarchical Orientalist dichotomy on an ever-smaller scale, thus enabling 'nesting divisions' *within* each group which previously used the differentiating strategy vis-à-vis other groups (Bakić-Hayden 1995). Subjectivities in Serbia are ambiguous, as already discussed. The valorisation of the poles of folk dichotomies is similarly shifting and perspectival. This inconsistency stems from the logic of nesting Orientalisms and the contradictory, insecure nature of Serbian national identity shaped by the Balkanist self-scrutiny through the Western gaze – already the 19th century Serbian national movement wavered between the ideal of Central European metropolitan civilisation and Romantic authenticity of the Serbian village (van de Port 1998).

12. However, ethnonationality *was* institutionalised and even constitutionalised in the SFRY where the main nationalities had their own republics (Hayden 1999; cf. Slezkine 1994 on the Soviet Union). Milošević and other Yugoslav leaders merely elevated it to a key ideological principle.

From the 1960s, the unbalanced modernisation of Yugoslav society provoked its ‘retraditionalisation’ – ‘the resurgence of nationalist ideologies and communalist practices in political life’ (Bougarel 1999: 165). Yugoslav cinematography and music also revelled in primitivist and Balkanist elements (van de Port 1998: 88). The self-consciously Balkanist aspect of national identity reemerged in the 1990s less suddenly than was apparent. *Myths of ‘the peasant’* (Čolović 2002: 21–8) played a key role in this, as has happened so many times in the history of modern Serbian politics (Naumović 1995; Ristović 2008). Under Milošević, the pure and noble peasant once again defined the national ideal, while cities were condemned as liberal and Westernised (Gordy 1999: 12–14). Simultaneously, Milošević’s Serbia was also Balkanised from without by the ‘Other Serbia’ which thus sought to establish its social superiority.

The Milošević regime retained much communist symbolism (Pavlaković 2005: 19) and its collectivist pattern of representation but combined it with the ethnonationalist register to perpetuate its power. It exploited the images of external and internal ‘enemies’ of the nation to call for ‘national unity’ and demobilise the opposition by branding it as ‘anti-Serbian’ (Gagnon 2004). A part of opposition unwittingly adopted a strategy of nationalist overbidding, indicating that nationalism became a ‘benchmarking’ political principle. For instance, Koštunica, victorious in the 2000 presidential elections, was about as nationalist as Milošević.

The myths of socialism, nationalism and democracy do not neatly succeed each other, but overlap, coming into the foreground, receding into the background and entering into complex dialogues, as the ideological continuities between the communist, Milošević and post-2000 regimes indicate. I explore how they combine to inform people’s relationships with politics. Symmetrically to the assumptions about development professionals, I hypothesise that practices associated with ‘rural’ and ‘semi-urban’ people represent a cultural style signifying, *inter alia*, an allegiance with the remnants of Milošević-era structures and with ‘illiberal’ organisations and movements. But other motives may be found in the space between political subjectivities of these people and past and present politics.¹³ These may include dislike of particular EU policies rather than of ‘the West’ as such; nostalgia not for the authoritarian rule of Milošević but for the social security which, responding to the workers’

13. I similarly argue that practices of the project participants may mirror a range of motives.

demands in the ‘antibureaucratic revolution’ (3.1.), he promised to maintain. As Jansen shows, the same performances can mean something very different depending on the context of their deployment. To draw a deliberately far-fetched parallel, do the NATO bombings and democratising and Europeanising policies share something in common that may provoke ‘rural’ self-identifications in otherwise democratic-minded people, perhaps thus challenging (or nuancing) the integrity of their subjectivities? Or, from an opposite perspective, do these policies try to employ ‘traditional’ identity markers to enroll those with nationalist subjectivities? In general, how do elements of the myths of democracy, of subjectivities and of political culture intersect to drive people’s *ad hoc* identifications and observable responses to the democratic-nation building, and how these in turn feed back into their subjectivities?

Methods

The study of national and transnational policies and their popular reception will require attention both to their official versions and to ‘political language’ in which people express their engagements with politics (Paley 2008a: 7). The media (including social media), policy documents and project-generated texts will all be relevant.

I will document the practices of the project participants who are most obviously the audience or ‘recipients’ of the intended reforms, that is, cosmopolitan-minded, urban-dwelling people who are members of community organisations, voluntary societies or charities, and who are also consumers of the kinds of journalism upon which the ‘projects’ intend to have their impact. I will study how they dress, talk and eat, what music and films they prefer – generally, how they communicate what sort of people they are, in both private and public settings. I will conduct participant observation in working spaces, but also in bars, social events and homes. Through interviews, I will seek to understand what meanings these practices mediate (especially when interpreted through the folk models of politics) for those who perform them and for others; observing and discussing interactions between the project participants and other people will be therefore of special importance. This main body of research on the styles and subjectivities of those working in the projects will be juxtaposed and compared with those of informants with presumably radically different subjectivities – activists and sympathisers of ‘illiberal civil society’ described above.

In both cases, I will try to learn how my interviewees construct their subjectivities by

prompting them to position themselves in relation to catchwords, politicians, institutions, events, current issues, and the official discourses represented by, e.g., selected media stories. With the project participants, I will also examine their orientations to project-specific items, such as objectives. To situate the subjectivities in the context of informants' pragmatic strategies, I will collect their 'life-projects'.

Spotting and understanding contextual variations of styles, their resulting congruencies and discrepancies with subjectivities and how people deal with them, and the relationships between styles, subjectivities and the democratic nation-building, will be the ultimate aim. To facilitate the collection of data, I will mainly work with informants with reasonably developed political subjectivities, i.e. those opinionated about and eager to comment on politics, although not necessarily 'objectively well-informed' or taking consistent, unambiguous positions.

4. METHODOLOGY

I adopt the basic assumption shared by anthropologies of democracy, policy and development that research on language (important for understanding normative ideals) must be combined with actor and practice-centred research. Because the projects involve inter-institutional and transnational networks of participants, their ethnography has to be multi-sited: it must travel and follow discourses, relationships and interventions (Marcus 1995; Paley 2008b). E.g., grantees of the EU Enlargement Fund have an option of making study trips to Slovakia (to see a supposedly more advanced democracy in practice) and selected participants might be offered to present their final analyses to unspecified EU *fonctionnaires* in Brussels. I will seek to participate in these activities. My research will combine the traditional anthropological 'studying down' with 'studying up' (Nader 1969/1974; Gusterson 1997) in a research mode of 'studying through'. This is 'a method for analysing connections between levels and forms of social process and action, and exploring how those processes work in different sites – local, national and global' (Shore & Wright 1997: 14). It can help identify interactions as well as disjunctions between levels and sites. In research on elites, it may be accomplished by tracking network connections between different kinds of 'experts' and 'laymen' and playing off their divergent knowledge claims against each other (Konrad 2002).

4.1. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

I see discourse as a type of social practice dialectically linked with social organisation, power relationships and ideologies. The meaning of a *communication event* cannot be derived only from itself and its situational context. It is necessary to examine its more abstract dimensions – *discursive practice* (i.e., modes of textual production and consumption) and *sociocultural practice* (Fairclough 1995: 57–60). The relationship of sociocultural practice with communication events is mediated by its impact on discursive practice. Discourse reveals the social conditions of its production and interpretation, and its formal properties can be read both as traces of its production and as clues for its interpretation (Fairclough 1992: 24).

To understand the discursive practice informing official and oppositional representations of the transforming Serbian governance and its relationships with society, I will follow the media (including electronic social media) and policy documents as they are published during my fieldwork or retrospectively in relation to particular issues. The ‘communication events’ that will be available for analysis include observed conversations and conducted interviews, but especially project-generated texts written by the EU Enlargement Fund grantees. I will particularly focus on intertextual relations between communication events, to trace trajectories of particular keywords and explore the formal properties of representation to ascertain what these say about relationships within the project actor-networks. I will further look out for what I call ‘discursive clusters’ – linguistic elements that often appear in conjunctions, thus reflecting underlying ideologies.

My research will combine an analysis of discourses with an ethnography of the contexts of their production and consumption (Blommaert 2005). Intensive participant observation of production contexts will be possible only within the studied projects. Nevertheless, I will also inquire about production contexts in interviews with the EU Enlargement Fund grantees, including the journalists, and with beneficiaries in other examined projects if texts will be among the project outputs. As for reception, I will ask my interviewees to read/watch and comment on media content that appears to be representative of relevant aspects of the overall discursive practice. Noting their responses will also constitute a method for studying political subjectivities.

4.2. STUDYING THE PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS

I adopt an open-ended, inductive research design to approach the projects as ‘ongoing, socially constructed and negotiated process[es], not simply the execution[s] of an already-specified plan of action with expected outcomes’ (Long & Long 1992: 35). This will involve detailed record-keeping about the projects and an orientation towards actors and practices (Mosse 1998). In practice, I will combine interviewing with voluntary work in the NGOs, participating in project-related activities and other activities, including social events, to gain some grasp of the overall organisational context and to get to know my colleagues also as social beings.

I take Callon’s (1986) ANT-based ‘sociology of translation’ as a methodological guide to studying how the projects ‘become real through the work of generating and translating interests, creating context by tying in supporters and so sustaining interpretations’ (Mosse & Lewis 2006: 13; see also Mosse 2004). This approach tracks knowledge production and construction of a network of relationships between participants in a process of *translation* ‘during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited’ (*ibid.*: 203). From translations between various, often contradictory goals emerges an ‘actor-network’, a transient entity which is simultaneously, for different purposes, a network and an actor. This method will help capture mobilisation and enrollment of entities at different sites and scales (e.g., the EU, the state, small NGOs in multiple countries) into one *ad hoc* actor-network.

While I will strive to maximise the use of participant observation, I will also need to rely on interviewing. Issues of access may prevent participant observation in some settings that I will identify as relevant, e.g. in state institutions, and many informants will be unavailable for casual interaction and may actually *expect* interviewing from someone claiming to be doing social-scientific research. Meeting their initial expectations can enable a later use of other methods.

I envisage mostly semi-structured interviewing, steering the conversation towards my interests, but leaving the interviewees considerable scope for introducing issues they consider relevant. More specific questioning will be deployed as my ethnographic knowledge deepens. Digital recording will be used, if appropriate, to store the interviews in order to review them later.

4.3. LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY

My Serbian language acquisition is somewhat facilitated by being a native speaker of related Slovak language. I have been studying individually and taking individual lessons since October 2009 and will attend an intensive intermediate course in Belgrade before my fieldwork. I will also consider doing a Serbian-English ‘language swap’ with a native speaker during my fieldwork.

5. ETHICS AND POSITIONALITY

My ethical issues differ from those of more traditional ethnographies. The gap between the anthropologist and the studied – the source of many ethical problems – will be present but attenuated. Coming from another postsocialist and Slavic state – Slovakia – I fit neither the category of native ethnographer nor Western ethnographer of postsocialism (De Soto & Dudwick 2000; Živković 2000). While sharing some characteristics with the informants, my linguistic and cultural incompetence and outsider status will make me something other than a ‘native’.

In anthropology of development, ethical quandaries often result from the researcher’s *multi-positionality* – ‘[a]nthropologists write from inside development (...) “communities” as well as from outside them’ (Mosse 2004: 11). These ‘participant-insiders’ working as consultants or ‘experts’ become the primary informants for their reflexive ethnographies (Stubbs 2002: 323). For the development community, generating *anthropological* knowledge and actualising it in writing may be an ‘anti-social’ act, disrupting its rules of knowledge production and use, and rupturing relationships of trust (Mosse 2006). My position seems simpler as I have not been involved with the organisations before, and while I will work for them to participant-observe, it will be obviously a research-driven rather than professional engagement. My interests will set me off as a ‘stranger’. That may be beneficial – some information is shared more readily with an ethnographer than with, say, a worker in another NGO – or detrimental, as researching organisations anthropologically is difficult without contributing practically (Mosse 2004: 12). While I will seek to make myself useful, e.g. with

my linguistic skills and past experiences in an NGO, the absence of required expertise might hinder that.

The status and educational capital of most participants will be comparable to, and sometimes exceed, mine. For gaining access, I will entirely depend on their goodwill, which represents a power-role reversal common in anthropology of development (Mosse 2004, 2006). While I have fully negotiated basic terms of my engagement with one of the project networks and partially with the second one, I expect to have to deal with this continuously, as frequently required by organisational research (Hirsch & Gellner 2001: 5).

A key anthropological ethical principle is to anticipate and reduce harms to the studied. An obvious threat for my participants is that the findings will be interpreted as an ‘evaluation’ of the projects, thus affecting their reputation and future access to funding or political support. Equally, mere reporting of some facts, regarding e.g. non-standard practices, could be harmful to them although otherwise defensible. Therefore, I will pre-empt likely misinterpretations and counteract them if they should occur, in compliance with the ASA’s *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice*, V. 2. b).

These informants are likely to competently seek a legal protection of their anonymity and confidentiality. However, ‘it is particularly difficult to disguise, say, office-holders, organizations (...) without so distorting the data as to compromise scholarly accuracy’ (*Guidelines*, I. 5. c)). Should the participants’ and my interests so clash, the solution will depend on my ability to improvise and their willingness to compromise. Details of confidentiality and anonymity will have to be continually re-negotiated.

It will be essential to protect the participants’ intellectual property rights on knowledge acquired during the project planning and implementation. The development of project proposals may be very expensive and leakage of their elements to other organisations – competitors for funding – might result in losses to the copyright owner. Therefore, the details of which information and when I can publish will have to be negotiated at the beginning and, if necessary, revisited later.

To a limited extent, I envisage working with other participants who will be more vulnerable than the main group of informants. I will rigorously seek their informed consent and ensure protection of their anonymity. The latter might be especially important in the case of nationalist activists.

This anthropological–development engagement must be as correct and mutually enriching as possible, because the field has to be left ‘in a state which permits future access by other researchers’ (*Guidelines*, Preamble). The participants’ experience will influence their future preparedness to work with research-oriented and applied anthropologists alike. I will seek to achieve ‘objectivity’ not in the sense of repressed subjectivity, but of the informants’ augmented capacity to object to and comment on what I say about them (Latour 2000). Finally, should my findings bear on public policy or opinion, I will ensure to state their limitations (*Guidelines*, V. 3. b)).

Should I struggle to resolve *ad hoc* dilemmas, I will consult my supervisors and my local anthropological adviser, Dr Slobodan Naumović.

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