

# On the Politics of *Imidž*: European Integration and the Trials of Recognition in Postconflict Macedonia

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Prior to the 2004 presidential election in Macedonia, a poll was taken to measure which issues were of greatest concern to likely voters. With the election only a short remove from the 2001 armed conflict in which ethnic Albanian insurgents and ethnic Macedonian-dominated state security clashed, matters such as improving ethnic relations and enhancing the national security situation ranked high among the top concerns. Yet, the priority chosen as the future president's "most important task" by the largest percentage of respondents (37 percent) was "improving Macedonia's international image."<sup>1</sup>

This article examines how concerns over Macedonia's international image—or, as it is in the Macedonian language, its *imidž*—animated Macedonian politics following the 2001 conflict and reflected a broader cultural politics associated with Euro-Atlantic integration and European Union (EU) expansion into the postsocialist states of eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the experience of other EU applicant-countries confronted with perpetual evaluations of their suitability for membership, in Macedonia, European integration appeared as a form of Zeno's paradox: each step toward inclusion in the shifting utopia of "Europe" seemed to approach, but still fall short of, the end goal.<sup>3</sup> Thus, alongside the pro-European stances

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1. Radio Free Europe, "Macedonia's Presidential Candidates on the Campaign Trail," *RFE/RL Balkan Report* 8, no. 14 (9 April 2004). The poll was conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Studies, part of the University of Skopje, Sts. Cyril and Methodius.

2. In Macedonia, the term *Euro-Atlantic integration* referred to Macedonia's efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). In practice, however, NATO membership was generally seen as a step toward the greater goal of EU membership. In this article, I reproduce the Macedonian focus on "European integration" and EU membership as the ultimate aim of "Euro-Atlantic integration" and NATO membership.

3. Cf. Jozsef Böröcz, "The Fox and the Raven: The European Union and Hungary Renegotiate the Margins of 'Europe,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 4 (October 2000): 847–75. Furthermore, EU membership itself does not necessarily eradicate discussions of or anxieties about a country's "Europeanness." See Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State* (New York, 1997) on Greece. Rather, as with any utopian projection or normative ideal, attempts to inhabit "Europe" force subjects to recognize the particularities that separate them from this abstract category, although the political economy of European identity ensures that some subjects experience this force

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of all major Macedonian political parties and a popular commitment to postconflict reform and democratization, a widespread sense developed in Macedonia that its *imidž*, that is, how the country was perceived and rated by “the international community,” consequential “foreigners,” or most commonly, “Europe,” would have a significant influence on the country’s future economic and political situation.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, beyond concrete policy and diplomacy, Macedonia’s *imidž* would either advance or obstruct EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) accession, foreign investment, and tourism, and even the goodwill afforded to the country and its citizens around the world.

The rise of a discourse on *imidž* within Macedonian domestic politics is thus a story about the perceived role of foreign actors in Macedonia and how they figured into local imaginaries of Europe and the international community. Although an international presence arrived in Macedonia shortly after its independence at the end of 1991 (most notably the United Nations’ first preventive deployment of peace-keeping soldiers), the 2001 conflict and the peace agreement that ended it altered the playing field of international intervention in the country. With the peace process, foreign diplomats oversaw fifteen amendments to the Macedonian constitution, and as signatories to the peace agreement, both the United States and the EU had an ambiguously defined warrant to oversee the treaty’s full implementation.<sup>5</sup> Concomitant to this intensified foreign role in domestic affairs, popular representations of a mighty but distant EU and United States abounded. Although critical depictions of the EU contrasted with a mass enthusiasm directed at Macedonia’s future membership in the EU, it was still common to see various Eurocrats, in particular the EU foreign minister Javier Solana and the U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia, as overlording viceroys: potent, but unresponsive figures of power (see figure 1).<sup>6</sup> The notion that Macedonia’s ultimate fate would be decided

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to a greater degree than others. See Talal Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe,” *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003), 159–80.

4. In Macedonia, there was a constant slippage between the more generic “international community” (*megjunarodna zaednica*) and “foreigners” (*stranci*) on the one hand and “Europe” (*Evropa*) on the other. As Victor Friedman mentions, even Americans could be subsumed as “European” in Macedonian equations of Europe with the west. See Victor Friedman, “Observing the Observers: Language, Ethnicity, and Power in the 1994 Macedonian Census and Beyond,” in Barnett R. Rubin, ed., *Toward Comprehensive Peace in Southeast Europe* (New York, 1996), 81–128. See also Michael Herzfeld, “‘As in Your Own House’: Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society,” in David D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, D.C., 1987), 75–89. Such slippages speak to the particular ways in which Macedonians actively imagined and constructed “Europe” and the “international” terrain in which the country’s future was presumed to lie.

5. The constitutional amendments set out by the peace treaty focused on minority rights issues (e.g., bilingual administration in municipalities with 20 percent or more of a linguistic minority group, a state-sponsored Albanian language university, and decentralization from the federal level to the municipalities).

6. Katherine Verdery points to a similar tension in early, postsocialist Romania, where European powers were portrayed either in positive terms, as models of freedom and prosperity, or in negative terms, as neoimperial threats. See Katherine Verdery, “Civil Society or



Figure 1. An example of a common genre of political caricature that placed foreign officials at the center of Macedonian politics. In this cartoon, from a special 2003 “Year-in-Review” insert published in the newspaper *Dnevnik*, U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Butler is literally at the center of Macedonia’s political scene. Significantly, while Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski holds the string to which a Macedonia-shaped balloon is attached, Butler is pinching the string, determining how high it will fly. Illustration by Darko Markovikj.

by these outside powers informed the emergent commonsense view that efforts to craft and improve Macedonia's *imidž* provided a primary means by which to shape "Europe's" or the "international community's" policies toward Macedonia and their effect on the country's future.

I approach talk about *imidž* (and the overall importance and power of national images in international politics) as a particularly productive political discourse suited to Macedonia's postconflict moment and accelerated "Europeanization." Similar to other east European discourses on Europe, the Macedonian discourse reproduced a categorical series that linked "Europe," "modernity," and "progress" and contrasted them to "Macedonia," "the past," and "backwardness."<sup>7</sup> Macedonian actors concerned with *imidž* imagined a "European" public—one conceived within a grand narrative of civilization and presumed to hold negative impressions about a "backward" Macedonia—as the prime addressee of their *imidž*-conscious practices. This discourse was thus premised on an orientalist imaginative geography, although the allure of *imidž* for Macedonians was precisely its promise to transcend the symbolic and political divide separating Macedonia from Europe.

In contrast to older discourses on European difference, however, the discourse on *imidž* stood out in two ways. First, in the historical context of Macedonia's postconflict reform and European integration, portrayals of "Europeanness" were indelibly colored by a cluster of concepts linked both to the EU's own cultural politics and also to the neoliberal forms of democratic governmentality increasingly prominent in Europe. Macedonian efforts to appeal to an imagined "European" public therefore reflected the EU's own representational palette, emphasizing the country's practices of good governance and transparency, and its cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, in addition to more general claims about its modernity, culturedness, and beauty.<sup>8</sup>

Second, this discourse also rested on a conception of politics informed by contemporary marketing ideology. According to this view, national

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Nation? 'Europe' in the Symbolism of Postsocialist Politics," *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996), 104–29.

7. Cf. Susan Gal, "Bartok's Funeral: Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric," *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 3 (August 1991): 440–58; and Verdery, "Civil Society or Nation?"

8. On the cultural politics of European integration, see John Borneman and Nick Fowler, "Europeanization," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 487–514; Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London, 2000); Irène Bellier and Thomas M. Wilson, eds., *An Anthropology of the European Union: Building, Imagining, and Experiencing the New Europe* (Oxford, 2000); Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton, 2004); and Douglas R. Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* (Princeton, 2000). On neoliberal forms of democratic governmentality, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York, 2008); and Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, 2006). On "transparency," in particular, and its discontents, see Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, eds., *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Durham, 2003); and William Mazzarella, "Internet X-Ray: E-Governance, Transparency, and the Politics of Immediation in India," *Public Culture* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 473–505.

brand identities would not only represent the nation on the international stage but also organize relationships between the object represented, that is, Macedonia, and the intended audiences for the brand.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in response to the continual deferral of recognition that characterized the process of European integration, the discourse on imidž projected a social imaginary where marketing expertise and strategic branding could at last secure Macedonia's entry into the EU and concretize its belonging to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Using this conception of politics-as-marketing, the discourse on imidž provided Macedonian political actors with an idiom in which to imagine, respond to, and capitalize on the larger political forces located in constructs of Europe and the international community. I investigate how this discourse arose as an authorizing device internal to the world of Macedonian politics. On a popular level—and reflecting the asymmetries inherent to the process of European integration—received wisdom in Macedonia held that foreign powers controlled the country's future. On the level of official politics, domestic political actors strove to legitimize themselves as successful leaders and caretakers of the national interest. Insofar as the discourse on imidž projected a field of agency in which Macedonian actors could imagine exerting control over the external factors seen to reign over the country's future, it offered Macedonian political figures a way to construct themselves as authorities in the face of foreign power. Thus, in the public performances of Macedonian politicians (and even in residents' everyday commentary on Macedonian politics), claims about imidž functioned as a means through which the presumed power of foreign observers could be transformed into domestic political authority. I contend that the uptake of imidž-discourse in postconflict Macedonia illustrates an important way in which the recognition politics inherent to European integration affected political dynamics within those, often postsocialist, countries located on the peripheries of the EU.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, the analysis of the Macedonian discourse on imidž developed here holds a critical mirror to the logic and rhetoric of European integration and its concomitant recognition politics.<sup>12</sup> Paralleling

9. Cf. Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (New York, 2004). Lury argues that a similar conception of the efficacy of brands drives contemporary marketing.

10. On the concept of "social imaginary," see Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 91–124.

11. For a discussion of nation-branding and other "image-conscious" practices elsewhere in postsocialist eastern Europe, see Sue Curry Jansen, "Designer Nation: Neo-Liberal Nation Branding—Brand Estonia," *Social Identities* 14, no. 1 (January 2008): 121–42.

12. The question of "recognition" (*priznavanje*) in Macedonia is often understood in relation to competitive claims made on the Macedonian national identity by neighboring states (or their official or unofficial representatives.) For example, Bulgarian officials have denied the existence of a distinct Macedonian language and ethnicity, the Serbian Orthodox Church refuses to acknowledge the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the Greek state refuses to recognize the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name. While these narrowly construed struggles over recognition continue to affect Macedonian politics, I conceive of the politics of recognition here in a more general sense, as an aspiration to independence and self-determination necessarily carried out through the negotiation of one's relationships to other actors. For my purposes,

the ever-changing accents attached to “European” standards in outsiders’ commentary on Macedonia’s postconflict politics, the discourse on *imidž* trafficked in shifting vocabularies of democracy, transparency, multiculturalism, and related ideals. Macedonian actors regularly embraced these idealized representations of western democracy in appealing to “European” publics. On the one hand, then, Macedonian political actors engaging in *imidž*-politics participated along with outside “European” observers in (re)producing forms of neoliberal global governance and other political normativities increasingly invoked in contemporary state-building projects.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, by responding in the similar idiom of idealized self-representation, this discourse indicted the constructed nature of the monolithic depictions of “Europe” so central to European integration and its politics of recognition.<sup>14</sup> As I will demonstrate, this core ambivalence to the discourse on *imidž* constitutes a critical insight on European cultural politics and the contradictions created by the ever-receding horizon of Macedonia’s full membership in an “integrating” Europe.

This article is thus an exercise in the anthropology of contemporary politics, an effort to understand transnational political concepts and practices as well as their reverberations in historically specific contexts. Combining ethnography and the analysis of public events, I examine the presuppositions of the concept of *imidž* and explore the discursive terrain and representative political practices authorized by it in postconflict Macedonia. The argument unfolds in three sections: the first examines the combination of marketing ideology and the discourse on Europe that lie at the center of the discourse on *imidž*; the second contextualizes the discourse within recent Macedonian history; the third describes how the discourse was taken up in Macedonian political practice. Throughout, I track the tension between the agentive possibilities attached to *imidž* and its embeddedness within the logic of European integration. I conclude by relating the Macedonian politics of *imidž* to contemporary recognition politics in Europe and beyond.

### The Discourse on Europe and the Political Economy of Image

The symbolic division of the European continent between west and east has long shaped European politics. Building on Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, scholars such as Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova have demonstrated how eastern Europe and the Balkans were constructed during the Enlightenment as backward, semicivilized others around which to imagine

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whether the goal of recognition is ever achievable is less interesting than what processes the aspiration for it sets into motion. See Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton, 2003).

13. See Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*; and Kimberley Coles, *Democratic Designs: International Intervention and Electoral Practices in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Ann Arbor, 2007).

14. See Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe,” and Böröcz, “The Fox and the Raven.”

“European” civility and superiority.<sup>15</sup> In a complementary fashion, numerous scholars have also examined how such hegemonic notions of (west) European superiority have been taken up within the political discourses of various east European countries in different historical periods.<sup>16</sup> Although the valences attached to stereotypes of (west) European civility and eastern or Balkan incivility shift across contexts of use, most scholars acknowledge that people in these regions have often internalized these stereotypes and commonly deploy them in a self-orientalizing fashion.<sup>17</sup>

As a consequence, orientalist discourses about east and west are commonly reproduced within eastern Europe, and this is also true of Macedonia. For instance, interethnic relations in Macedonia are often cast in terms of “nesting orientalisms,” what Milica Bakić-Hayden described as the recursion of orientalist distinctions across larger and smaller fields of analysis.<sup>18</sup> Vasiliki Neofotistos has elaborated on this notion, showing how ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia each employ stereotypes that cast the other group as the uncivilized other preventing the country’s entrance into Europe.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as Ilká Thiessen has

15. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization and the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994); and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997). See also Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Contemporary Yugoslav Politics,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1–15; and Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, 1998). That “Europe” is a concept continually (re)imagined in western European centers is also an important point; see Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe.” For discussions of the EU’s monopolization of “Europe,” see also Böröcz, “The Fox and the Raven,” and Friedman, “Observing the Observers.”

16. E.g., Gal, “Bartok’s Funeral”; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, “Orientalist Variations”; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917–31; Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York, 1994); Verdery, “Civil Society or Nation?”; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, chap. 2; Dina Iordanova, “Are the Balkans Admissible? The Discourse on Europe,” *Balkanistica* 13 (2000): 1–34; Dominic Boyer, *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* (Chicago, 2005), chap. 5; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006); chap. 5; Patrick Hyder Patterson, “On the Edge of Reason: The Boundaries of Balkanism in Slovenian, Austrian, and Italian Discourse,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 110–41. Regarding Macedonia specifically, see Friedman, “Observing the Observers”; Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton, 2003); Keith Brown, “Sovereignty after Socialism at Europe’s New Borders,” in Douglas Howland and Luise White, eds., *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington, 2009), 196–221; Ilká Thiessen, *Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a Changing World* (Peterborough, Canada, 2007); Vasiliki Neofotistos, “‘The Balkans’ Other Within: Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia,” *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (March 2008): 17–36.

17. On “Europe” as a “shifter,” see Gal, “Bartok’s Funeral.”

18. Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism.” Cf. Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in Paul V. Kroskrity, ed., *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Santa Fe, 2000), 35–84.

19. Neofotistos, “‘The Balkans’ Other Within.” See also Rozita Dimova, “‘Modern’ Masculinities: Ethnicity, Education, and Gender in Macedonia,” *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 3 (July 2006): 305–20; and Brown, “Sovereignty after Socialism.”

argued, whereas the Yugoslav project under Josip Broz Tito had tethered Macedonians' sense of belonging within the imaginary of European modernity, the sudden dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s raised deep anxieties about Macedonia's own link to "Europe" and thus raised the political and symbolic stakes of Macedonia's recognition by western powers.<sup>20</sup>

The postconflict Macedonian concern over *imidž* weds this desire for recognition—and the orientalist geography it presupposes—to a contemporary discourse on the power of international images that has become prominent transnationally following the Cold War and the rise of neoliberal globalization.<sup>21</sup> Image, a concept that originally took shape in the world of advertising in reference to "identities" (that is, the constellation of values, attributes, and qualities) achieved by and developed for particular products and businesses has since come to attain global purchase in political strategizing. As in the advertising context, image in this international usage is conceived of as a representational identity that can be molded to achieve various material benefits, for example, in international relations. Whether pursuing "nation-branding" or engaging in "public diplomacy," governments now spend large sums of money on various campaigns to promote their country's image.<sup>22</sup>

The following vignette attests to how these transnational, consumerist notions of international image have colored the Macedonian discourse on *imidž*, not only among political actors, but also in everyday interactions. On a return visit to Macedonia in August 2006, I accompanied a friend, Emi, to her family's summer cottage. We were met by her mother, who welcomed me with the traditional Macedonian hospitality: first sweets, then coffee. As we chatted, I noticed that Emi's mother felt obliged not only to welcome me to her home, but also to her country.<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that we were speaking in Macedonian and she knew that I had lived in Skopje, she proceeded to shower me with notable facts about Macedonian history. The conversation was a pleasant manifestation of a Macedonian genre of introduction that I had participated in many times before. We were abruptly interrupted, though, by Emi's provocative reframing of our conversation: "Mamo, on znae; dosta marketing" (Mom, he knows; enough with the marketing). Clearly irritated, Emi's mother retorted: "Pa, ni treba marketing" (Well, we need marketing).

In presenting this example here, I do not intend to suggest that Emi's mother was intentionally weaving a positive representation of Macedonia

20. Thiessen, *Waiting for Macedonia*.

21. Jansen, "Designer Nation."

22. For a discussion of how commercial brand identities fit into cultural and national politics and how they can be appropriated or resignified from below, see Rosemary Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law* (Durham, 1998). Furthermore, branding tactics are increasingly used by political groups seeking to change the national status quo, such as efforts (allegedly sponsored by the Soros Foundation) to brand Georgia's "Rose Revolution." See Paul Manning, "Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (May 2007): 171–213.

23. Cf. Herzfeld, "As in Your Own House."

in the hope of improving its international standing, although like any proud host, and faithful to this genre of introduction, she was trying to make a good impression on her guest. Rather, it is the fact that Emi could characterize this innocent behavior as an act of national *marketing* (that is, one concerned with imidž) that bespeaks the discourse's salience. Emi effectively drew a parallel between her mother's conversational hospitality and a recognizable genre of imidž-focused political speech that had been influenced by the transnational confluence of public relations and politics.

In order to understand some features of imidž discourse in the Macedonian context and its relationship to such broader discourses on national image, it is necessary to unpack the more general form underlying the concept of image. From Karl Marx onward, a rich critical tradition has examined commodities as reified (and fetishized) sets of social relations, and recent work on brands has furthered this line of argument.<sup>24</sup> While brands are commonly treated in professional and popular discourse as things in themselves, their power and efficacy (or lack thereof) derives from obscured sets of social relations. Similarly, although national images are discussed in everyday conversation as if they referred to something objective and concrete, that is, actual sets of attributes associated with a particular nation, the apparent objectivity of image is an effect of neoliberal discourses on branding as applied to the nation. The objectivity of image is then further supported by technologies of measurement, such as polling, indexing, and rating, which reify "public opinion" about a nation. Together such practices obfuscate the fact that "image" is necessarily referentially indeterminate and irreducible to exact quantification and qualification.

That national images are portrayed in common parlance as objects existing separate from the complex relationships underlying the international political economy, and as targets to be improved or developed via various campaigns or initiatives, bespeaks a unique aspect of the transnational discourse on national images. In contrast to earlier interstate representational politics, the concern with national images "reinterprets national identity in market terms."<sup>25</sup> A strong national image, like a strong commercial brand, is seen not only as a point of national pride but also as a political agent capable of shaping others' perceptions and behavior.<sup>26</sup>

With the imperative to appeal to the international political equivalent of "desired consumers," however, the concept of national image replicates what Michael Herzfeld terms the "disemia" located at the center of contemporary nationalism, that is, the tension between official representations of national identity and the collective, but intimate, recognition of "those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external

24. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York, 1977); Lury, *Brands*; Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties*; William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham, 2003); Jansen, "Designer Nation."

25. Jansen, "Designer Nation," 122.

26. Cf. Lury, *Brands*.

embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality.”<sup>27</sup> Commenting on Herzfeld, Andrew Shryock highlights how this tension “internalizes and renders essential the presence of an outside observer whose disapproval matters.”<sup>28</sup> Concern over national image thus essentializes international power divisions by constructing an addressee “whose disapproval matters” and fosters a double consciousness among those seeking the reward of image-politics.<sup>29</sup> Constantly in pursuit of external recognition, such actors necessarily confront the gap between their own self-understandings and more powerful others’ representation of them.<sup>30</sup>

In consequence, characterizations of national image are never neutral; they always imply an evaluation as either positive or negative in relation to what is assumed to be the standard of recognition at that moment. This is especially clear in countries such as Macedonia, which seek to attain EU membership. As John Borneman and Nick Fowler argue, “all prospective [EU] members are considered juvenile if not actively infantilized by their Western relatives and must undergo a probationary period of Europeanization before being ostensibly adopted by the family.”<sup>31</sup> Evaluations created according to the shifting standards of European integration—what Dominic Boyer described for the East German context as “the language of the ‘not yet’”—reproduce the hierarchies that condition image-politics.<sup>32</sup> The deferral of recognition through patronizing assessments of “political immaturity” and other similar standards fuels political practices in which the pursuit of recognition takes the form of image-crafting and national marketing—precisely those forms stereotyped by Emi when she interrupted her mother.<sup>33</sup>

The double consciousness intrinsic to international recognition politics thus informs the practices aimed at developing a national image.

27. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, 3.

28. Andrew Shryock, ed., *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture* (Stanford, 2004), 10.

29. Cf. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York, 1994); see also Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, 2002).

30. The issue of national image, of course, does not affect all members of a population equally. Certain social groups may be more or less susceptible to the politics of image based on their placement within polities variously divided by categories such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race as well as by factors such as one’s profession or whether one lives in an urban or rural environment. I thank Keith Brown for emphasizing this point to me.

31. Borneman and Fowler, “Europeanization,” 496.

32. Boyer, *Spirit and System*, 189.

33. James Ferguson’s *Expectations of Modernity* is an important touchstone on the role of discourse in actively constructing global inequality in contemporary capitalism. Focusing on a Zambian sense of expulsion from the modernist dreams once promised by development, Ferguson explores how imaginaries of modernity and the modern world order circulate in global capitalism mediating “the mechanisms of membership, exclusion, and abjection upon which the contemporary system of spatialized global inequality depends.” Arguably, the use of image in contemporary global politics functions as just one such mechanism. See James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, 1999), 236.

Although seemingly harkening to some indeterminate public, practices aimed at national promotion are always already infused with—or in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, dialogized with—specific terms, concepts, and values thought to appeal to the particular others imagined as addressees.<sup>34</sup> For instance, given the political economy of European integration in Macedonia, Macedonian constructs of “Europe” were necessarily implied as addressees of imidž-discourse. In turn, Macedonian sentiments about what sorts of national representation would best improve Macedonia's imidž in “European” eyes guided efforts at imidž-management. In the postconflict context, Macedonian endeavors at image-crafting increasingly drew from EU discourses on European identity and came to rely on a set of discourses whereby the “modernity” and “Europeanness” of the country were voiced in terms of contemporary, “Western” ideals of democracy, efficiency, multiculturalism, transparency, and so on.<sup>35</sup>

Indicative of this dialogism is the following quote. When asked by the Macedonian business and politics weekly *Kapital* whether the government had an idea on “how to change [Macedonia's] bad image in the EU,” Radmila Šekerinska, at the time the deputy minister in charge of Macedonia's Sector for European Integration, answered “Simply put, we need to be more accomplished, more argumentative, and more rational; to know what to talk about and what to want. In a single word, we need to present the European part of Macedonian reality and politics, while at the same time working to change, to improve, that reality.”<sup>36</sup> In effect, Šekerinska invoked “European” images of efficiency and deliberative democracy in formulating an antidote to Macedonia's bad imidž.

Given the strategic dialogism fostered by imidž-politics, national marketing in Macedonia, but also elsewhere, can be viewed as a complex of efforts that aim to represent the country in terms thought to be already familiar to the target audience and, thereby, to achieve an interdiscursive framework in which a desired recognition could occur. In this way, postconflict image-politics served as a tool to engage an imagined audience of powerful outsiders, most often, “Europe.” If Macedonia's leaders could succeed in building such a framework via their imidž-conscious actions and initiatives, then they could interpellate a new European public, a public that saw Macedonia as one of its own.

As within any national context, however, the strategies and practices engaged in to achieve image-recognition in postconflict Macedonia were neither uniform nor united. Rather, different political interests employed varying strategies to win positive outside appraisal, and one group's desire to control the country's image before an international or European public was often complicated by competing representations. As will be discussed

34. On publics, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York, 2002); on dialogism, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, 1981).

35. See Borneman and Fowler, “Europeanization”; Shore, *Building Europe*; Bellier and Wilson, eds., *An Anthropology of the European Union*; Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*; Holmes, *Integral Europe*; and Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe.”

36. Verica Milanova, “Evrointegracija kje bide uspešno samo ako ja vključuva javnosta,” *Kapital*, no. 217 (17 January 2004): 21.

below, this was particularly evident between Macedonia's two largest political parties and between ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian political establishments.<sup>37</sup> Image thus operates on two levels, one externally focused and the other internally focused: the primary act of crafting image to appeal to an imagined external observer stimulates a secondary level of image-focused practice as political actors compete to present themselves as "appropriate" standard-bearers of national image. In this way, popular concern over Macedonia's international image focused, not only on the country's efforts at public diplomacy, but also reverberated across the discussions of any happening considered to have a possible effect on outside perceptions of Macedonia.

### Macedonian History Lessons in Imidž

If the rise of image as a transnational discourse constitutes a turn in the international politics of representation, the particularities of Macedonia's recent history make the country an especially clear case, illustrating how concern over national image animates politics on the domestic stage. Many countries, of course, now share an interest in developing positive national images.<sup>38</sup> But understanding how the discourse on imidž came to permeate postconflict politics in Macedonia demands placing the country's international relations in historical context.

In the past two decades, international actors have occupied central roles in Macedonia's domestic politics and in its chief political imaginary.<sup>39</sup> Beginning with its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, the new nation was quickly confronted by a hostile politics of international favor. Despite the findings of the European Community–convened Badinter Commission, which recommended the recognition of an independent Macedonia, Greek nationalist pressure that insisted on a monopoly to the name "Macedonia" stalled Macedonia's widespread recognition by other states.<sup>40</sup> In consequence, only after assenting to a "temporary solution"

37. On competitive constructions of ethnic identity in postsocialist Macedonia, see Vasiliki Neofotistos, "Beyond Stereotypes: Violence and the Porousness of Ethnic Boundaries in the Republic of Macedonia," *History and Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (March 2004): 47–67; Neofotistos, "'The Balkans' Other Within"; Dimova, "'Modern' Masculinities"; Keith Brown, "In the Realm of the Double-Headed Eagle: Parapolitics in Macedonia 1994–1999," in Jane Cowan, ed., *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* (London, 2000); Brown, "Sovereignty after Socialism"; and Thiessen, *Waiting for Macedonia*.

38. See Jansen, "Designer Nation."

39. The consequential involvement of the "great powers" in southeastern Europe is long and well attested, as is the idea that these "great powers" lay behind political goings-on in the region. On the former point, see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1983). On the latter point, see Friedman, "Observing the Observers."

40. Greece defends the exclusivity of its claims to the name "Macedonia" on the grounds that Macedonian use constitutes an irredentist politics. This position is patently ridiculous; even if a tiny minority of Macedonian nationalists support a Greater Macedonia, there is no credible threat of a Macedonian landgrab in the northern regions of Greece. Rather, the Greek insistence on exclusive rights to the name *Macedonia* can be linked to the desire to monopolize Alexander the Great as a national symbol and a marketing lure. While the divisive legacy of the Greek civil war and Greece's desire to conceal

to the naming dispute in 1993 was Macedonia admitted to the United Nations under the now notorious compromise name, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” Formal recognition by western European powers and the United States followed gradually afterwards.<sup>41</sup> Despite this rocky start, Macedonia soon earned a reputation in international political circles and in the international press as a Balkan “Oasis of Peace” for its relative stability compared to its ex-Yugoslav neighbors. Yet Macedonia’s own 2001 conflict between ethnic Albanian insurgents and state police, military, and paramilitary forces not only changed this image but also alerted many in Macedonia to the perceived stakes of its imidž.<sup>42</sup>

Both during and after the conflict, the overwhelming majority of ethnic Macedonians with whom I spoke claimed that the Macedonian government had lost the “media war” (*mediumskata vojna*) against the insurgents, a battle of imidž waged through the international media in order to secure loyalties among the international community.<sup>43</sup> According to this argument, despite the initial support given by the United States and the EU for the Macedonian government, the guerrilla National Liberation Army’s (NLA) consistent skill in cooperating with foreign journalists shifted the diplomatic tide. The argument continues by claiming that the insurgents succeeded in convincing these journalists to replace depictions of the NLA as thuggish terrorists with portrayals of romantic rebels fighting for the rights of Macedonia’s Albanian minority, which also improved the insurgents’ political leverage. Ultimately, then, as adherents of the media war hypothesis saw it, the peace deal that ended the conflict, which

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its treatment of its own ethnic Macedonian minority is also part of the picture, the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece is largely a politics of image, or, in this case, a politics over image.

41. Most countries recognized the Republic of Macedonia in 1994–95, although many did so under the “temporary” name provided by the United Nations rather than the constitutional name. The United States recognized Macedonia’s constitutional name in 2004, but, as of June 2010, the EU still has not done so.

42. For in-depth analyses of Macedonia’s first years of independence, see Brown, *The Past in Question*; Victor Roudometof, ed., *The Macedonian Question* (Boulder, Colo., 2000); James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (New York, 2001); John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece: The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation* (Jefferson, N.C., 1997); and Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (New York, 1995).

43. The convergence of the discourse of imidž and the representational politics of war in Macedonia has roots in the earlier Yugoslav wars. See Iordanova, “Are the Balkans Admissible?” Dubravka Ugrešić also noted the role of image-management during Croatia’s war of independence from Yugoslavia: “The *image*, which is more important than the truth, is being worked on by government organizations, the Ministry of Information, offices for the promotion of Croatia in the world, but also by newly formed nongovernmental organizations such as, for instance, ‘The Croatian Anti-defamation League.’ Maintaining that ‘lies about Croatia have been spread for decades,’ the president of the League recently announced: ‘We shall endeavour to alter world public opinion in favour of Croatia, using the truth as our strongest and sole argument. It is the duty of each one of us to defend our country, and that is our most important task. Slander is a more powerful weapon than a gun, a tank or an aeroplane.’ Looking at the local newspapers the uninformed reader might think that we were not involved in a real war but in a battle for our *image in the world*.” Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*, trans. Celia Hawksworth (University Park, 1998), 75 (emphasis in the original).

was negotiated under U.S. and EU pressure and was popularly viewed as a victory for the insurgents, resulted from this shift in media favor.<sup>44</sup> The NLA was seen as having succeeded in promoting an *imidž* of ethnic Albanians as victims and an *imidž* of the Macedonian state as akin to Slobodan Milošević's Serbia. The NLA's purported success in such *imidž* politics was held to have been the decisive factor in the conflict.

In positioning the struggle over how the conflict was represented abroad as key to its overall outcome, this narrative seizes upon the very real influence of international press coverage, although it also erases other important factors that contributed to the conflict's resolution (for example, insurgent military successes, government political blunders, a joint U.S. and EU *realpolitik* determined not to have another war—or massive peacekeeping mission—in the Balkans). Nonetheless, the continuing persuasiveness of this narrative as an explanation for the conflict's particular unfolding had an impact on the domestic political scene, further reinforcing belief in the significance of international favor as well as in the corresponding model of politics-as-marketing. Just as postconflict Macedonian politicians perceived the insurgents as having succeeded in marketing their *imidž* to foreigners, so too did those politicians perceive a need to market Macedonia's *imidž* anew on the international stage.

At the same time, the conflict also led to intensified international intervention in the country. The United States and the EU, as signatories to the peace treaty, were charged with overseeing the agreement's implementation, and the involvement of both NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also increased. Furthermore, the 2001 signing of the EU Stabilisation and Association Agreement ratcheted up Macedonia's efforts to join the EU, although as Jozsef Böröcz argues, such agreements and the "integration" they imply are very open-ended and set in unequal terms.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while Macedonian concern over its international perception dated to the period of independence, the 2001 conflict strengthened convictions about international powers' control over the country's future and the usefulness of *imidž* as the tool to influence them. Achievement of a new positive image would at once circulate representations of Macedonia untarnished by the conflict and increase the country's leverage within the European integration process.

One incident, in particular, stands as an extreme example of just how strong the discourse on *imidž* became at this moment. In 2002, Macedonian police killed seven South Asian men at Raštanski Lozja, a small village outside Skopje. Interior Minister Ljube Boškovski claimed that the murdered men were terrorists planning to attack the Macedonian embassies of the United States and its European allies aiding the war in Afghanistan. Later evidence, however, indicated that the men had in fact been economic migrants en route to Greece. Subsequent reports on the

44. For representative examples of this sort of criticism toward the international news coverage of the conflict, see Ljube Profiloski, *Mediumskata vojna protiv Makedonija* (Skopje, 2002); and Aleksandar Damovski, "Foreign Media Coverage: Manipulation or Ignorance?" in Alistar Crighton, ed., *Macedonia: The Media and the Conflict* (Skopje, 2003).

45. Böröcz, "The Fox and the Raven."

incident suggested that, not only had Boškovski been involved in planning the men's assassination, but the plot was specifically designed to improve Macedonia's imidž.<sup>46</sup> In fabricating a narrative on the successful squashing of a terrorist action, Boškovski had purportedly hoped to win points with American and European governments (and among domestic constituencies as well) as a vigilant ally in the war on terror.<sup>47</sup>

Other political performances in Macedonia presupposing imidž's power to influence "the international community" also demonstrated a duality of address toward outside and domestic audiences (though certainly less extreme than the imidž-politics alleged for Boškovski). The concept's traction depended on its external orientation to consequential observers, but claims about imidž also offered politicians and other public actors a potent means to authorize themselves before domestic audiences. Explicit and implicit references to imidž proliferated in political speech and in the everyday discussion of politics. More often than not, as the following examples illustrate, such imidž-presupposing practices intermingled, creating an environment saturated by diverse, but overlapping, interpellations of a subject who was imidž-conscious.<sup>48</sup>

### Imidž Politics in Practice

In the spring of 2004, Macedonia geared up for a special presidential election following the tragic death of President Boris Trajkovski in a plane crash that February. After a multicandidate primary, the election between Branko Crvenkovski of the ruling SDSM and Saško Kedev of the VMRO-DPMNE, the leading opposition party, was scheduled for the last Wednesday in April.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the extraordinary ranking of imidž in the pre-election poll mentioned at the beginning of this article, imidž-consciousness permeated political performances during the campaign; it even came to bear on how the vote was framed as a test of Macedonia's democratic maturity. In each case, concern over how "Europe" or the "international community" evaluated Macedonia was transformed into a political authorizing device on the domestic stage.

46. Tomislav Kežarovski, "Ljube Boškovski komunicira so iztražniot sudija od Hotel Ambasador," *Utrinski Vesnik*, no. 1463 (4 May 2004).

47. While Boškovski claimed that the murdered men had plans to bomb the American, German, and British embassies in Skopje (i.e., the purported targets were both American and European), his use of an American-dominated discourse on terrorism risked alienating some European audiences. The Boškovski case is thus a good example of how the dialogism inherent to image politics can as easily fracture as unite audiences.

48. On the concept of interpellation, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1971), 127–86.

49. Macedonian politics is dominated by three major parties. The left-leaning Union of Social Democrats (SDSM or Socijalnodemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija) and the right-leaning Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE or Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija- Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Narodno Edinstvo) are the country's two largest parties. The Democratic Union for Integration (BDI/DUI or Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim/Demokratska Unija za Integracija) is the third key party in Macedonia and the country's chief ethnic Albanian party.

On one level, imidž-consciousness entered into the election via the candidates' campaigns, where each candidate routinely drew on the discourse of imidž to appeal to voters. Opposition party candidate Kedev, for instance, frequently emphasized the possibilities of his newcomer status, making claims such as, "I think that now is the moment when I could personally make a contribution to the transformation of Macedonia's imidž," and elsewhere argued that, "Nobody in Europe recognizes leaders who do not care for their citizens, independent of their ethnic, religious, and political background."<sup>50</sup> That Kedev, the candidate of a right-nationalist party made such gestures to multiculturalist notions of "tolerance" and "equality" speaks volumes about the dialogic meshing of discourses encouraged by concern over imidž. VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski made the case for Kedev succinctly, "This country needs a man who will solve its problems, who prepares it for foreign investments, and who knows the spirit of Europe."<sup>51</sup>

The draw of imidž was also not lost on Crvenkovski, although his strategies were different. Having regained the post of prime minister in 2002, Crvenkovski took advantage of the attention directed at Macedonia following the 2001 conflict and intensified the government's efforts at European integration. For instance, Crvenkovski elevated the government's Sector for European Integration to a ministry post and launched a domestic- and international-focused media campaign promoting Macedonia's EU aspirations. Additionally, just weeks before the election, Crvenkovski led the delegation to officially submit Macedonia's application for EU membership. In campaigning for president, Crvenkovski highlighted these accomplishments—even if they were part of a longer-standing Macedonian initiative to join the EU—to demonstrate his positive effect on Macedonia's imidž. He thereby aimed to highlight his stability as a politician with a "stay the (European) course" tactic, leaving the discourse of imidž in a visible background: not always explicitly mentioned, but apparent nonetheless. His campaign posters made this clear: a portrait of the candidate appears before equally prominent Macedonian and EU flags with the text "Branko Crvenkovski: Statesman" (see figure 2).

The candidates' campaigns drew on imidž to sway voters; simultaneously, the authority of imidž was called on to shape public behavior. Leading up to the election, politicians, diplomats, and media commentators spoke of the country's need for an election without violence or balloting irregularities: anything less would tarnish Macedonia's international reputation.<sup>52</sup> Here the avoidance of election-tampering was portrayed as a civic

50. Macedonian Information and Liason Service, "MILS News" (24 March 2004); Radio Free Europe, "Macedonia's Presidential Candidates."

51. Radio Free Europe, "Macedonia's Presidential Candidates."

52. E.g., in a joint EU, NATO, and OSCE press conference, the EU spokesperson explicitly made the connection between the election and its impact on EU evaluations of Macedonia: "The elections are not only to vote for a particular politician or party; rather, they will broadcast a very important message to the EU about the aspirations of the country for Euro integration." Reported in Tamara Grnčaroska, "Spored EU, NATO, i OBSE: Izborite ušte edna predizvik za Makedonija," *Utrinski Vesnik*, no. 1437 (1 April 2004).



Figure 2. The standard campaign poster for presidential candidate Branko Crvenkovski. Note the presence of both an EU and Macedonian flag in the upper left-hand corner. The text, here in Albanian with the exception of the candidate's name, reads, "Macedonia for all; Macedonia in NATO; Macedonia in the EU. Branko Crvenkovski: Statesman." This advertisement was printed in the 26 April 2004 edition of the Albanian language magazine *Lobi*.

duty given the perceived importance of imidž. One aspect of the election, as made evident by these calls to ensure a particular kind of vote, was thus to signal to international observers that Macedonia was “their” kind of democracy, although such signals would subsequently be countered with western evaluations that had become a customary part of European integration.<sup>53</sup>

The election took place as scheduled and was relatively problem-free, and Crvenkovski emerged victorious. The election as a whole, however, stands as a striking testament to the multileveled penetration of the discourse of imidž into Macedonian politics, from the public relations positionings of the candidates to an overall framing of the vote itself. In each case, the presumption that foreigners were watching, and that this mattered, was used to prescribe and proscribe various forms of behavior. The 2004 presidential election thereby indicates how imidž-centric promotion of self worked as a central means to control the frames of and message behind political issues. Political actors would struggle to position themselves as the best shepherds of Macedonia’s imidž and as a consequence, they came to couch their divergent positions within this common discursive framework.

A vote of a different sort, however, resulted in what was perhaps the most extreme display of the politics of imidž during 2004. In July, the ruling SDSM and its coalition partners passed a controversial redistricting plan as part of the decentralization process outlined in the peace agreement that ended the 2001 conflict. Focusing on the fact that the plan would replace the ethnic Macedonian majorities of two municipalities with ethnic Albanian ones, a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, led by the Civic Movement of Macedonia, launched a campaign to nullify the new redistricting plan through a referendum. Initially, the organizers criticized the plan as an unfortunate result of outside political pressure that would result in a deeper entrenchment of ethnic divisions across Macedonia’s municipal landscape. Instead, these groups advocated for a more “multicultural” plan that would emphasize the civic nature of belonging in the country. However, the nationalist World Macedonian Congress and the VMRO-DPMNE quickly took center stage in the pro-referendum advocacy—to the chagrin of some earlier referendum organizers—in opposition to the SDSM’s efforts to justify the redistricting plan. With this support, the referendum secured the requisite number of signatures to put it to a popular vote, which was set for 7 November 2004. As a consequence, the late summer and early fall of that year were marked by increasingly vociferous politicking on both sides of the issue.

Initially, the SDSM government that passed the redistricting plan defended it as a fair and realistic step in the country’s decentralization and

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Macedonian politicians similarly emphasized the importance of democratic elections without irregularities. See, e.g., “Političarite posakaa fer i demokratski izbori i masoven oddziv,” *Utrinski Vesnik*, no. 1448 (15 April 2004).

53. See Friedman, “Observing the Observers,” for an insightful analysis of international monitoring during Macedonia’s 1994 census. On elections and international aid workers, respectively, in Bosnia, see Kimberley Coles, “Ambivalent Builders: Europeanization, the Production of Difference, and Internationals in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *PoLAR* 25, no. 1 (May 2002): 1–18; and Kimberley Coles, “Election Day: The Construction of Democracy through Technique,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (November 2004): 551–80.

democratization, while the VMRO-DPMNE and other referendum supporters decried the nondemocratic way in which the plan was formed “behind closed doors” and expressed outrage at what they considered dangerous gerrymandering. From the beginning then, the strategy of each side of the referendum drew on *imidž*-sensitive discourses dialogized with discourses of European integration: the SDSM in pointing to decentralization and democratization, the VMRO-DPMNE in voicing the rhetoric of transparency and democracy. Meanwhile, in most foreign embassies, it was feared that a successful referendum might incite new ethnic conflict.

As summer drew to a close, speculation grew that the referendum might pass. With the VMRO-DPMNE-supported movement against the government’s redistricting plan gathering momentum, SDSM embarked on a new strategy. First, SDSM and its allies abandoned the hope of winning the referendum and instead strove to invalidate it by calling on supporters to boycott the vote. By Macedonian law, any vote with less than 50 percent of the electorate participating is considered void. In conjunction, the SDSM leadership also gave up advocating the merits of the redistricting plan and instead argued that overturning the plan would harm Macedonia’s *imidž* and its path toward European integration.

In this context, SDSM-sponsored billboards playing on the politics of *imidž* began to sprout up across the country. Employing the slogan “To be whole, Europe needs Macedonia,” the billboards depicted the map of Europe as a jigsaw puzzle with one missing piece (see figure 3). To the side was shown the one piece absent from the puzzle with a red silhouette of Macedonia prominently in its center. By framing the referendum over a redistricting plan in this manner, the billboards made the SDSM case regarding the stakes of the vote: A vote for the referendum was contrary to Macedonia’s European *imidž* (see figure 4).

In contrast, referendum supporters argued that the referendum epitomized democracy-in-action and citizens’ involvement in political decision-making and, hence, proof of the country’s democratic maturity. While not referencing *imidž* explicitly, these remarks also addressed the imagined observer of *imidž* in an effort to rebut SDSM’s claims.

In the end, the November vote on the referendum resulted in an overwhelming majority, among those casting ballots, in support of overturning the redistricting plan. Turnout, however, was less than the 50 percent required to validate the vote and so the referendum failed. Given the earlier speculation about the referendum’s likely success, the SDSM’s argument that the referendum would hurt Macedonia’s *imidž* surely contributed to the referendum’s ultimate defeat, a perception only bolstered by the conduct of foreign diplomats in the country.<sup>54</sup>

On the whole, then, the set of *imidž*-centric practices outlined here signal the great authority invested in the discourse of *imidž* that came to

54. One key factor named in the defeat of the referendum was the U.S. recognition of Macedonia under its constitutional name just days prior to the vote. The move was seen as a gesture of support for the SDSM-led government and thus as a sign of American disapproval of the referendum. The timing of the decision also indicates how foreign governments and organizations in Macedonia would leverage *imidž*’s authority to pursue their own goals.



Figure 3. One of the anti-referendum campaign’s “To be whole, Europe needs Macedonia” billboards. While companion billboards in this series addressed the referendum explicitly, this sign assumed spectators would understand its political message: Be European and vote “No” on the referendum. The missing puzzle piece on the left depicts an outline of Macedonia. Photograph by the author.



Figure 4. Another anti-referendum billboard stating, “Europe: Now or Never.” That the anti-referendum message of this sign was clear is evidenced by the graffiti in the upper right-hand corner. “Za,” which means “for,” was the slogan of the pro-referendum coalition. Photograph by the author.

preside over Macedonia's prolonged "transition." In making claims about their own relationship to imidž, political actors were signaling their ability to advance perceived national interests on the world stage. Their authority resulted from their ability to position themselves or their initiatives as the ones most likely to achieve outside, "European," approval, to have a positive impact on Macedonian imidž, and, consequently, to promise a brighter future. The appeal of imidž as a discourse within Macedonian domestic politics depended on the power projected upon foreign powers and the desire to shape these powers' approach to Macedonia. But the power of imidž (that is, its capacity to transform foreign policy toward Macedonia) remains ambivalent. While imidž registered a Macedonian desire to exert control over its relations with "Europe," as these examples demonstrate, the politics of imidž also encouraged precisely those social, discursive, and legal forms demanded by an integrating Europe. Although a response to the recognition politics of European integration, the politics of imidž continued to operate within the terms of European recognition. Indeed, as imidž-politics was brought to bear on the domestic stage, nearly any action in Macedonia could be evaluated according to its "Europeanness" and its effect on imidž.

While I have focused on the use of imidž in political performances and as the discursive backdrop for a number of high-profile public events, the discourse of imidž was commonly taken up in personal worlds as well. Often in zones of transnational interaction—for example, at airports, in embassy visa lines, at border crossings—individual Macedonians would be called to inhabit the discourse of imidž.<sup>55</sup> On such personal levels, concern over imidž coincided with the desire to circulate positive representations of one's national identity when confronted by outsiders' ignorance or stereotypes, or to seize upon the promise of imidž and its model of politics-as-marketing as the hope for a better future.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, convictions about the importance of imidž was something that I encountered again and again when as an American researcher I was approached by informants and acquaintances as a possible conduit for national imidž-improvement. As one neighbor said to me over coffee after I had explained my research to her, "Well, be sure to write good things about Macedonia!" Even in small, casual ways, imidž underwrote social gestures in which desires for the future authored present actions.

### **Imidž and the Ambivalences of European Integration**

The diverse and widespread use of the discourse on imidž in postconflict Macedonia supports the thesis that national identity is never a simple,

55. For an insightful account of the humiliations and frustrations generated by one such similar encounter in Serbia, namely, waiting outside foreign embassies in pursuit of visas, see Stef Jansen, "After the Red Passport: Towards an Anthropology of the Everyday Geopolitics of Entrapment in the EU's 'Immediate Outside,'" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 4 (December 2009): 815–32.

56. Cf. Vincent Crapanzano, "Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis," *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (February 2003): 3–32.

autonomous projection of an Andersonian “imagined community” but is instead a reflexive concept in which contestations about what can be “national” are informed by perceptions of their reception by imagined publics elsewhere. As Herzfeld argues, this internally and externally oriented character of nationalism contributes to the basis of the social relations that ground the nation-state.<sup>57</sup> If this double vision is inherent to national consciousness, the historically specific convergence in Macedonia of the transnational discourse of national image, an EU cultural politics that reformulated orientalist logics of European difference, and a recent history of intense international intervention resulted in a particularly powerful political discourse (and concomitant political practices) that drew their authority from this dual focus. Gesturing to the control international powers had over the country, the discourse on *imidž* channeled this power onto the local political field. At the same time, the conviction that via *imidž* Macedonia could exert some control over these otherwise distant powers not only ensured the discourse’s traction but also resulted in numerous attempts to improve Macedonia’s image, from Boškovski’s alleged, misguided staging of “terrorist” assassinations to an orderly voting process to the enhanced public presence of the government’s Sector for European Integration.

That *imidž* arose as the concept framing these practices speaks to the specificities of the political circumstances of postconflict Macedonia but also to the nature of European integration and international oversight in Macedonia. The discourse of international oversight in Macedonia, which tantalizingly promised European inclusion *if* certain conditions were met, created a space in which *imidž* could thrive as the consistent deferral of outsiders’ recognition repeatedly renewed the possibilities for Macedonian *imidž* politics. This, in turn, intensified the crucial questions of the politics of *imidž*: which “face” was to be put forward as “our” national image, and who had the authority and ability to do so? The specific rise of the discourse of *imidž* in Macedonia can thus be seen as a product of European integration and its ever-receding promise of recognition.

Yet the discourse on *imidž* and the embrace of national images as a mode to address consequential foreign onlookers also betrays a deep critical insight about the European politics of recognition manifested in Macedonia’s integration process, namely, that EU politics also trafficks in image. As materialized within Macedonian politics, the strategic and shifting realizations of *imidž* reflected EU efforts to craft and circulate particular representations of “European” identity, representations whose status was far from hegemonic and whose value and authority were malleable.<sup>58</sup> Where the cultural politics of EU integration mobilized selective projections of European identity for consumption by domestic and for-

57. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.

58. See Borneman and Fowler, “Europeanization”; Shore, *Building Europe*; Bellier and Wilson, eds., *An Anthropology of the European Union*; Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*; Holmes, *Integral Europe*; and Asad, “Muslims as a ‘Religious Minority’ in Europe.”

eign audiences, the discourse on *imidž* countered and reformulated these practices, maintaining that through the authority of *imidž*, Macedonia too could influence the route and results of its European course.

The politics of *imidž* in Macedonia thus represent not a cynical embrace of “European” values for instrumental ends but a commentary on the representational politics of the EU and their relationship to the political process of integration in Macedonia. When viewed from the official perspective of the EU, the value of integration for countries like Macedonia is most often taken for granted, and what constitutes European integration in Macedonia is certainly not defined on Macedonian terms, but rather for Macedonia.<sup>59</sup> Foreign diagnoses of Macedonia’s progress or preparedness for Euro-Atlantic membership thereby naturalize these externally defined goals. In contrast, from the perspective developed here, rather than blind enthrallment to the promises of European integration and eventual recognition, the discourse of *imidž* represented a critical redeployment of discourses associated with the west where the imagined result was not replication and assimilation, but conversation and negotiation.<sup>60</sup> The promise of *imidž* was not coextensive with that of recognition, but rather it was a way to move and shape the seemingly otherwise intractable force of the global powers present in postconflict Macedonia.

Macedonian political actors’ focus on *imidž* as a mode of international-cum-domestic politics can thus be seen as a savvy analysis of and adaptation to the postconflict political situation, albeit one still bound within the terms and categories of that situation. These actors slyly employed the globally dominant, consumerist model of politics in which “image” does matter and used it to pursue their goals (for example, access to capital resources, security, and rights) in forms that aimed to appeal to the international forces that controlled their realization as well as to local constituencies.

This critical edge to the discourse on *imidž* therefore emerges as one reaction among many to the doubled structuring of Macedonian political life between domestic and foreign forces. So conceived, as a response to EU representational politics and their own images, Macedonian *imidž* politics cannot simply be reduced to cynical or deficient engagements of democratization. Such stereotypes about the Balkans—too often called upon by foreign observers in Macedonia to explain the lingering “problems” despite “successes” along the road to Europe—may thereby, ironically, obscure a critical view on actually existing democratization, as well as on how these practices hold open the possibility for rearranging the unequal relationships that underwrite the democratization process. By problematizing the perpetual “not yet” of European integration’s recog-

59. Cf. Böröcz, “The Fox and the Raven”; Victor Friedman, “Observing the Observers”; and Coles, *Democratic Designs*.

60. Cf. James Ferguson, “Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the ‘New World Society,’” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (November 2002): 551–69.

dition politics, we can appreciate the power of, and tensions within, the responses that emerge in reaction to this politics. The discourse on imidž was such a response, one that simultaneously operated within hegemonic categories while also promising a means to transform existing geopolitical hierarchies. It should thus be no surprise that a politics focused on imidž would come to occupy such a prominent place in Macedonian public discourse.