

## ПРИКАЗИ Reviews and Critiques

Pål KolstØ (ed)  
*Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflicts*,  
Burlington: Ashgate, 2009, 270 pp.

The media accompanied the Yugoslav crisis from its very beginning. Often, the media and public worked together in order to create stories that blamed the 'Other' for the Yugoslav crisis. This proved to be the case primarily when the conflict turned into wars of succession and when the media gained a remarkable role to influence decision-making processes. As warned by Pål KolstØ, editor of the book, 'politicians may become prisoners of the images and perceptions they have conjured up' (p. 2). However, academics continue to examine major concerns in regard to media involvement in the Yugoslav wars and, accordingly, this book presents a collection of papers which analyze mass-media activism, the capacity to influence public opinion and/or political elites and encourage war.

Tarik Jusić seeks to address the relationship between media discourse and politics of ethnic conflict. His analysis suggests that this relationship is better understood if examined through two aspects: variables that influence the media's discourse in conflict (environmental aspects, the nature of the media, the nature of the audience) and effects the media have on the development of conflict (shaping the discursive framework, influencing political actors, challenging the public debate). By offering insightful points about these variables and their relevance during the Yugoslav wars, Jusić concludes: 'The link and interactions between the media discourse and conflict are complex and bidirectional' (p. 37).

Chapter Two focuses on televisual construction of collective identities. Sabina Mihelj, Vroanika Bajt and Miloš Pankov talk about identity construction as a process that marginalizes and excludes the 'Other' (p. 41). The authors examine television news in Slovenia and Serbia through four case studies. Starting from 'The Trial of the Four' in 1988, through 'The Run-up to the Conflict' and 'The Ten-Day War' in 1991, to 'International Recognition' in 1992, TV Ljubljana and TV Belgrade adopted different reporting perspectives which certainly influenced the public as how to perceive the opposite side. While the Slovenian media talked about international recognition, the Serbian media focused on blaming the Slovenes and the West for destroying the Yugoslav federation, thus trying to justify military aggression of the Yugoslav army aimed at preserving the country from disintegration.

The role of Croatian and Serbian press discourses presents an inevitable puzzle when talking about Yugoslav drama. Ivana Djurić and Vladimir Zorić, while comparing Croatian *Večernji list* and *Novi list* and Serbian *Večernje novosti* and *Borba*, show how

each of them presented major events, such as elections in Croatia, Serbian and Croatian referendums, Vukovar battle, Maslenica and Storm operations. Again here, talking about the 'Other' appears as a relevant point for the media discourses. However, the authors approach the problem from the other way around: 'the implicit division between the „good us“ and „bad them“ was rhetorically concealed and supported by two strategic categories that [they] labeled „bad us“ and „good them“' (p. 82).

The fourth paper deals with 'Self' and 'Other' in Kosovo. Nita Luci and Predrag Marković give an overview of the press accounts in Kosovo during the Yugoslav federation and after its collapse. They agree that at the end of the 1980s, 'shifts in the boundaries of „ethnic“ cultural, social and political signification became increasingly visible' (p. 89). This ever bigger division between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians represented a matter of discontent that the Yugoslav leadership often ignored to address. Following this pattern, the media were divided along solely national and ethnic lines: 'within such processes varying and contested chronologies of „the Kosovo conflict“ emerged as they were constructed in the Albanian language and Serbian language media in Kosovo and Serbia' (p. 103).

Jovo Bakić and Gazela Pudar write about the Yugoslav succession wars. Before analyzing both Yugoslav and Western media and their responses to the Yugoslav wars, the authors point out the importance of *Orientalist*, *Balkanist* and *Occidentalist* approaches in the debate. Thus, it is of crucial importance to understand whether the media reporting had been shaped by one of these three approaches or not. However, demonization of the other side was a persistent feature during the wars: while the Western media talked about the aggression by Milošević's Serbia, Serbian media talked about the Serbs as 'a victim of the powerful and ungrateful USA and EU' (p. 126).

Chapter Six examines media discourse characterizing the relations between Montenegro and Serbia before their separation. Djordje Pavićević and Srdjan Djurović note that this separation did not involve violence and, accordingly, the media activism was rather calm: 'The media in Serbia and Montenegro did not treat the other side as a hostile one, but at worst, as a bad partner who wished to dominate or consciously bring about disharmony' (p. 151). The authors stress the linkage between the politics and media. For them, the political climate and existing circumstances, thus immediate call for separation, did not allow the media to step in and independently encourage hatred – a scenario that might have provoked conflict.

Michal Sladeček and Amer Džihana are interested in media coverage during the Bosnian conflict. The authors analyze three important events: referendum on independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992, signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 and negotiations on the new constitutional organization of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2006. Reporting about 'us' and 'others' proved more evident in 1992 and 1995, while in 2006 ethnic intolerance was less obvious regardless of the political discourse which continued to benefit from 'us' and 'them'. In the authors' view, 'the other side was no longer described as criminal, but was considered responsible for the committed crimes and the political crisis, as well as for obstructing change and wanting to dominate' (p. 172).

Media discourse in Macedonia is what Zhidas Daskalovski addresses. The Albanian insurgent unit named National Liberation Army (NLA) threatened Macedonian stability in 2001. Daskalovski examines the relationship between the media and conflict

presented in Macedonian *Vest*, *Dnevnik* and *Utrinski Vestnik* and Albanian *Flaka* and *Fakti*. While arguing that ‘the media in the two languages reported differently on specific high-tension events during the conflict (p. 186), the post-conflict period marked a different trend: rhetoric about ‘self’ and ‘other’ diminished remarkably. The neutralization of the ethical component in the media meant that both the Macedonian and Albanian media passed their test in regard to the ‘Other’.

Chapter Nine analyzes the operation ‘Storm’ in the Croatian and Serbian press. Here, Gordana Djerić notes that the two publics had absolutely different understandings about the operation due to the media reporting (p. 198). The silence that accompanied the operation contributed to the overall perception about the event, which in the end, is celebrated as Victory Day in Croatia, whereas in Serbia the operation will remain associated with the killing of civilians. Understandably, discourses about ‘us’ and ‘them’ here prove inevitable. However, incomplete understanding of the event and recognition of its consequences have largely contributed to the ever present antagonism between the two parties.

The final paper, written by Nedin Mutić, focuses on ‘self’ and ‘other’ in Balkan war cinema. He notes that cinema provided space for distinctions between ‘self-other, Bosnian-Serb, peace-war, Balkan-West, active-passive and comedy-tragedy’ (p. 219). Nevertheless, different directors adopted different standpoints about ‘us’ and ‘them’. Mutić’s detailed analysis includes *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flames*, *No Man’s Land*, *The Red Colored Grey Track*, *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*, etc. All these films inspire continuous debate: ‘By watching films such as these one witnesses and experiences alternative reality where self and other, and the war between them, require continued reinterpretation’ (p. 233).

To conclude, the book’s contribution lies in the variety of issues it examines. From the media discourses in Yugoslavia’s constituent republics at the time to the current perspectives, the authors offer deep understandings about media activism during the Yugoslav succession wars. While placing the media, public and political leaderships within the Yugoslav context, the authors question what role the media played in encouraging or preventing the deepening of the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The collapse of Yugoslavia was rather violent and the prevailing opinion of the book is that the media should not remain exempted from criticism.

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