

SYMBOLIC STRUGGLES IN SERBIA – A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS FOR THE PERIOD 2006 – 2013^{2,3}

Abstract: *Contemporary Serbian society is divided in many ways. Certain divisions are more conspicuous than others, for instance the political ones, while some of them still participate in the distribution of power in the social field, although it is not that transparent. This was particularly the case during the time of the division into the “first” and “second” Serbia (Spasić, Petrović, 2013). During the analysed period (2006–2013), Serbia became an independent country and an ostensible consensus was reinforced regarding the adoption of European values⁴, the path to the EU and a peaceful future. The divisions following the regression of nationalist forces on the public scene in Serbia are not as clear-cut as in the previous period, before the declaratory, one could even say partly “tactical”, unification of political forces over the EU path.*

The aim of this paper is to sketch the outlines of symbolic struggles in contemporary Serbian society through a content analysis of daily newspapers for the period 2006–2013. Bearing in mind that the analysis covers a longer period, it is expected that it can provide an insight into the shift in the balance of the struggle. Findings imply the presence of symbolic struggles in the political arena, as well as in the area of ethnic relations as the most dominant ones. This trend is maintained throughout the observed period.

Key words: *symbolic struggles, ethnic relations, political struggles, nationalism, classification, Us and Them*

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⁴ This consensus among the main political actors was reached as early as October 2000 (see: <https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/serbia-and-eu/history/>), and was further reinforced in 2008 with the coalition between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia.

1. Problem and theoretical framework

A social community attempts to raise members that possess a socially desirable character, individuals who will become well-integrated and who will feel “comfortable in the culture” of their own society. The manner in which this value basis of a society will be defined depends on the group that imposes itself as the governing and dominant one in a social community. The dominant group forces its *system of classification* that gets interiorized and accepted to a certain extent by members of the society. The larger the number of society members that reach a consensus, the more integrated the community and the higher the level of *moral density* (Durkheim, [1893] 1997). Furthermore, with an increase in symbolic struggles in a society, the divisions – class-related (Bourdieu, 1984; Parkin 1974; DiMaggio 1987; Savage et al., 2013; Jarness, 2017; Lindell, 2020), ethnic (Barth, 1969, Verdery, 1994; Horowitz, 1985; Spinner, 1994; Sanders, 2002; Wimmer, 2008; Hancock, 2017), cultural (Somers, 1994; Lamont 2000; Van Eijck, 2001; Swidler 2001), become stricter, while the criteria for categorization and differentiation grow more stringent. Symbolic capital, the process of its manipulation, and symbolic struggles for the establishment of the domination of one’s own symbolic content allow symbolic power to also become a source of real social inequality and exclusion (Lamont, 1992; Lamont, Molnár, 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, Lamont. 2007).

On the political scene, this means drawing up ideological borders and creating fronts for political struggles, for example, along the line of the conflict between the positive effects of the implementation of European values in the culture of the Serbian society on the one hand, and the negative effects of “getting closer” to the European Union on the preservation of national identity on the other hand.

Generally speaking, profound divisions in the social context can lead to difficulties in maintaining internal stability. In other words, the set of common social values is limited, therefore, the norms that stem from those values – moral, religious, customary, as well as legal – and bring the community together are present or observed in partial groups, which causes a deep division in the society. A large number of members feel rejected in specific parts of the society in which they live. Naturally, under the influence of modernization and globalization, Serbia shares the destiny of the contemporary world in the sense of unavoidable effects of these processes; however, it also differs from the rest in a series of specificities. These can primarily be related to the value disorientation after the fall of socialism, the strengthening of nationalism and collectivism, warring past and slow transition. Moreover, Serbia is predominantly an “Orthodox country”⁵ with a renewed and fervently accepted religious tradition (Author, 2013), attempting to overcome the identity confusion with regard to the process of self-declaration, under the conditions of separation from the formerly “brotherly” related Slavic peoples, on its way to the EU.

The analysis conducted, the results of which are presented here, aims to identify the symbolic divisions along the lines of religion, ethnic belonging, political

⁵ Serbia is a country with a population that predominantly identifies as Orthodox Christian, while the Constitution defines Serbia as a secular state.

orientation, locality (rural-urban division), manners and the like. Bourdieu (1985) speaks of two fields in which symbolic struggles take place: everyday life and the institutional framework. Inside institutions, the political powers in office have a much greater chance of imposing their own worldview, since the contemporary Serbian state is to a large degree party political; thus, the parties in power control the institutions, while social and cultural policies are mainly created by party members to the detriment of professionalism (Pešić, 2007; Cvejić, 2016; Stanojević, Gundogan, Babović, 2016). The analysis presented in this paper follows both of these fields of symbolic struggles. Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical concept that, in addition to economic factors, emphasizes cultural ones as well (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu, Passeron 1990), which divide and characterize the divided classes – “cultural symbols and practices, from artistic tastes, clothing styles and eating habits to religion, science, and philosophy, including the language in which members of society communicate, embody interests and serve to enhance social inequalities” (Swartz, 1997: 6), we managed to create a methodological construct that allowed us to include all of these elements in the analysis instrument, with the idea of discovering the basic dividing lines (Spasić, 2013).

2. Content analysis method and sample

The instrument created with the aim of analysing symbolic confrontation and struggles is based on the sociological tradition (Lamont, Molnar, 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, Lamont, 2007; Jermes, 2017) that recognizes cultural elements of social divisions and struggles as important (besides the material ones), i.e., as a resource used by social groups in the struggle for occupying social positions and controlling social resources.

The analysis may contribute both to the understanding of social events and to the prediction of social changes in Serbia. The categories that represent the guidelines in this analysis include the cultural characteristics that are common to the Serbian and other societies subjected to modernization and globalization, but also those that originate from the Eastern, Balkan and local milieu of the Serbian society.

Content analysis of the media represents an important task because the media exert a significant influence on the creation of public opinion and awareness in people. One must take into account that media reporting on social reality passes through the lens of editorial policies and the values of ownership structures in newspapers. Therefore, we attempted to soften that fact and obtain as objective a picture as possible by including into the analysis daily newspapers with different concepts and different target audiences. Still, our scope remained within the circle of daily newspapers that certainly want to communicate with wider audiences. The analysed newspapers included *Danas*, *Blic* and *Kurir*. The method of content analysis was selected because it successfully combines quantitative and qualitative analyses. One of the goals of this study was to locate the dominant actors and their attitudes used to create images of reality, produce divisions, determine the “right” values, normalize opinions on certain relevant and current topics, etc.

The categories for content analysis were created after a pilot study. As already mentioned, we searched for symbolic divisions and “wars” along the lines of divisions within the possession of material wealth or lack thereof, religious and ethnic divisions, political orientations. Inside these relations we tested the main lines of conflict, such as: authoritarianism and democracy; non/transparency; collectivism as opposed to individualism; a conflict between cosmopolites and patriots; support or denunciation of diversity in sexual orientation; issues of gender distinction and perception; but also issues of moral systems of traditionalism and liberalism, as well as issues of egalitarianism and social justice. Along with all of these areas, we also emphasized the cultural sphere, where we searched for divisions between the educated and uneducated, urban and rural, and a more general topic of manners, from decency to vulgarity. We arrived at these categories by analysing theoretical conceptions that have been substantiated in earlier studies (Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990; Lamont, Fournier, 2002).

The newspaper article was the unit of analysis. Quantitative analysis of the above topics yielded information on their frequency and prominence within newspaper content – thus, to a certain extent, their presence in the public sphere, while qualitative content analysis provided findings on the manner in which the given topics were discussed and how they were used to perform delineation.

The sample included articles from the above newspapers for the period 2006–2013. This period was selected as we consider it to be a meaningful whole that can be analysed, due to a relative crystallization of value conceptions after 2000. Already in 2013, fundamental changes took place in the political arena, resulting in this period requiring separate analysis. Each of the newspapers was represented by eighty randomly selected issues proportionally distributed per year, which amounted to 240 analysed issues in total.

We decided to choose *Danas*, *Blic* and *Kurir* as representatives of, on the one hand, typical and, on the other hand, different editorial policies and readerships. Thus, we attempted to cover the greatest possible portion of daily newspapers readership, which eventually afforded us the right to assume their influence on the opinions and positioning of readers. The *Blic* daily newspaper is intended for mass audiences, with a continuous pro-European orientation. The peculiarity of the *Kurir* newspaper is a clear orientation towards mass audiences and short news without many comments. Furthermore, what is also observable is the affinity to and preferential treatment of the currently dominant political powers over a certain period of time, followed by a more critical stance of them in another, i.e., an obvious influence of daily politics on editorial policy. This newspaper can be labelled as sensationalistic, intended for the widest possible audience. Finally, the *Danas* daily newspaper is directed towards a more intellectual audience, and it contains polemics and leans towards pro-Europeanism. This daily newspaper is characterized by a more thorough and substantial examination of social phenomena, with critical insights and confrontation of different opinions, which makes it a non-classical informative newspaper.⁶

⁶ While there have been no relevant studies to date profiling the readership of daily newspapers in Serbia, some data are available on the website of the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia:

As far as the period encompassed by the analysis is concerned (from 2006 to 2013), it was characterized by a dominance of issues of national interest⁷ (Montenegro leaving the federation, the issue of the status of Kosovo, Kosovo independence declaration, cooperation with the Tribunal in The Hague, accession to the EU, etc.). After 2013, no significantly greater changes occurred in terms of international politics and the position of Serbia, even though political changes had taken place in 2012 when the Serbian Progressive Party came to power. Even though it originated from the Serbian Radical Party, a party with an exceptionally nationalistic ideological orientation, this political power which to this day is the sovereign ruler of Serbia wavers in its foreign policy between EU accession, which it declares itself to be in favour of, and a relationship with Russia, which it tries to maintain. On a more local level, it attempts to cater to the nationalistic segment of the voting population by occasionally resorting to inflammatory rhetoric – harsh speeches delivered on the topic of the borders of the Republic of Serbia or its relations with Croatia and Albania, the relativization of the issue of the status of the Republic of Srpska, and the like. The internal commotion results in further divisions into “the people”, who are the focus of attention of this government, and the increasingly marginalized “intellectual elite”, which has a critical disposition.

3. Findings

Using a qualitative and quantitative analysis of newspaper content on a previously defined sample, we reconstructed the basic discursive divisions articulated in the newspaper media space found in a single segment of the history of contemporary Serbian society (2006-2013).

The most pronounced divisions identified are those based on **a)** political preference, followed by **b)** ethnic divisions, with those relating to **c)** material status, i.e., divisions between *the world of the poor* and *the world of the rich*, in third place. Also observed were very interesting constructions of boundaries between *the educated* and *non-educated*, *cultured* and *non-cultured*, *urban* and *rural*, followed by divisions resulting from conflicts between *gender* identities and *sexual* orientations, but also by *confessional* belonging.

For the purposes of this paper, we have decided to present the most frequent and pronounced divisions, the ones that emphasize ethnic and political differences.

2.1. Ethnic belonging

The topic featuring most frequently in the analysed material, and one that emerged as an important dividing line in contemporary Serbia, is ethnic belonging as a factor of differentiation between *Us* and *Them*.

<https://nuns.rs/novine-koje-citaju-najuticajnji-ljudi-u-zemlji/>

The selection and impressions provided are therefore the result of the authors' own insights.

⁷ Given the turbulent and as yet unresolved ethnic relations in the last thirty years, national interest remains a lively and open topic. The studied period includes numerous challenges and events as mentioned in the text, resulting in intense confrontations in discourse on these issues.

Generally speaking, this is the most frequent dividing line that appears in the analysed period in the *Blic* newspaper. What stands out within this topic is the Kosovo subtopic, which is the one most written about. This topic is discussed the most frequently, not only among the subtopics on ethnic orientation but in general, among all the topics (categories) that were analysed. A total of 165 pieces of news relate to the issue of Kosovo. A substantial portion of these is dedicated to the acquittal of Haradinaj, a former leader of the KLA, by The Hague Tribunal, which caused considerable dissatisfaction in Serbia. Of course, the news on this subtopic is not uniform, but characterized by great diversity, which ranges from the consideration of the status of Kosovo on all levels (*Use the Constitution to defend our right to Kosovo*: “Should a solution be imposed regarding the status of Kosovo, that is, the independence of this province, the Prime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica shall propose that the new constitution state that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia, and that the constitution will come into force there when the requisite conditions are met.” - Aleksandar Simić, PM’s advisor; “...this move by the Serbian authorities is ‘quite useless’ since international agreements and law are above domestic legislation” - Momčilo Grubač, professor of constitutional law and former federal minister of justice – *Blic*, 3/8/2006; “Kosovo is clearly an independent state and its citizens are citizens of Kosovo. What is currently being done in Serbia reveals a tendency for various abuses. I am convinced that the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo, which also includes Serbs, will choose to align themselves to their Kosovo identity” – Deputy PM of Kosovo Hajredin Kuçi), the connection between recognizing Kosovo as an independent state and the road to the EU, negotiations between Belgrade and Priština, the rights of ethnic minorities in Kosovo (*Jahjaga: Serbia must give up its territorial pretensions*: “Kosovo is the homeland of all, and you, as citizens of Serbian ethnicity, shall be able to exercise all your national, religious, educational and cultural rights here. For that, you will have mine and the full support of the Kosovo institutions ...” Kosovo President Atifete Jahjaga called on Serbian authorities today to “give up on their territorial pretensions” and “cease their support of illegal and criminal organizations” in three northern Kosovo municipalities, which she said are holding hostage the future and progress of citizens, *Blic*, 8/12/2011; *Trajković: Accusations against Serbs from the north of Kosovo won’t help de-escalate the situation*: “That international protection isn’t working, however, seeing as how in November this year alone several Serbs were killed or wounded. What the Serbs in Kosovo are facing now is a process of getting accustomed to a whole new reality, one that could, unfortunately, be accompanied by the departure of some Serbs from their centuries-old homes” – Rada Trajković, Serbian MP in Kosovo Parliament), the issue of Serbian national interests (*Pobeda*: “By boycotting the elections, which they were encouraged to do by official Belgrade authorities, Serbs have lost power in the only five municipalities: three in the north, two under Albanian jurisdiction. The boycott accomplished nothing, for the second time, at least not to the benefit of the Serbian community [...] Official Belgrade seems to be only interested in territory, and even then, only one part of it – the north. Because it is already common knowledge that, whatever status is decided on, it will

come and go, and what will ensue then will last four years during which Serbs in the Albanian-majority environment will not be able to participate in the daily life of their own place of residence. When their survival hinges precisely on doing so...” – author Željka Jevtić, *Blic*, 21/11/2007.); the ethnic identity of Kosovo Serbs and their predicament (*Cyrillic is disappearing in Kosovo*: “The Cyrillic script, as the primary and traditional alphabet of the Serbian community, has all but disappeared in Kosovo and Metohija. It has been effectively removed from public use and can only be seen very rarely.” – Živojin Rakočević, author, *Blic*, 13/12/2011), the issue of Kosovo elections, the status of North Kosovo, conflicts in northern Kosovo (Rexhepi’s war cry: ““Such inflammatory statements and similar provocations threaten the fragile peace and stability in the north of Kosovo,” said the President of Serbia, adding that it was very important that EULEX refuted Rexhepi’s claims of its support of such a plan.” – Boris Tadić, Serbian President; *Blic*, 11/7/2010; Thaçi: *Tadić should also bow before those murdered in Kosovo*: “Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi has called on the President of Serbia Boris Tadić to take a bow in remembrance of the victims of Serbian security forces during the war in Kosovo between 1998 and 1999, writes the “Koha Ditore” daily today”. *Blic*, 13/7/2010), the position of the Serbian government on Kosovo elections, to war victims in Kosovo (*Vlasi: Dialogue in both countries’ interest*: “Bidding on the numbers or causes that led to the crimes is inhumane and barbarous. It is a fact that the Serbian government at the time initiated a spiral of violence and led to tragic conflict, it is a fact that the mechanisms of that government and of the state of Serbia persecuted, killed and banished Albanians *en masse* from their homes, it is a fact that Albanians in Kosovo led a war of defense and liberation, and not an anti-Serb war, on its territory, but crimes need to be identified so that the courts can address them.” - Azem Vlasi, lawyer, member of Forum 2015 and president of NGO Kosovo Association for Interethnic Cooperation, *Blic*, 26/9/2010.).

Even though the majority of articles talk about the problems of, above all, the state of Serbia and Serbian citizens in Kosovo, there are also articles that show certain positive examples of these neighbours living together: “Young Albanians: ‘Our wish to visit Belgrade has come true’: The wish of the students of the ‘School of Young Leaders’ from Priština to visit Belgrade has finally come true, thanks to the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.” This news bulletin contains information on the students who did not find it difficult to travel from snowbound Priština at minus five degrees to the Serbian capital, and satisfy their curiosity on the wild nightlife in Belgrade that they had heard so much about.

Elisa Hoxha – final-year student at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Priština: “*Belgrade is such a beautiful city and, it seems to me, very convenient for living. I feel free here. The strongest prejudice that I have heard before coming to Belgrade is that there is great intolerance towards Albanians. These stories about hatred are spread by the people whose judgement is influenced by political life. The young in Priština do not think that way either. I have Serbian female friends, but I can’t see why that would be important, they’re simply my friends.*”

Artan Murati –law student: “*I have a lot of friends from Kosovo Polje. We gather together every Sunday to play football. There might be some intolerance in smaller places, but not in Priština. I see that the situation is similar in Belgrade.*” (*Blic*, 21 October 2010)

Another subtopic that we observed within ethnic identification relates to the *different images* of Serbia, which are either created by Serbs themselves or by “outsiders”, and which, expectedly, can be positive or negative. In total, thirty-three pieces of news relate to this topic, which is important because of the problems with identification and self-identification of Serbs in the period of wars in the Balkans, i.e., endogamous and exogamous identification. During this period, Serbs were presented in the West in a manner that frustrated the citizens of Serbia. On the one hand, they were identified among the Balkan peoples as the culprits in the majority of conflicts, while on the other hand, the perception of ethnic Serbs was based on the experience of injustice and a struggle for survival under difficult conditions (Bakić, 1999). Even during the period observed here, topics such as “Are Serbs the oldest European people?” emerged, although such discourse was most characteristic of the 1990s:

Do we study in schools from the textbooks that were written on the basis of scientific research or is it all just a matter of an insidious conspiracy organized by the Great Forces and the “Nordic-Berlin School”? Did Serbs move into the Balkans in the 7th century, or are they the oldest European people? Many, and not a small number at that, believe in these hypotheses and often advocate them in common conversations by randomly presenting alleged arguments that prove their claims without a doubt. Many blame textbooks for certain ideas on the position and role of Serbs throughout history. (B. Anđelić. *Blic*, 23 October 2011)

Certain articles deal with well-known self-stereotypes about Serbs as a defiant, proud and bellicose people (Ćirković, 1997), which is a third theme identified in our analysis (“*Dačić: Serbs have always been rebellious, we are the James Dean of the Balkans.*” *Blic*, 9 January 2012), while the dilemma on which domain Serbia belongs to culturally – the East or the West, always remains either in a manifest or a latent form.

Within the topic on ethnic boundaries, twenty-nine pieces of news encompass subtopics such as national hatred, fascism and nationalism. We identified divisions on the issue of attitudes toward violence against athletes based on the color of their skin or their nationality (*Football hooligans beat up, threaten and intimidate: the author of the text reports critically on explanations, offered by local government officials, of violence against a football player of African descent “as the consequence of youthful transgressions or as isolated acts of irresponsible individuals, claiming that there is nothing in Čačak that could be characterized as racism or extremism”, Blic, 27/9/2007; Mean Machine – Poster proclamations: “It looks like someone in this country, but also in our city, is hell-bent on doing away with the stands, and with the fans, because, after last year’s arrests of a large number of Borac supporters, there are now new arrests of Serbian youth. These arrests are done at random, and*

the penalties are draconian. They have also been arresting Serbian flags at stadiums throughout Serbia, but not the Turkish ones, which are flown at every Novi Pazar game. How can it be that the harshest penalties are now being demanded for us by those same people in the administration whose party leader once threatened to cut off the hand that dares unfurl a Turkish flag in Raska”, *Blic*: 23/8/2008.), as well as for reactions to instances of ethnic discrimination directed against the Roma (*Jakšić offends Roma*: Democratic Party of Serbia MP Marko Jakšić said that Batić did not come to the session in order to defend Kosovo, but instead “attended in order to provoke with his Roma and Gypsy mentality”; Vladan Batić, the president of the Christian Democratic Party of Serbia at the time, responded to this by calling Jakšić’s words “fascistoid ideas”, insisting this was “no momentary lapse of judgment, but a position, principle and manner, a whole outlook”, *Blic*, 27/9/2007).

When it comes to ethnic affiliation as a key to divisions, frequent discussion on this topic can be encountered in the *Kurir* daily newspaper, as well. Thirty-seven articles are dedicated to this topic. Serbs are contrasted with Croats, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Roma, Albanians, and there is even talk of the assimilation of Romanians in one article. Emerging problems are related to the language and script of Serbs in Croatia, current events and ethnic tensions (*Embargo increases tension between Serbs and Albanians*; *Low numbers of Roma in kindergartens*; *Montenegrins drive Serbs from the beach*; *Stoning of the Croatian Embassy in Belgrade*; *Serbian entertainers: Tereza, shame on you! Farce: Montenegrin language gets interpreters in Serbian courts*). The articles provide information on current problems (confrontations on the topic of the use of the Cyrillic script in Croatia, trade relations between Kosovo and Serbia, the Croatian singer Tereza Kesovija holding a concert in Belgrade despite previously vowing never again to perform there, etc.) and show that relationships with all the minorities in Serbia, with neighbouring peoples and those who Serbs were in conflict with during this period remain in flux.

The most frequently discussed problem is Kosovo and the position of Serbs and “Serbian holy places” in Kosovo (*Kosovo is not Serbia’s neighbour*; *Thaçi’s butcher: I did not remove Serbs’ organs*; *Persecution of Serbs*; *Candles burning for murdered Kosovo Serbs*; *Serbs protest construction of houses for Albanians*; *Serbian cup in Kosovo is not a provocation*; *Gave himself away: Hashim Thaçi speaks Serbian*; *Haradinaj admits: I killed Serbs and Albanians*; *Ecumenical Patriarch: Kosovo is the historic cradle of Serbs*). The other important topic is that of Serbian refugees from Croatia and the Republic of Srpska. In this newspaper, directed towards the broadest audience, one can observe incendiary rhetoric (such as the exiling of Serbs, or organ theft from Serbs by Thaçi’s men) insisting on the dangers Serbs are faced with and on Kosovo as a mythological homeland.

Ethnic belonging and ethnic divisions are topics that draw the greatest attention in *Danas* as well. Not fewer than 253 articles relate to various aspects of ethnic relationships in Serbia, as well as on the territory of former Yugoslavia. In this newspaper they are discussed in an analytical manner.

Distinctive subtopics include: the *issue of Kosovo* (the recognition of Kosovo, negotiations, ethnic incidents, etc., found in ninety-three pieces of news or thirty-

seven per cent of articles that deal with Kosovo). News related to Kosovo is present throughout the observed period, while topics shift depending on the unfolding of events and the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo. During 2007, the discussion was oriented towards the status of Kosovo, with titles showing the unconciliatory position of Kosovo Serbs – *Serbs will never give up on Kosovo. If a solution is forced upon them, they have the right to self-determination*; however, other attitudes can be found as well: *Belgrade is not completely clear on the issue of Kosovo*. After the declaration of Kosovo independence in 2008, articles follow the non-recognition of Kosovo by Serbia's neighbours and other countries. Then, the issue of the position of Serbs in Kosovo is evoked as a very important topic. Crime trials, nationalism, but also attempts at coexistence are present as topics. Mythology related to Kosovo and its importance for Serbs is discussed as well:

Kosovo's recent declaration of independence has rocked the very foundations of Serbian statehood in both idea and praxis, and shattered the confidence of an otherwise triumphalist-prone people. The mood has ranged from despair, to dismay, to easily diagnosable nationwide PTSD, to aggressive outbursts of hatred. Indeed, history has made a genuine mockery of the Serbian myth of Kosovo, but the traumatized people infatuated with the blood-drenched hallowed ground of its ancestors haven't realized this yet, too busy hating its current inhabitants with a passion. (28/3/2008, Myth and hatred - Peter Kuzmič).

In the same newspaper we found twenty-nine pieces of news that covered the topic *Images of Serbia*, which is eleven per cent of all news comprising the category of ethnic belonging. On the one hand, the Images of Serbia present Serbia as a country with no prospects and with wrong value orientations, where it is impossible to live safely and peacefully. There, Serbs are described as wild, distraught, triumphalism-prone, traumatized, educationally neglected, small, frustrated and insignificant people⁸:

I find it difficult after four years of quiet life among the benevolent Austrians to return to my wild Serbians, to their crazy arguments, to them lunging at each other. (Bogdan Bogdanović. "I find it difficult to return: Time Machine 1997 – 2007." Danas, 7 February 2007)

On the other hand, descriptions emerge that renounce the existence of a "folk mentality", which are used to explain the objective causes of certain behaviours or the general state:

In fact, there is no such thing as "folk mentality" that would be good or bad, but only a series of historical conditions in which various peoples have lived and which have

⁸ Since the beginning of the twentieth century, such characterization of Balkan peoples is not at all rare. It has been part of the Western discourse on the Balkans and the peoples inhabiting this peninsula (Todorova, 2009), and as such has been reproduced among its members in the manner illustrated in the excerpt. The term balkanization is used not only to denote processes of fragmentation of what were until then territorial wholes, but also to refer to processes defined as a return to or reawakening of archaic forms of social life - "reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (Todorova, 2009: 3).

shaped them the way they are... (Neven Cvetićanin, “On railway track thieves.” *Danas*, 2 November 2009).

There are also attempts at explanations that lead directly to certain social groups, organizations or perhaps individuals who have greatly influenced the formation and preservation of conditions in which people live. Furthermore, there is direct confrontation in the positions from which history is observed, a bipolar image of Serbia, a division into *Us* and *Them*, where the ones suspect the others of ulterior motives, of the promotion of certain ideologies, while presenting themselves as objective:

During the time of the Eighth Plenary Session, Serbia asked for equality in the federation. Twenty years later, Serbia is the most unequal of all the Yugoslav republics, today states or statelets. All of the republics have gained independence and the peoples have created their own states of sorts after the horrible war troubles and crimes. Only Serbia is still an incomplete state twenty years later. (Momčilo Pavlović. “Serbia remains an incomplete state.” *Danas*, 22–23 September 2007)

Within this topic we can single out the subtopic of *national hatred, fascism and nationalism*, covered by seventy articles (twenty-eight per cent). An important part comprises news that discusses the position of Roma in Serbia and the attitudes towards them (twenty articles – fifteen explicitly talking about Roma, while in the remaining five they appear as one of the ethnic minorities). Certainly, these are dominated by the issue of violence and discrimination against Roma:

He apologized to Roma for the offence caused when he told Batić that he did not attend the session in order to defend Kosovo but to provoke people “with his Romani and Gypsy mentality”. (Marko Jakšić. “An incident in the Parliament.” *Danas*, 27 September 2007)

What also stands out as a subtopic is *the relationship with the surrounding countries – Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro*. Since the dominant topics deal with national relations primarily towards the countries in the region, we have split this topic into the relationship with Croatia, the relationship with Bosnia, the relationship with Montenegro, and the relationship with others. Such a division is not arbitrary; on the contrary, the results demonstrate that the articles are equally distributed in such a typology, and that the lowest number of texts relate to the relationship with others. This is also justified by the fact that interethnic relationships with these peoples are more intense due to the burden of the past, filled with wars, territorial tension, convergence, various federations, cohabiting in the same state, etc. Because of this burden of the past in the relationships between these countries, certain events, even those that are not truly significant, can cause one of the sides to react, leading to a chain reaction, predominantly in the political sphere, i.e., diplomatic relations. Judging by the statements quoted in the newspapers, all of this can later on easily result in the reinforcing of existing, slightly forgotten attitudes in the discourse of these actors, or in a deterioration of relations, i.e., as it is usually said with a hint of irony, to the “worsening of the already damaged relations”.

However, even though this was to be expected from a newspaper such as *Danas*, this group of news discussion is predominantly centered around post-conflict topics, from the need for cooperation on the resolution of issues of displaced persons, the issue of complete cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, the possibility of cooperation between countries, to the clarification of the adverse effects of the instrumental use of national symbols with the aim of emphasizing differences:

*Politically (state formation) and nationally (cultural identity), it is fully legitimate to have the Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin languages, but to scientifically denounce that it is not one and the same language linguistically is irrational business. (Zoran Panović. "Brenization." *Danas*, 20–21 June 2009)*

Quantitative analysis has indicated that the topics which draw out the lines of ethnic boundaries are predominant. The field of ethnic identities is still the one in which intense struggles with *Others* are taking place, where the self-stereotypes are analysed, and where heterostereotypes are profiled. Making distinctions via categories of ethnicities is a key topic both in the tabloid newspapers and in the mainstream and analytical ones.

2.2. Political divisions

Within the division on the basis of **political orientations** there appear several fundamental fronts: democracy vs. authoritarianism; pro-European vs. anti-European forces; transparency vs. non-transparency; cosmopolitanism vs. patriotism. All these dichotomies appear together and in the majority of cases inseparably, as exclusive characteristics (values) in opposition. These topics are discussed in no fewer than sixty articles in *Blic*.

Most often, pro-European orientations are connected with democratic tendencies and open politics, while, contrarily, anti-European political positions emerge hand in hand with nationalistic sentiment, authoritarianism, fascist and right-wing ideology. One should bear in mind that the profile of the latter political orientation is defined by the representatives of the former, since the members of the latter never self-identify using these terms. It is interesting that non-transparency (in leading the state, politics, business activities of state-owned and private companies that are directly or indirectly linked with the political milieu) is not a distinctive characteristic, since it is used by both sides when describing the activities of their opponents.

In the news, democracy is most often mentioned in the context of the power of political forces in Serbia to lead the country through European integration, and ensure political stability and democratic elections. Apart from the direct affirmation of democratic institutions and values, democracy is also discussed through a critique of its absence from the field of politics. Thus, in one article Vesna Pešić, a sociologist, talks about the non-existence of democratic and fair elections in Serbia, while Vladimir Pavićević, a political scientist, lists the following major shortcomings of democracy in Serbia: reduced choice, endangered right to political association and activity, and complete absence of the rule of law.

In this position, one of the more important indicators of the level of democracy in a country is the precondition for its constitution of the issue of the freedom of the media. This is where the democratic capacity of a country to protect and ensure the recognition of human and minority rights is assessed. Contrary to democracy stands authoritarianism, expressed through the unlimited authority of political parties. The actors of the evaluation of activities in the political scene, apart from being labelled by the opposing parties, are political analysts and university professors – political scientists, who evaluate and categorize activities and ideologies.

As part of this recognizable differentiation, we can identify several sub-topics:

Patriotism/nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism and pro-European vs. anti-European forces – within the sixty articles that deal with political divisions in Serbia in the studied period, in the *Blic* newspaper thirty-one articles are dedicated to this type of division on the political scene. This is an obviously very important division in the observed period. Ever since the 1990s and the conflicts in the Balkans, there has been a division into those who advocate national interests and those who are “traitors” in Serbia. This has always matched the division into pro-European and anti-European forces, which have found their stronghold in the right-wing forces that have always had a robust presence on the political scene, until the most recent shift saw the explicitly nationalist parties taking a pro-European stance. In Serbia there used to exist two clearly delineated political paths:

The first comprises the Radicals as the classic nationalistic right and related parties of the right centre (DPS and NS). The other block consists of the parties of the left political centre and the centre (DP, G17 Plus and other coalition partners). The main “demarcation line” between the Euro-democratic and the national-people’s blocks in our circumstances is not the character of the socio-economic system that they promote, but the relation towards European integration of Serbia and the manner in which the Kosovo issue is to be addressed in the future (Blic, 28 March 2008).

Along the *transparent/non-transparent* line, there is a certain equality between the stances of the authors of different news (or their conversational partners). The link between the state and the parties, on the one hand, and the economic powerhouses, on the other, emerges as the main characteristic of non-transparency. These links are visible in the non-transparent presentation of the financial sources of the biggest political parties. As an illustration, the president of “Transparency Serbia”, Vladimir Goati, pointing to this problem, says that *the Serbian Government should show more determination in endorsing the work of independent institutions that fight against corruption and harmonizing the system with other democratic countries. The problem lies, as he says, in the fact that political parties see social institutions as their prey* (“They use the budget as their party’s till.” *Blic*, 27 October 2010). This division is most often related to the activities of political parties (financing and expenditure, particularly during election campaigns), but also to the work of the government and specific ministers, state institutions and officials:

For some time now the story about the merciless draining of public companies has been going on. Parties place their dignitaries in them and through them collect the

revenue uncontrollably. If it had not been for the persistent journalists and aggressive opposition, many would still be hiding behind trade secrets. (Mihal Ramač. “Public milking of the sacred cow.” *Danas*, 29–30 November 2008)

The articles also point to the need to establish institutional mechanisms for the control of economic flow, as preconditions for transparency and political accountability.

Political divisions, confrontation, and the struggle to impose one’s own cultural model appear thirty times in the studied period in *Kurir*. What is discernible in this area is the confrontation between the three types of Serbia: the First – nationalist, conservative, rural, anti-European Serbia, aligned with Milošević at first, and with the Serbian Radical Party later (especially its leaders Šešelj, Nikolić and Vučić), as well as, in the period analysed here, with the Democratic Party of Serbia with its leader, at the time the architect of anti-European politics (e.g., Koštunica led the procession against the Brussels agreement, LDP, DP and URS to endorse the Brussels agreement). The Second Serbia, defined as civic, cosmopolitan, urban, oriented toward EU integration and represented by the Democratic Party (Serbia), is only present implicitly, in particular via narratives used to construct a portrait of the Third Serbia, primarily by ascribing certain aspects of the Second Serbia to “former” actors in the First Serbia, who are now trying to claim the domain of the Third Serbia (“Vučić is like Đinđić! A decisive break from the past, a joint step towards the EU”)⁹. One can also identify important topics around which standpoints are organized in the following: the Kosovo issue (*Stefanović: some in the north of Kosovo do not grasp reality*), the Brussels agreement, the relation between small and big parties, manoeuvring between the USA and Russia. Throughout the entire period one can also observe the opposition between the two strongest parties in Serbia, the Serbian Progressive Party and the Democratic Party (*SPP: Đilas and his doctors from DP sucked the life out of Serbia; Progressives destroyed democrats and leaguers; Croats reduced to Tadić! Provincial government robbed Serbia, now tearing the country apart; Gašić: Đilas, you from DP are liars, my degree is from a state faculty*). What is dominant here are topics related to different political orientations and ethnic belonging. Similarly to *Blic*, these topics are ubiquitous in *Kurir* as well.

In the *Danas* daily newspaper, political struggles and confrontation occupy an important position as well – 170 articles. In comparison with the other two analysed newspapers, subtler debates are heard in this case. The image is not as oversimplified and directed only towards the most important actors on the political scene, but also relates to social issues and their importance for social life. For example, one focus is on the protection of the rights of vulnerable social groups:

The Croatian Bunjevac-Šokac Party: By the latest decree of the Serbian Government on abolishing the subsidies to persons over the age of 79, their human and civil rights are denied, thus not acknowledging the contribution that they made as agricultural producers, which is obviously a case of discrimination based on age, and any type

⁹ For an in-depth academic study of the discursive construction of the Third Serbia as an alternative to the stark division between the First and Second Serbia, please see: Spasić, Petrović, 2012; 2013.

of discrimination is not permitted by our Constitution. ("Decree on the register of agricultural land is discriminatory." Danas, 29 May 2009)

Another set of articles speaks of the conflicts and oppression due to disagreement on basic social values:

The raid by the party thugs in the Novi Sad Youth Theatre announced the beginning of the pre-election campaign in the capital. Belgrade streets echo with the voices that say that, apart from the bad, there are also good radicals, such as the mayor of Novi Sad. She would have prevented the violence, but the party would not let her do it. If the radicals win in the capital, all of the theatres will be assigned party troopers for directors. The repertoire will be decided by masked men using bats. The director, however, was not a radical. The radicals elected him following the recommendation by DPS. (Mihalj Ramač. "A C for D students." Danas, 10–11 February 2007)

When we examine the analysed articles in terms of their content, two more topics stand out as significant.

Authoritarianism vs. democracy, forty-two articles i.e., twenty-five per cent: Democracy is most often mentioned in relation to the issue of compromised human rights and freedoms, followed by favouring personal or party interests to the detriment of general wellbeing and civic interest, and, finally, very frequently "in a package" with European values (political and civil freedoms, social equality, liberal market) and integration. This vision of democratic values and institutions stands opposed to the totalitarian and authoritarian tendencies of certain parts of the public, state institutions, civil associations or ideas by individuals.

Patriotism/nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism, and pro-European vs. anti-European forces: A large number of articles in this area relate directly to the issue of European integration and the future status of Serbia with regard to the EU, whether it will become a member state or not, what the main preconditions are that need to be met (fifty articles, i.e., forty-eight per cent of the news on this topic). Here, foreign officials appear through giving support to pro-European governments or reforms, and promoting new conditions or strengthening the old ones as necessary for a serious consideration for membership. Furthermore, domestic politicians also speak positively of the changes that lead to the EU and the importance of drawing nearer to the values and institutions of the European Union.

Serbia finds itself in a decisive moment in which it needs to make a decision on whether it will follow the path of modernization, development and European integration, or the one of closing in and arresting development, and history shows us that we were always on the losing side whenever we decided not to accept what was being proposed to us by the world. The previous two centuries saw the downfall of all modernist attempts in Serbia, and we can conclude that the establishment of a democratic order will only be possible when the civil rises above the national, the autonomous above the unitary, and the ideas of freedom and democracy above the ideas of authoritarianism and subservience (Čedomir Čupić. "Serbia as a difficult society." Danas, 10–11 February 2007).

4. Conclusions

Even though the editorial policies of the observed daily newspapers (2006–2013) differ, as we have stated at the beginning, we were still able to identify a trend, namely that each of them was dominated by ethnic and political divisions. It is clear that during this period Serbia was still divided along those lines and that there were no oscillations regarding the presence of such topics throughout the entire period, as well as regarding their importance in relation to other social debates that feature to a lesser extent (quality of life, gender relations, social issues).

Despite the fact that Serbia is mostly ethnically homogeneous today (83.32% Serbs, 2011 census), the issue of ethnic confrontation is still present. The foremost issue is that of Kosovo, which has not been resolved yet. Also present is the identity crisis within the endogenous and exogenous identification after the period in which Serbs were marked as the “bad guys” of the world. The debate remains open, both in Serbia and outside the country. The analysis also shows that the relations with surrounding nations will remain a subject of confrontation and symbolic struggles for a long time.

Political divisions are also conspicuous and significant. One can observe the dynamics and shifts in certain political actors from one end of value orientations to the opposite one. The divisions remain, while the actors gather from one side to the other depending on their own role – position/opposition. In line with Pavlović’s (2006) characterization of political struggle as a *par excellence* form of symbolic struggle for the preservation or transformation of the social world, we can state that in the case of the analysed newspapers it is, in fact, a form of symbolic struggle for one’s own preservation of authority, in which actors use inherent meanings of their own discursive codes, that is, employ the categories that in the code in question have a positive connotation in the characterization of their own positions, while using the categories with a negative connotation in the characterization of *Others*.

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SIMBOLIČKE BORBE U SRBIJI – ANALIZA SADRŽAJA DNEVNIH NOVINA U PERIODU OD 2006-2013. GODINE

Apstrakt. *Savremeno srpsko društvo je podeljeno na mnogo načina. Društvene grupe se bore za nametanje svog vrednosnog sistema i kulturnog okvira u cilju kontrolisanja društvenih resursa i usmeravanja društvenog razvoja na osnovu sopstvenih preferencija i interesa. Neke podele su vidljivije od drugih, poput onih političkih, dok neke nisu u toj meri transparentne, ali učestvuju u raspodeli snaga u društvenom polju. Ovo je naročito bio slučaj u vreme duboke podeljenosti na „prvu“ i „drugu“ Srbiju (Spasić & Petrović, 2013). U periodu koji je predmet analize (2006-2013.), Srbija postaje samostalna država i učvršćuje se prividni konsenzus oko prihvatanja evropskih vrednosti, evropskog puta Srbije i mirne budućnosti. Podele nakon regresije nacionalističkih snaga na javnoj sceni u Srbiji nisu tako jasno uočljive kao u prethodnom periodu pre nego je došlo do deklarativnog, a moglo bi se reći delom i "tatkickog", ujedinjavanja političkih snaga u pogledu puta ka EU. U radu je učinjen pokušaj da se preko analize sadržaja dnevnih listova u period (2006-2013.) skiciraju osnovne linije simboličkih borbi u savremenom srpskom društvu. Kako je analizom obuhvaćen duži period ispitana su glavna težišta borbe, kao i određene pravilnosti u ovim kretanjima. U cilju celovitijeg obuhvata, u analizu su uključena tri dnevna lista sa različitim ciljnim grupama i uređivačkim politikama. Nalazi ukazuju na dominantno prisustvo simboličkih borbi u političkoj areni, kao i u oblasti etničkih odnosa. Ovaj trend se održava tokom čitavog posmatranog perioda.*

Cljučne reči: *simboličke borbe, etnički odnosi, političke borbe, nacionalizam, klasifikacija, Mi i Oni*