

YUGOSLAV HISTORY AND ITS INTERPRETATION

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THE NEW YORK TIMES ON THE NATO BOMBING OF FR YUGOSLAVIA IN 1999 (Translation *In Extenso*)

Abstract

This paper analyzes the linguistic characteristics of *The New York Times*' reporting on the bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The research corpus consists of articles published in this American daily newspaper between March 24, 1999, and June 10, 1999. The study also provides an overview of significant works and publications that examine the perception of NATO's military intervention in both foreign and domestic press. This paper aims to determine how linguistic choices influence the representation of the bombing, which linguistic devices are used to construct the image of Serbs and to identify the dominant macro-strategies in the production of this discourse. The first hypothesis suggests that a negative portrayal of Serbia and Serbs is constructed primarily at the language's lexical and stylistic levels. The second hypothesis posits that *The New York Times*' reporting fully aligns with the broader representation of Serbs and Serbia in

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other European and global media and that, together, they form part of a unified transnational discourse. The characteristics of this global narrative include the mitigation of the impact and consequences of the bombing, the construction of a negative image of a particular nation, the simplification of complex historical and political relations, and the demonization of the enemy – all serving to maintain the existing balance of power and legitimize a new world order.

Keywords: *The New York Times*, discourse analysis, bombing, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1999.

INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of this research is a linguistic analysis of the media coverage surrounding the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia¹, particularly examining the portrayal of the bombing itself, Serbia, and the Serbian people within the pages of the American newspaper, *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* was selected for several reasons. It is one of the most influential media outlets in the United States², providing daily coverage of the NATO aggression, as evidenced by the hundreds of articles published during this period. Furthermore, the newspaper has been subject to only sporadic linguistic analysis about this specific event.

Given the exceptional complexity of the topic, which inevitably encompasses historical, sociological, political, military, and cultural dimensions, this paper will primarily focus on a linguistic analysis of the media. This is particularly relevant considering that reports on the NATO bombing were prominently featured in print media and prime-time radio and television programs (Lakić 2010, 276). The significant role that language played in constructing a discourse justifying the bombing is evident in two linguistic phenomena that are still considered

¹ From a legal and formal standpoint, the bombing of the FRY in 1999 possessed all the elements of aggression against an independent and sovereign state (Krivokapić 2017, 257).

² Nikola Živković (2003, 11) states that, alongside the Washington Post, this newspaper holds a global monopoly and participates in global media production.

examples of propaganda: the use of the euphemism “intervention”³ and the naming of the military operation “Merciful Angel”.

The term “intervention”, instead of more appropriate terms like “bombing”, “attack”, or “war”, was used to create a general public perception, both domestically and internationally, of the necessity of action “that had to be taken to improve, regulate problems, and ensure better conditions in FRY” (Vujošević 2021, 175). Miodrag Mitić (2005, 92) notes that German officials, immediately after the first air strikes in March 1999, stated to the media that “war” was an inappropriate term and that “the government prefers to talk about ‘military operations’ or ‘air strikes’”. While the most well-known, this is not the only example of lexical cushioning of negative meanings: “Instead of the word ‘crimes’, the words ‘campaigns’, ‘interventions’, and ‘actions’ are used; instead of ‘victims’, we hear about ‘collateral damage’; instead of ‘soldiers’, we hear about ‘peacekeepers’; instead of ‘bombing’, we hear about ‘air intervention’” (Lazarević and Artonović 2011, 536).

The name of the NATO bombing operation, “Merciful Angel”, regardless of whether it is incomplete information, a myth, or a term coined for propaganda, continues to produce various effects on readers. While some researchers use this term in their works (Vujošević 2020, 238; Vujošević 2021, 173; Tančić and Gordić 2022, 102), and although it is used in elementary school textbooks (Tančić and Gordić 2022, 102), according to recent media reports, the origin of the name remains unclear. It has been suggested that it resulted from an inaccurate translation (the American component in the Alliance “Noble Anvil” was replaced with “angel”), a mistake by an official when naming the operation (a Chinese president), or the intentional use of the name of a British convoy (“Operation Angel’s mission of mercy”) as a collective term for a military operation (RTS 2009). Regardless, the term itself carries a substantial manipulative potential, primarily stemming from the emotional component evoked by the oxymoron⁴ “merciful bombing” or “steel angel”.

³ It represents a stylistic figure that replaces one (unpleasant, frightening, or dangerous) concept with another, milder and more acceptable one. For example, instead of “war,” we write “conflict”.

⁴ A figure of speech that joins two contradictory terms, such as “living dead”.

Due to these and numerous other examples in the media at the end of the 20th century, many researchers of contemporary propaganda strategies argue that a “language struggle” is crucial, if not decisive, for their maintenance (Höijer, Nohrstedt, and Ottosen 2002, 5). This means that a unique language aimed at a large audience is used for manipulative purposes, to influence public opinion, shape perception, and (dis) inform (Grygiel 2023, 176), all with the aim of what Chomsky calls “manufacturing consent”⁵ (Stojadinović 2014, 135). This is particularly dangerous when media discourse is shaped by state propaganda, often during wars (Boyd-Barrett 2004, 435).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Regarding the analysis of media coverage in 1999, there are several studies investigating how the bombing was presented in domestic and foreign media (for example, in the German *Der Spiegel*, the British *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Times*, the Serbian *NIN*, *Politika*, and several Polish⁶, Norwegian, and Swedish media,⁷ etc.). In addition to academic papers, media discourse on the bombing of Yugoslavia was also the subject of discussion in the media itself. For example, the newspaper *Vreme* published an analysis in 2009 on the divided opinions of intellectuals about the bombing (Mihaljinac and Vujošević 2021, 464; *Vreme* 2009).

Serbian researchers have paid the most attention to the representation of the bombing of FR Yugoslavia in Germany. In addition to Miodrag Mitić’s book (Mitić 2005) “The German Perspective on the Yugoslav Crisis”, which offers a panorama of views and opinions published in Germany in 1999 (5), Ljiljana Glišović’s exhaustive research (Glišović 2011) “Serbia in the Mirror of the German Press 1987–2006” stands out. This work examines the relationship between

⁵ This implies that the media serves to “justify various actions by giving them legitimacy in the eyes of the public regardless of whether those actions are contrary to basic democratic principles” (Stojadinović 2014, 136).

⁶ According to Bjeganjskii and Ščutkovska (2017), the bombing divided Polish public opinion. While some supported it, others strongly criticized it (9).

⁷ According to Höijer, Stig, and Ottosen (2002), the Norwegian public was much more receptive to NATO propaganda than the Swedish public, but at one point, the media in both countries were critical of the bombing (1).

German newspapers and Serbia from the media, politics, and language perspective. Regarding the period of the bombing, the author concluded that during March, April, May, and June, articles about the conflict in Kosovo were daily, largely negative, full of prejudices and stereotypes and that Serbs were compared to Nazis (96).

A similar chronological overview, ten years earlier, is provided by Nikola Živković (2003) in his book “How Others See Us: The Image of Serbs in the German Media 1990–2000”. He concludes that during this period, news was censored, and for an entire decade, the German press approved all actions taken against Serbs while simultaneously reporting on their “atrocities” (266). Author Anđela Vujošević (2021) examined the writing of the magazine *Spiegel*, comparing it to articles in *NIN* and *Politika*. She concluded that there is a significant difference in the frequency of specific vocabulary in domestic and foreign media (182–183) and that, among other things, the use of specific marked words created a negative image of Serbia and Serbs (202). Additionally, the same author found that the German media generally justified the bombing (Mihaljinac and Vujošević 2021, 475).

British media has been the subject of analysis by linguist Igor Lakić (2010). Using examples from *The Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Times*, he determined that the media (or statements by politicians published in the media) shifted the responsibility for the bombing onto Serbia and its intransigence and also, primarily through comments by politicians, justified the NATO bombing (277–280). Slobodan Vuković (2018) also analyzed the British press, among others, in his two-volume work “Serbs in the Western Narrative”. The author emphasizes that during 1999, there was a regular practice of comparing Serbs to Nazis, and it was even published that they were carrying out a “Balkan version of the final solution” (287). This book also includes reviews of US media coverage. Concluding that the shift in US policy toward Serbia went hand in hand with a change in the media (211), the author says that during the NATO bombing, Americans openly sided with one side (270).⁸ Serbs were accused of communism, Greater Serbian

⁸ For example, it provides data showing that during 1998–1999, the American press used the word “genocide” 220 times, and that New York Times journalists openly advocated for Belgrade to be “blackened out”, for the targets to be the power grid,

nationalism, intolerance, violence, and backwardness, and this was the dominant narrative in the reporting for all ten years (211–274).

The New York Times' coverage of the bombing of Serbia has been sporadically examined in domestic and foreign academic works, with media, political science, or sociological analysis predominating content analysis. For example, authors Lazarević and Artonović (2012, 313–338) concluded that this daily newspaper was the most extreme in its reporting and interpretation of information from Kosovo and Metohija in the period from 1999 to 2010: "The BBC and The New York Times had the highest number of texts with a predominantly negative tone towards Serbs from the north or were exclusive, and both media outlets published a significant number of texts with a pro-Albanian/anti-Serb spin" (333). Sociologist Jovo Bakić (2011) wrote about the bias of *The New York Times* is reporting from the beginning to the end of the 1990s and concluded that the "most pronounced campaign of demonization of Serbs, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia" had emerged at that time (112). Furthermore, in the book "Degraded Capability – The Media and The Kosovo Crisis", authors Ackerman and Naureckas (2001) argue that *The New York Times* not only served to Americanize the conflict and crisis in Kosovo and Metohija into a one-sided ethnic crime (100) but also that significant historical revisionism and a shift about earlier texts can be observed in the reporting of this media. Namely, in 1982, the terms "ethnic cleansing" and "ethnically pure" territory were used to describe the Albanians' intention to establish an ethnically compact Kosovo. This phrase was used similarly for the next seven years (99).

Therefore, previous analyses, with few exceptions, show that the world press, primarily German, British, and American, acted orchestrated, one-sided, and uncritically, significantly changing its previous stances. Serbs were portrayed as enemies, criminals, and Nazis, and this discourse was dominant not only during the NATO bombing but throughout the 1990s.

roads, bridges, and water supply, and for the need to move to a ground intervention (Vuković 2003, 271–274).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE WORK

Although there is no unified theoretical and methodological concept of an interdisciplinary perspective in sociolinguistics, instead several fluid views on the relationship between language and society from the perspective of different fields, it is essential to note that ‘purely linguistic analysis cannot provide satisfactory results in the analysis of media and that it must be combined with critical discourse analysis that allows the text to be interpreted by the appropriate discourse and social practice. The interpretation of a text can be subjective if it relies on something other than linguistic findings. In contrast, without proper understanding, linguistic analysis alone cannot provide a valid and complete analysis of a newspaper article (Lakić 2010, 269). Therefore, in this paper, we use the analytical framework of critical discourse analysis (of media discourse) that examines the function, purpose, and intent of using specific linguistic means in a specific social context. A critical look at the use of language in any discourse implies that the researcher, through the analysis of different linguistic levels (from phonetics to stylistics), uncovers hidden or at least at first glance, invisible determinants in social relations, which are primarily related to power relations (Filipović 2018, 20). For example, a purely linguistic analysis of a text will establish that a particular politician or media often uses the passive voice in their texts or speeches. Still, only critical discourse analysis can determine which information is being pushed into the foreground and which is being hidden by using these constructions.⁹

As its leading researchers describe, critical discourse analysis examines language as a social practice¹⁰ (Wodak and Weiss 2003, 13) and how power, social inequality, and manipulation are legitimized and reproduced through various linguistic tools (Van Dijk 2015,

⁹ An excellent example is provided by the author Milica Vuković (2014, 223) – the statements of American presidents Reagan, Clinton, and Bush “Mistakes were made,” in which the speaker only acknowledges that mistakes were made, but not who is responsible for them.

¹⁰ Language shapes (or defines) certain events, institutions, or structures, but society also in turn influences language. This mutual relationship can mean maintaining the current status quo or reshaping society and language (Wodak and Weiss 2003, 13).

466). A fundamental premise of this research orientation is that linguistic practices are not neutral but are “ideological and tend to shape social representations according to specific interests” (Pešić 2024, 9). While many studies have been written on political, scientific, economic, and even everyday discourse, media discourse is fascinating because it is the most comprehensive, and the most significant number of people are constantly exposed to it (Caldas-Coulthard 2003, 273). The basic framework for examining language in this paper is Norman Fairclough’s three-step model of analysis (Norman Fairclough 1989, 26), which consists of describing the text, interpreting it, and explaining the social context, combined with Van Dijk’s (Van Dijk 2015) interpretation of the relationship between microstructures (the language of specific texts) and macrostructures (the ideological background of discourse) (469).¹¹ To examine these relations, all texts in the specified media will be observed through the macro-strategies of thematization (imposing a topic on the audience), polarization (the existence of two opposing groups), and justification (spreading danger and stopping it).¹²

The corpus of this research consists of articles published in *The New York Times* between March 24, 1999, and June 10, 1999. Given the daily reporting and the many articles, the analysis included 27 texts categorized as “Conflict in the Balkans: The overview” and a search for keywords that yielded over 200 articles, mostly presented as “Opinion.” This study aims to determine how the bombing is presented in the newspaper’s writing, what linguistic means are used to construct the image of Serbs, and what macro-strategies are built through the specific use of language. The study’s first hypothesis is that the negative image of Serbia and Serbs is created primarily at the lexical and stylistic levels. The second hypothesis is that the reporting of the American daily newspaper *The New York Times* fully corresponds to the representation of Serbs and Serbia in other

¹¹ According to Van Dijk (2015), the relationship between macrostructures and microstructures is the central focus of critical discourse analysis. Microstructures consist of language use, discourse, and communication, while macrostructures represent power, domination, and inequality (468).

¹² In order to examine the relationship between discursive practices and ideology in a specific case, we combined several strategies presented in the works of Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Vuković 2014; Van Dijk 2015.

European and world media and that, together with them, it can be interpreted as part of a unified transnational discourse.

ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

The initial *New York Times* article was categorized as “Conflict in the Balkans: The Overview”.¹³ In the first part of this corpus, there is still a slight deviation from an utterly negative perception of Serbs and Serbia. Serbs as a people are either not mentioned or are given a neutral position. One of the reasons for this is, as the same media reports, the division of Americans on the issue of the situation in the Balkans. Namely, the first polls showed that 46% of Americans supported the bombing, while 43% did not (Clines 1999a).¹⁴ However, later, and also in the initial articles of the second type – columns and opinions (Opinion), this picture changes completely, as, after all, the targets.¹⁵ And goals of the military operation change. Since maintaining a particular ideology in media discourse requires establishing control over the topic – for example, when editors or media owners decide which events to report on and which not to (Van Dijk 2015, 471), based on the number of texts we analyze, their frequency, and nature, we can conclude that the bombing of Serbia was a critical issue for readers in the United States, but also for politics itself. It is believed that after the Cold War, the United States needed an enemy and a new role in established international relations (Stojadinović 2014, 61), and the situation in the Balkans proved highly stimulating. Placing this topic in the focus of interest further opened space for developing two other strategies – presenting the enemy and justifying the attack.

Furthermore, the strategy of polarization, of presenting the adversary, was meant to indicate to readers who belongs to the “us” group and who belongs to the “them” group. We always produce

¹³ These texts mainly provide basic information about the bombing, an overview of the most important statements and events.

¹⁴ “NATO Strikes Go On as Serbs Step Up Campaign”. In the list of references, the dates when the text was published are given. In exceptional cases, when it is appropriate, the title of the article is also noted. All translations by Aleksandra Savić.

¹⁵ First, the goal was military infrastructure, then troops, depots, and communication facilities, and then infrastructure, bridges, and other facilities.

solidarity and compassion, and they distance and intolerance (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). The careful painting of the relationship between “victim” and “perpetrator” begins in the very first days after the bombs fell. One of the first headlines in *The New York Times* is “After the Years of Mourning, a Time for Joy” (Stewart 1999). This text describes the joy of American Albanians after the news of the bombing of Serbia was announced. After that, a negative attitude towards Serbs, prejudices, and stereotypes are found in almost every text. Columns and opinions of journalists (“Opinion”) predominate. It is always emphasized that Serbs have previously participated in “similar slaughter” (Fitched 1999) and have “run wild” (Knowlton 1999). Some established phrases are found in several consecutive texts. For example, “Serbian atrocities” (*The New York Times* 1999a; Friedman 1999a; Lewis 1999a; *The New York Times* 1999b; Lewis 1999b), “Serbian rage” (*The New York Times* 1999c; *The New York Times* 1999d; Erlanger 1999a), Serbian “slaughter” (Friedman 1999b; Ellsberg 1999), which means that the task of such language is to underline and repeat several times what the relations between the warring parties are, but also to increase empathy towards the “endangered”.

Such a wholly stereotypical and malicious way of describing an entire nation and country is further complicated by the fact that it talks about persecutions and killings “perpetrated by Serbia” (*The New York Times* 1999e) and about “Serbia’s destructive role in the Balkans” (*The New York Times* 1999f). Serbs are depicted in an article dated April 4, 1999, in the following manner: “Serbs are tough and extremely nationalistic. Kosovo occupies an almost sacred place in their hearts, and they are led by a powerful opportunist who benefits from the crisis.”¹⁶ (Eagleburger 1999). The demonization reaches its peak in parallels with the Nazi regime, both directly, when Serbia is openly declared a neo-Nazi state (Clines 1999b), and through allusions, such as the use of the phrase “brutal Serbian blitzkrieg” (*The New York Times* 1999g). All these mechanisms that successfully establish the image of the enemy are activated at the moments when the newspaper openly supports the bombing – “Serbs deserve it” (Judah 1999), “Sanctions remain. The Serbian people will suffer, but

¹⁶ “The Serbs are tough and highly nationalistic, Kosovo occupies an almost holy place in their hearts, and they are led by a power-hungry opportunist who thrives in crises”.

it is necessary because of the tyranny they supported” (Lewis 1999b), “I am glad we are punishing Serbs for ethnic cleansing” (Friedman 1999b), and “Serbs must learn a lesson” (Datta-Ray 1999).

Finally, the most interesting aspect of the analyzed corpus is undoubtedly the attitude towards the bombing itself and its justification, i.e., according to the reporting of this media, its necessity. To fulfill the strategy of justifying the military attack, the bombing is described as a “moral imperative,” “the end of a tragedy,” and essential for “American national interests” (*The New York Times* 1999h), as well as the “right decision” and an “attempt to solve a problem that Serbia considers internal”, as well as a “matter of duty” (Clines 1999b). Also, NATO aggression is described as “preventing a humanitarian catastrophe” (Clines 1999a) or as a “goal worth fighting for”, “defeating something bad to build something good” (Mitchell 1999). By using tested phrases, specific lexicon, and even oxymorons (in the examples of “humanitarian catastrophe” (Clines 1999a) and “large-scale humanitarian catastrophe” (Miller 1999),¹⁷ they try to justify America’s role in the bombing and further gain public opinion. In these texts, the words of others are mostly conveyed, mainly those of the US president, members of Congress, secretary of state, and NATO officials.

The naming of the military operation has been the subject of many works and studies. In the selected corpus of the American New York Times, in addition to the previously mentioned “intervention” (Rieff 1999), the bombing is also called a “humanitarian intervention”.¹⁸ (Glaberson 1999), “air strikes” (Perlez 1999a), “intensive air operation” (Perlez 1999b), “air mission” (Schmitt 1999), and “bombing campaign” (*The New York Times* 1999i). The goal of mitigating military terminology and euphemisms is not only to hide a particular word or mislead the audience. One of the most dangerous characteristics of using this linguistic tool is the attempt to evoke as few emotional reactions as possible from the message recipient (Vuković 2014, 235) and prevent the emergence of empathy. How dangerous intentions can

¹⁷ Ljiljana Glišović, in her 2011 analysis of the German magazine Spiegel (issue 212), also highlights these same examples.

¹⁸ In some texts (for example, “American negotiators depart, frustrated by Milosevic’s hard line” (Erlanger 1999c) and “Honor compels opposition to rally around Belgrade” (Harden 1999)), it is clearly emphasized – directly or ironically – that these names are used by politicians and centers of power.

be hidden behind such discourse is shown by the text “Birthday in a Shelter, With “Fireworks” (Erlanger 1999b), dated March 26, 1999, in which the culmination of the negation of violence in descriptions of the bombing is achieved. Namely, depicting the life of a family of four in a Belgrade suburb, the reporter states that Biljana’s husband Mile said: “The Americans organized fireworks for your birthday”. Since a Serb from Belgrade utters this sentence, it completely reverses the situation and, besides being genuinely tragic, humiliates the victims of the aggression, mainly civilians. The attempt to control the reader’s empathy is ultimately revealed when, in similar texts (“Crisis in the Balkans: the Kosovars; Serbs Shelling Wide Swath of Kosovo”), we read the sad confessions of the opposing side, in which the words of Albanians are conveyed: “When we drive down the street, all the shops and houses are burning on both sides” (Kifner 1999). Thus, the same strategies were used to justify the bombing as in the other analyzed media, which tells us that it was a broader propaganda effort – an affirmative approach to the bombing (Mihaljinac and Vujošević 2021, 464).

“The use of metaphors is also exciting. Given the frequent use of these linguistic tools and the large number of texts, we will present only two interconnected and form a powerful parallelism. The first is the metaphor of fire, and the second is water. The former is used to describe Serbs and the latter Albanians. The metaphor of fire is used in the following expressions: ‘Serbs are *fanning* the flames’¹⁹ of ethnic and religious division’²⁰ (Clines 1999b), ‘pouring *oil on the fire*’²¹ (Broder 1999), and Serbia is a ‘*powder keg that has exploded twice before in this century*’²² (*The New York Times* 1999h).²³ On the other hand, there are metaphors such as how refugees have ‘*poured*

¹⁹ Italics by Aleksandra Savić.

²⁰ “Serbia who has done nothing since the cold war ended but start new wars and pour gasoline on the flames of ethnic and religious division”. Given the exceptional precision of the metaphor and the potential misunderstandings that may arise during translation, the original phrase will also be given in this case.

²¹ “Pour gasoline on the flames of ethnic and religious division”.

²² “To defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results”.

²³ All these metaphors were used in his speech by Bill Clinton.

across the borders'²⁴ (Shenon 1999), there is a '*flood* of new refugees'²⁵ (Clines 1999a), a '*non-stop refugee flow*'²⁶ (Clines 1999c), and a '*wave* of refugees'²⁷ (*The New York Times* 1999h).²⁸

Lakoff and Johnson (2015) define metaphors as concepts through which we think and act, understanding one aspect of reality through another that is more familiar, simpler, or clearer (10). In this case, the metaphors of fire, which highlight experiences of war, conflict, and disputes, and metaphors of water, which emphasize danger or catastrophe, have the task of presenting readers with a simplified picture of the world in which, on the one hand, there is a people with strong emotional charge, who have no control over their actions and who can explode at any moment, and on the other, a large number of lost and distressed people who lose their identity and become a catastrophe for neighboring countries. Although these two metaphors are opposed, they share some standard features - fire and water destroy each other, are difficult to control, and produce great crises. Their task in these texts is to present large amounts of information through simple, opposing concepts to which people will react quickly and to show the consequences if the fire or water is not stopped. And the question of stopping brings us back to the justification of the bombing from the beginning of this analysis.

The preceding paragraphs have described the linguistic structuring of three macro-strategies: setting the agenda, identifying the enemy, and justifying the attack. In almost every text, it is clearly emphasized that Serbs are evil-doers and bullies, that their behavior is bestial and uncontrolled, and that the state protects and encourages them in their atrocities. Albanians, on the other hand, are the target of attacks and martyrs. Due to the conflict, they have to leave their homes, thus threatening neighboring countries as well. When Serbs talk about bombs, it is like fireworks for them, and when statements by Albanians are conveyed, it is described how everything is burning

²⁴ "*Poured across the borders*".

²⁵ "*A flood of new refugees*".

²⁶ "*Nonstop refugee flow*".

²⁷ "*Wave of refugees*".

²⁸ They can be labeled with the following concepts: *Serbs are fire*, and *refugees are water*.

and disappearing. This relationship, built on the manipulation of empathy and the creation of a black-and-white picture, is intended to justify attacks on Serbia and serve to position the United States not only as a global hegemon involved in resolving yet another crisis but also as a protector of the weak and the disadvantaged, a guardian of the world order, a defender of human rights, and an advocate of just war (Stojadinović 2015, 39). Later surveys show the fact that such reporting was very successful – unlike the initial hesitation of public opinion, as early as April, the opinion about the bombing changed drastically, and the New York Times now records that one survey showed great support for the bombing by the American people – as much as 58% (Kohut 1999).²⁹

²⁹ “Beware of Polls on the War”. Given the content of the article, polls and manipulation of them could be the subject of a separate paper.

CONCLUSION

Critical discourse analysis aims not only to uncover the linguistic tools frequently used in reporting but also to provide answers as to the political goal of the message senders with such a choice. This analysis has shown that language plays a vital, if not key, role in producing a simplified but contrasting picture of the world that is then easily used for propaganda purposes. By using three propaganda strategies – agenda-setting, enemy-marking, and justification of attacks – an illusion was created of the United States as a benefactor and advocate for protecting human rights. The importance of the topic of NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for the study of political and media discourse in general is also indicated by the fact that this event was declared the first Internet war,³⁰ as online news had a great impact on the approval of the intervention (Vujošević 2020, 190).

The analysis reveals that the American New York Times employed a softened lexicon, descriptive constructions, and numerous euphemisms to obscure the true nature of the military operation and prevent the audience from feeling empathy or compassion. Such language use allowed for gaining voter approval or greater support for the state's foreign policy, as well as securing international legitimacy for military intervention. The most striking example of this use is the portrayal of the bombing as a fireworks display, which not only seeks to conceal the violence and suffering of innocent people but also inverts it into a celebration. Furthermore, in addition to the stereotypical portrayal of the military attacks themselves, the relationship between the two opposing sides is presented in a clichéd and simplified manner. A negative attitude towards an entire nation, its past, and its characteristics is intended to justify all the inhumanities of the target of NATO bombs, and ultimately to lead to direct advocacy of the attack. The demonization of Serbs is further

³⁰ The article states that every global event had its own media. In World War II, it was the film, television footage proved to be the most significant in Vietnam, while in the Gulf War it was the live broadcast. The latter also marks a “turning point in the way war events are presented in the media” (Petrović 2021, 283). Media researchers agree that a turning point in reporting occurred precisely after the Gulf War (Živković 2003, 15).

enhanced by the use of metaphors that simplify complex historical, political, and ethnic relations and reduce them to a question of external control.

The analyzed discourse has several important characteristics. Not only is it one of the first of its kind in modern warfare, as, in addition to military methods, it also uses media, political, and linguistic ones, but it can also be said that it builds the so-called global discourse (Höijer, Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2002). Namely, during the analysis of previous works on this or similar topics, it was established that almost identical discourse appears in German, British and other American media, which is enough to say that it is a transnational media narrative whose characteristics are: mitigating the impact and consequences of bombing, building a negative image of a nation, simplifying complex historical and political relations and demonizing the enemy, all in order to maintain the existing power relations and legitimize the new world order.

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