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BREAKING THE FRAMES OF WAR: SERBIAN WEEKLY VREME AND THE REPORTING ON THE KOSOVO CRISIS (1997-2000)¹

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the Yugoslav/Serbian newsweekly *Vreme*'s reporting under Slobodan Milošević's regime, more precisely its coverage of the Kosovo crisis and its aftermath in the late 1990s. Founded just before the collapse of the former Yugoslavia as one of the first private media outlets, *Vreme* set the standards of responsible and critical journalism about wars and politics during Milošević's rule, but it is debatable if and to what extent it was capable of escaping and transgressing the limitations it imposed on the Serbian media. This question of media reporting during Milošević's rule is thus examined in a broader context of the conflicts and political constellation in Serbia in the 1990s. In addition, the article also examines the debates over the legacy of the 1990s wars and crimes that appeared in *Vreme* in 2002, thereby providing an inside into the post-conflict dilemmas, challenges and ideological divisions in the Serbian society in general.

KEYWORDS

Vreme, 1990s, Serbia, Kosovo, War, NATO bombing, Journalism, Reporting

Discussing the American media's coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in their influential book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (2009), Judith Butler uses the phrase "embedded reporting" to describe a limitation on what can be presented as

an arrangement whereby journalists agreed to report only from the perspective established by military and governmental authorities... Embedded reporting

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implies that reporters working under such conditions agree not to make the mandating of perspective *itself* into a topic to be reported and discussed; hence these reporters were offered access to the war only on the condition that their gaze remain restricted to the established parameters [...] (Butler 2009: 64).

According to Butler, the result is that such production of new images and narratives remains within a pre-existing political framework, without challenging or undermining it. She takes this issue further in a context of more fundamental questions of lives worth grieving and remembering: “one way of posing the question of who ‘we’ are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable... An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all.” (Butler 2009: 38).

The Parting Ways: Who are “We” and are Albanians People Like Us?

These Butlerian timely meditations, in our view, offer a proper context for a discussion of Yugoslav/Serbian newsweekly *Vreme*’s reporting under Slobodan Milošević’s regime, more precisely on its coverage of the Kosovo crisis and its aftermath in the late 1990s. Founded just before the collapse of the former Yugoslavia as one of the first private media outlets, *Vreme* set the standards of responsible and critical journalism on wars and politics during Milošević’s rule (See: Beširević 2022), but it is debatable if and to what extent it was capable of escaping and transgressing the limitations this political climate imposed on the Serbian media. This question regarding *Vreme*’s reporting during the 1990s particularly fueled up the Serbian public sphere in the course of the bitter debate held on *Vreme*’s pages in 2002 between the editorial staff on the one side, and the weekly’s co-founder and guru Srđa Popović and other ultra-liberals on the other.² The debate opened with an editorial on August 1, 2002, and continued in the columns *Post and Reactions* for the full 15 weeks. Overall, it comprised some 78 texts; members of the editorial board published 8, Srđa Popović wrote 9, while other contributions mostly consisted of readers’ letters, written by some 50 authors, all of which Olivera Milosavljević meticulously

2 Belgrade lawyer and human rights activist Srđa Popović (1937-2013) is typically credited for his founding, inspiring and logistical role in the establishment of *Vreme*. One entry in the weekly describes Popović as a charismatic figure, “the gray eminence of Serbian opposition. Granted with unprecedented charm and intelligence, intellectually superior, eloquent and persuasive, moderate in writing, with clear and consistent attitudes, capable of distinguishing important from irrelevant (which, as much as being rare, is also an important characteristic), Popović functioned as a *role model* for many people.” (Bazdulj 2014) Milan Milošević adds that “*Vreme* was founded as a privately-owned outlet, with editorial staff having a significant participation in ownership and a crucial role in electing the editor-in-chief, and they enjoyed institutionalized editorial independence from their owners.” For a brief survey, see Milošević (2009), Žarković (2014) and Švarn (2015).

gathered in her book-length study *Tačka razlaza* (*Parting Ways*, see: Milosavljević 2003: 5 et passim). This debate, as we argue, has wider relevance as it exemplifies some of the key points of departure and dispute within what is often called the “Other Serbia” or “Second Serbia”, that is, a significant, progressive part of Serbian society critical of Serbian nationalism, with anti-war, pro-European and pro-democratic sentiments (see: Russell-Omaljev 2016). Namely, as Milosavljević argued, the dispute – triggered by an accusation by Sonja Biserko – human rights activist, a vigorous critic of Serbian nationalism and the proponent of wide societal facing with war crimes – that Serbian independent media (like *Vreme* and B92) relativize and “de-ethnicize” Serbian war crimes, exposed a deep rift among former allies from the anti-Milošević “Other Serbia.” Milosavljević documents two irreconcilable positions: one side argues for focusing on individual criminal guilt and warns against “collective guilt”, while the other insists on society’s moral and political responsibility for crimes committed in its name, rejecting the notion that crimes can be separated from their ethnic motivation.

The first major issue that can be derived from this debate was the dispute about the extent to which *Vreme*’s reporting remained confined within or whether it transcended the overall limits of journalism – or, in Butlerian terms, if their reporting was embedded within the pre-existing framework – set by Milošević’s regime. In other words, did *Vreme* achieve and maintain its initially boldly proclaimed “top standards in the journalistic profession ... in order to join the worldwide family of weekly magazines such as *Time*, *Spiegel*, *Newsweek*, *Economist* and others” (Milošević 2009), or whether “*Vreme* sunk deeper and deeper alongside Serbian society”, to such an extent that its reporting during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 resembled “prostitution,” as it was poignantly described by its very (co)founder Srđa Popović (Milosavljević 2003: 196-7)?

The second key issue of this debate was whether *Vreme* treated Albanian victims as (at all or equally) grievable, perhaps even as grievable as the Serbian ones (thereby breaking the prevailing nationalist and xenophobic framework). According to some, *Vreme* wrote about the Yugoslav dissolution wars “without discriminating against the victims on the basis of their ethnicity,” as its long-term reporter Filip Švarm wrote in an issue marking *Vreme*’s 25-year jubilee (Švarm 2015: 9). Srđa Popović, in distinction, claims that *Vreme* “started to lose perspective in 1998” when Serbia reached the peak of the anti-Albanian frenzy. “Everything that happened here was a consequence of the widespread anti-Albanian racism; people here, I say in general, cannot accept the fact that the Albanians are people just like us” (Milosavljević 2003: 196).

To be sure, the 2002 polemic over *Vreme* was far more than a mere internal or editorial dispute. It showed cracks between the once united, democratic, pro-European and anti-Milošević block, caused by fundamental differences in attitudes about the transformation of Serbian society and the relationship it should establish to its violent past. Many bitter words about the collective responsibility of the entire Serbian population for the atrocities committed by

the Milošević regime were exchanged at the time. Thus, as aforementioned, it enables us to pinpoint this prominent distinction within what is often called the “Other Serbia” or “Second Serbia”, that is, a significant, progressive part of Serbian society that was critical of Milošević, Serbian nationalism and pro-European. To go back to Butler, in order to determine whether Albanian lives were considered valuable and grievable by *Vreme* in the late 1990s would be a way of confirming that there was more to Serbia during the war than the monolithic pro-regime “us”; that not all of “us” were to blame for what was happening; and that at least some of “us” did not sink, remaining unembedded and questioning the frame until it finally broke and brought about Milošević’s downfall.

In order to examine the professionalism and critical edge of *Vreme*’s reporting, in the first part of the article we briefly sketch its origins and its editorial policies amidst the perils and challenges of publishing under the Milošević regime, especially its distinctive treatment of the “Albanian question” in comparison to other media, regime and non-regime alike. In the second part we focus on the general representation of Albanians in *Vreme* in 1997, including the depictions of Kosovo Albanians, the collapse of Albania in 1997 and conflicts between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians in (today’s) North Macedonia. Arguably, 1997 was the year when it seemed that the Kosovo issue still could have been resolved without an armed conflict – the Serbian state was recovering after the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, international sanctions were for the most part lifted, while Milošević even briefly enjoyed a certain status of stability factor in the region. This is then followed by the discussion of *Vreme*’s reporting on the period between March 1998 and January 1999, more precisely its coverage of the massacres in Kosovo villages of Likošani, Srbica, Klečka and Račak, the last of which ultimately triggered the NATO bombing campaign. In particular, we discuss *Vreme*’s approach to these events in the light of contemporaneous state attacks on the media in the form of draconic media laws, imposed fines and trials. The article then discusses *Vreme*’s reporting during the NATO bombing and the full-fledged war in Kosovo, followed by the state of emergency and censorship in Serbia that once again put significant constraints on the media. In the last section, we provide some concluding remarks about *Vreme*’s reporting in the days of Milošević’s downfall, ending with the later polemics about its overall quality and political standpoint. Rather than following academic conventions of offering a strong thesis and claims, we stick to journalistic principles, offering balanced discussion and facts, letting the readers draw their own conclusions.

Defying “Albaniasm”: *Vreme* and the Crisis in Albania (March-August 1997)

While stirring ethnic hatred and spreading hostility has been a commonplace for most Serbian and regional media during the 1990s conflicts (see, for instance, Kurspahić 2003: 9-20 et passim), it has been persuasively argued that

the Albanians were particularly treated as “others” and “enemies” in the Serbian media: “If one has to define the ultimate Other in Serbian media and culture, the choice would be easy. Kosovo Albanians were the most remote others.” (Luci and Marković 2009: 84). Luci and Marković conveniently distinguish two perspectives on the Kosovo crisis advanced in the Serbian media in the late 1990s. Those media that aligned with Milošević’s regime

tried to show that KLA was a terrorist organization that terrorized and plundered Albanians themselves [...] The Serbian pro-regime newspaper *Politika* [...] claimed that the police reacted within “legal limits”. *Nedeljni telegraf*, a weekly with close links to the police, expressed regrets that the politicians “prevented” police from finishing their work [...] The opposition press held a different perspective. *Naša Borba* quoted an Albanian political activist from Srbica/Skenderaj who denied the existence of the KLA [...] Nobody dared to admit that it was a matter of a mass uprising of the entire Drenica population [...]

While the oppositional Belgrade daily *Danas* mentioned civilian casualties, *Vreme* provided a strikingly different story. According to this news magazine, Serbian police massacred the Ahmeti family after capturing all male members of the family in their house and plundering their property.” (Luci and Marković 2009: 98-99)

In Butlerian terminology, this in effect meant that the Albanian lives were the ones not worth grieving and remembering, lives that were not considered valuable and shall not to be mourned.

In order to show whether *Vreme*, as an anti-regime magazine, had a different attitude to the “Albanian question” from the one expressed by virtually all state-sponsored media, it is instructive to see how *Vreme* reported about the Albanians in general before focusing on the Kosovo crisis of 1998 and 1999. The most convenient in this respect is *Vreme*’s reporting about the 1997 crisis in Albania. The breakdown of pyramidal banking schemes, in which many Albanians lost their money, triggered the collapse of the Albanian state. This was followed by riots of angry people, the overthrow of Sali Berisha’s regime, pillage of army warehouses and mutual clashes in which some 2000 people in total lost their lives. However, after an international intervention in mid-April, some 7000 foreign troops worked to restore order and elections in June put a new government in power. The crisis officially ended on August 11, when foreign troops withdrew from Albania.

Arguably, these events provided a perfect pretext for fueling traditional stereotypes and prejudices about Albanians and their inability to have an organized political life, let alone for Kosovo independence or the unification of all Albanians. As was discussed elsewhere at length, Albanians have been looked down upon by Serbs to such an extent that we can even speak of “Albanism” as a sub-species of Balkanism to describe a discourse that emerged in Serbia on the eve of the Balkan wars and has remained productive ever since (see Pavlović 2019a: 3-21). We are employing here Maria Todorova’s concept

of *Balkanism* as invaluable in understanding a broader picture of stereotypes about the Balkans and its people held both in the West and among the Balkan peoples themselves. Balkanism is a term somewhat similar to Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1978). Todorova defined it as a discourse that creates a stereotype of and politics towards the Balkans that is significantly and organically intertwined with this discourse. The term "the Balkans" is often stereotypically used as "a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (Todorova 1997: 3). This negative and pejorative perception of the Balkans is characteristic of the West, says Todorova, but it also became internalized and adopted to a certain extent by the Balkan people themselves. Milica Bakić-Hayden uses a cognate term "nesting Orientalism" to describe the tendency of every region to view cultures and religions located East to themselves as more conservative and primitive (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 917-931).³ Albanism, then, would be a form or sub-section of Balkanism that generates Serbian negative perceptions of Albanians, by (ab)using medieval Serbian history and religious sites to assert exclusive territorial rights over Kosovo, advances humanitarian allegations of orchestrated ethnic cleansing against Serbs (first raised before the Balkan Wars and particularly exploited since the 1980s) and frames Albanians as recent settlers who arrived only after the Great Migrations of Serbs from the 18th century onwards. As argued elsewhere at length (Pavlović 2019b), this pejorative perception at the turn of the 20th century replaced a previously positive view of Albanians as our like-minded, brave neighbouring highlanders and allies against the Ottomans. Instead, it framed them as Muslims, Turkish collaborators and tormentors of remaining Kosovo Serbs. Emerging alongside the geopolitical concept of "Old Serbia" and Kosovo as a "holy" Serbian land, these negative, dehumanizing stereotypes hardened into a coherent, xenophobic discourse that were – and still are – used to legitimize Serbian political and territorial claims.

Vreme transcended or defied these deeply rooted prejudiced views of the Albanians in several ways during its comprehensive coverage of the Albanian crisis,⁴ which we will illustrate by focusing in particular on the magazine issue

3 Among the Yugoslav successor states this attitude manifests itself as a tendency to view countries and nations to the southeast as "Balkan" in the sense of primitive and backward. Thus, for Slovenes, the Balkans is located in Croatia, the Croats locate it in Serbia, the Serbs in Kosovo and Macedonia, while for Macedonians, the Balkans is wherever the Albanians live. Moreover, as Atdhe Hetemi argued, there is a tendency among Albanians themselves to perceive Kosovo Albanians or Albanians in the mountainous North or South as more "Balkan" than themselves (Hetemi 2015: 131-151).

4 *Vreme* reported at length about the situation in Albania, the most notable articles on this issue being: Stojan Cerović's regular columns "Duh vremena" (*Vreme* 334: 8-9; *Vreme* 335: 12-13), "Albanija, Jugoslavija i Kosovo" ("Albania, Yugoslavia and Kosovo") as the main thematic issue (*Vreme*: 335: 15-23); "Tragedy and politics" (*Vreme* 337: 36-38) and the follow up, "Albania: The temptations of Alba," about the deployment of foreign troops as a peacekeeping and stabilization mission in Albania ("Albanija: Alba na iskušenju," *Vreme* 339: 32-34); "Albania: Chaos and despair" ("Albanija: Haos i beznade," *Vreme* 342: 42-43); "Discarded Berisha," about the upcoming Albanian elections

entitled “Albania, Yugoslavia and Kosovo” (“Albanija, Jugoslavija i Kosovo,” *Vreme* 335: 15-23), and focused around the “Albanian question.” *Vreme*’s central column “Duh vremena” (“Spirit of the time”), written by Stojan Cerović, opened with a sarcastic statement that “the old communist ideal of withering away of the state was finally realized... current chaos presents a genuine and natural, albeit slightly delayed, epilogue of the Enver Hodxa’s [communist dictator of Albania from 1945 to his death in 1985] epoch.” (Cerović 1997: 12). Considering that Albania was “locked from the inside for decades, in a pathological fear of foreign enemies” and that it had “zero level of human rights,” Cerović drew his conclusion that “it would have been a miracle if Albania peacefully transitioned into modernization, i.e., it is normal that the nation of long-term convicts did not miss its chance to descend into an orgy of absolute freedom. Almost overnight the country returned to a natural state, which shows how short the path is from a total state to no state” (Cerović 1997: 12).

Cerović then instructed that the surrounding countries should not make any hasty moves, as that could turn the existing regional instability into a larger Balkan conflict, and advocated for the solution that would involve the international community rather than the neighboring states with vested interests. Moving to the Serbian context, Cerović believed that Serbia could experience a similar scenario, perhaps to a lesser extent:

If Albania is not quite literally our future, it is to some extent our past and present. What happened there abruptly and completely, started here years ago and is still going on. Partial disintegration is almost continuous, to which Milošević’s regime seems to be permanently committed. He did not try to create new elastic institutions necessary for overcoming the model of the totalitarian state, and instead maintains in the same condition the most important elements for him – the media and police – while leaving everything else to chaotic disintegration (Cerović 1997: 12).

The point is, therefore, that dictators are responsible for depriving people of their freedoms, and that the outcome of such liberation can be destructive, in correlation with oppression. Among the bad intentions following from prejudices and animosity towards the Albanians, the fear that the regime and its supporters might sense about the situation in the neighborhood, and hope that this might indicate the imminent fall of the Milošević regime, Cerović pursued the third option, demonstrating his own affections and those of his magazine. Cerović thus avoided falling into the trap of *internal Balkanism* or *nesting Orientalism*, and instead blamed the totalitarian communist rule and an implicit

(“Otpisani Beriša,” *Vreme* 347: 36-37); “Albania: elections under helmet,” reports about Fatos Nano’s victory over Sali Berisha (“Albanija: izbori pod šlemom,” *Vreme* 350: 36); “The end or a new chaos,” is another article about the Albanian elections (“Kraj ili novi kaos” *Vreme* 351: 34-35); “Establishing order” (“Zavodenje reda,” *Vreme* 358: 32-34); remarks about Albania were also made in some other issues and articles as well. Since *Vreme* had no reporter on the ground, it is worth noting that reports from Albania written by Branko Jokić were taken from the Slovenian daily *Delo*.

Hobbesian view of the natural condition for the collapse of the state. In other words, there is nothing intrinsically Albanian nor Balkan about the ongoing *bellum omnium contra omnes* in Albania. On the contrary, this state of affairs seems to be a natural, if not an inevitable, consequence of the authoritarian rule.

Other articles on this subject included the views of a prominent Kosovo Albanian intellectual Shkëlzen Maliqi and *Vreme*'s reporter from Kosovo Dejan Anastasijević. In general, the implicit central concern of all was whether the Albanian crisis had the potential to spread to Yugoslavia, and whether the events in Albania were relevant for the Kosovo question? Anastasijević interviewed several opposition figures, as well as Goran Perčević from Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), who appeared to make efforts in being professional and balanced in their approach and trying to accommodate various voices from both the opposition and the ruling coalition, including the Albanian one. Practically all correspondents emphasized the totalitarian state and the lack of democratic and institutional foundations as the reasons for the crisis.⁵

The same effort to provide a balanced view of different arguments from both sides marked *Vreme*'s reports on the deteriorating relations between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority in Macedonia at the time. An illustrative coverage of this situation is provided in Nebojša Jakonov's article with a worrying title "The War in Gostivar" ("Gostivarski rat," Jakonov 1997a: 36-37), which reported about the recent clashes between the police and the local Albanian majority in this Macedonian town. Three men were killed and 200 wounded after local Albanians clashed with the police who removed the double-eagled flag (the official flag of the Republic of Albania) from the flagpole in front of the Gostivar's municipality building.

So, how did Jakonov explain this radicalization in Macedonia? The first explanation provided for the conflict was the radicalization among the local Albanians themselves, indicated by the rising popularity among them of the two radical parties of Macedonian Albanians, united into a single political bloc and suspended their participation in the government. This unification followed the ongoing process of gradual radicalization of Albanian parties in Macedonia, and the ultimate goal was the secession of Western Macedonian territories inhabited by the Albanian majority from the Macedonian state. The very erection of the symbols of the Albanian state by local Albanian governments in the towns of Gostivar, Tetovo and Debar was illustrative of the distance this political entity is creating towards the Macedonian state. This was, as the reporter said, the explanation offered by some local analysts.

Jakonov himself, however, claimed that this was a one-sided and biased explanation that only focused on the radicalization of Albanian parties as a result of their exposition to radical Albanian ideology from Kosovo. The reporter also mentioned the radicalization coming from the Macedonian authorities as a reason for deteriorating mutual relations and creating conflict:

5 See: *Vreme* 335 (1997: 15-23).

Still, it was the government that made this apparently long and carefully planned action of removing the problematic flags (which followed less than ten hours after the court declared new legislation about the use of national flags) thus launching an offensive whose ultimate aim is, no doubt, the attempt to gain the ‘upper hand’ from Albanian radicals in defining the ambient for future talks about the harmonization of intra-national relations in the country” (Jakonov 1997a: 37).

This, according to Jakonov, meant provoking the “spiral of violence” and endangering the fragile balance that existed among the Macedonian parties, also prone to radicalization, who bore a greater burden of responsibility for the development of the democratic process in the country, because they represented the majority. Responsibility also went to the Supreme Court judge who ruled this measure, even though on some prior similar occasions the Supreme Court was blissfully silent (“mudro ćutao”). All this may indicate, said the reporter, further entrenchment into national blocks, visible from the unification of two Albanian parties and welcoming comments from the opposition, otherwise extremely critical of the regime, which is “full of praise for the government that [...] proved it can defend the legal order and territorial integrity” (Jakonov 1997a: 37).

The reporter himself, however, was critical of such claims that he described as being possibly the greatest defeat of democracy in Macedonia. In his concluding lines, Jakonov affirmed the fact that the power “from ‘below’, comprised of common Macedonian citizens in their everyday battle to build a decent place for life for themselves and their children”, remained the strongest force on the ground and somehow still managed to surpass the power of the state (Jakonov 1997a: 37). Jakonov saw democratization and decent citizens as the ways to handle this crisis, rather than radicalization and nationalism. This attitude was indicative of *Vreme*’s reporting in general, and the weekly should be credited for it. There was no satanization of the Albanians, common citizens were presented with sympathies, mutual respect and democratization were praised, while irresponsible politicians from all sides were criticized for the promotion of nationalism and playing with fire (see also Jakonov’s article about Macedonia in *Kosovo* ’97 1997: 6-7).

A telling example of how these views of Albanians profoundly differed from the general views at the time is offered in an extensive report on the research about Serbian-Albanian perceptions in Kosovo in an article called “Nothing new, all the worst” (“Ništa novo, sve najgore,” Ćirić 1997: 20-23). Journalist Aleksandar Ćirić emphasized that this is the first research on common perceptions in eight years, and warned about its results revealing deeply entrenched prejudices among Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Among some 200 questions posed to 816 Albanians and 405 Serbs from Kosovo, Kosovo Serbs saw *themselves* as being hospitable (53), brave (51), peaceful (34), clean (31), intelligent (23) and cheerful (20), while they thought of Albanians as united (62), hateful towards other nations (55), insidious (46), backward (37), brute (20) and so on. Albanians from Kosovo, in contrast, perceived *themselves* as hospitable (77%), peaceful (41), brave (39), clean (29), intelligent (25), honest (25) and so

on, while the Serbs, according to their views, hate other nations (81), and are insidious (52), selfish (27), brute (26) etc. Other statistics were even more worrying in terms of ethnic distance: only 0,7% of informants came from mixed marriages, only 5 percent of Serbs spoke any Albanian, while 54 percent of Albanians spoke Serbian. Informants were also essentially against any form of common life: against intermarrying (95% of Albanians, 74% of Serbs), establishing friendship (82% of Albanians, 44% of Serbs), living in the same place (40% of Albanians, 64 % of Serbs) etc.⁶

Finally, this research also showed that by that time Albanians had completely lost all faith in Serbian and Yugoslav institutions. Out of 10 offered solutions for the Kosovo problem, which included large autonomy, Kosovo as a federal unit in Yugoslavia, confederation, unification with Albania and others, a staggering 98% of Albanians chose Kosovo's independence, in comparison to 2% of Serbs who believed this to be the solution (Ćirić 1997: 21). Almost none of the Albanians interviewed showed any trust in the Serbian president (99), the army (99), the police (98), the courts (96) etc. and they had no intention in participating in any elections organized by Serbia (Ćirić 1997: 21-22).

Simultaneously, *Vreme* continued to cover the situation in Kosovo in commentaries, editorials and columns, while articles (such as Anastasijević 1997: 22, Lutovac 1997: 18-22), covered the groundbreaking exhibition of 3 young Kosovo artists at the Serbian Contemporary Art Museum (Despotović 1997: 46). *Vreme* also dedicated one special issue (*Kosovo '97* 1997: 1-16) entirely to the situation in Kosovo. Here, *Vreme* reaffirmed its balanced approach and attempted to offer different perspectives without condemning either an ethnic group or political party. In the special issue, *Vreme* presented at length various viewpoints expressed at one of the rare meetings of prominent Serbian and Kosovo Albanian public figures held in late June 1997 in Ulcinj, Montenegro. The multiplicity of voices and opinions there included a former government official – former Foreign minister of SRY Ilija Đukić, one prominent Serbian scholar and NGO activist – Dušan Janjić, as well as prominent Albanians Azem Vlasi, Behlul Beqaj and Adem Demaçi. As the aforementioned typical Cerović's "Duh Vremena" showed, *Vreme* remained highly critical of the regime of Slobodan Milošević, but in this respect criticized the Serbian opposition as well, for their calculated lack of involvement with the Kosovo problematic.

Empathy for the Victims: *Vreme's* Reporting on the Crimes in Drenica, Srbica, Klečka and Račak (Autumn 1997 – Spring 1999)

After the resolution of the crisis in Albania and the establishment of, however inchoate and internationally mediated, diplomatic contact between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, *Vreme* gradually moved on to other explosive issues, such as the 1997 elections, which saw the dissolution of the coalition *Zajedno*, and the

6 On the general distance between Serbs and Albanians from the 1980s onwards, see: Milošević 2004: 97-103.

then Montenegrin prime minister Milo Đukanović's breakup with Milošević. However, Kosovo remained a highly relevant and often debated topic, particularly with the rise of the new militant force on the ground among the Kosovo Albanians, called the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA henceforth) in the autumn of 1997. And, while both the Serbian and the parallel Kosovo Albanian regimes denied its existence, in a series of articles *Vreme* reporter on the ground Dejan Anastasijević brought to the public exclusive information on this new militant player on the boiling Kosovo scene.⁷ Just as Anastasijević predicted, the spring of 1998 brought a full-blown war between the KLA and Serbian police, and the predictable result were civilian casualties and the radicalization of violence on both sides. In this section, we will relate in some detail *Vreme's* coverage of the clashes between Serbian police and KLA resulting in the killings of the Jashari and Ahmeti families, i.e., crimes against civilians in Drenica, Srbica, Klečka and, finally, Račak, the last being *the* event that turned NATO against SRY.

It is instructive first to make a brief reference to the other media's reporting on the subject, with the Jasharis' killing as an example. Adem Jashari (1955–1998), a prominent KLA member from the village Prekaz/Donje Prekaze, who led the guerrilla campaign against Serbian/Yugoslav rule and is nowadays celebrated as a national hero in Kosovo, was killed alongside 56 members of his extended family in a police action on March 6, 1998. In a newspaper article "Crime and Punishment of Donje Prekaze" ("Zločin i kazna Donjih Prekaza"), well-known mainstream journalist Miroslav Lazanski emphasized that Serbian police invited Jashari to surrender, and that his father was inclined to negotiate, but that he rejected that and forbade anyone from the family to leave the house, which Lazanski describes as a well-equipped fortress. Lazanski, therefore, puts the burden of responsibility for the killings on Jashari himself, labeling him a terrorist. "What power of hate, passionate nationalism, religious intolerance and terrorism forced the Jashari clan and village Donje Prekaze to take this road of no return?... Will Donje Prekaze be a warning to any terrorist adventure? It remains to be seen".⁸

Another influential weekly, *NIN*, provided a report about the Jashari case by its reporter Dragana Novković from Prishtina. Novković opened her article with a statement about how it was "hard to find out how the conflict between the police and terrorists is ongoing." She also related the Albanian media's claims about a large number of women and children being killed, and Serbian

7 Especially relevant in this respect are his articles: "Where the people's army treads," about the attempted assassination of Prishtina university rector Radivoje Papović ("Kud narodna vojska prođe," *Vreme* 366: 15-17), "The thin red line" ("Tanka crvena linija," *Vreme* 373: 13-14), "Awaiting the spring," about the likely radicalization of the KLA actions ("Čekajući proleće," *Vreme* 376: 13-14), "The Fear of Saigon," a moving testimony on local Serbian tycoons from Prishtina who molested a Serb refugee from Croatia and forced his wife and underage daughters to prostitution ("Strah od Sajgona," *Vreme* 377: 10-12) and others.

8 Lazanski, Miroslav, "Zločin i kazna Donjih Prekaza," *Večernje novosti*, March 9, 1998. See also: Luci and Marković (2009: 99).

sources rejecting these claims. “That, however, can be true”, she continued, “considering the terrorists’ tactic of locking themselves in their houses alongside their extensive families and resisting the police from there. This is exemplified by the latest events in Donje Prekaze, when the police, only after hours-long calls, managed to get out 30 men, women and children from Adem Jashari’s house to prevent the bloodshed”. Apparently, therefore, she did not hesitate to call the Albanian rebels terrorists, and even a week after the event, she basically claimed that the police acted justifiably and avoided the bloodshed. In other words, NIN here essentially followed a pattern of the vast majority of the Serbian media of presenting the KLA as a terrorist organization that terrorized and plundered Albanians themselves and claiming that the police reacted within “legal limits”, previously described by Luci and Marković (2009: 98-99). In line with the opening references to Butler, this effectively means that the Albanian lives are the ones not worthy of grieving and remembering, lives that are not considered valuable and are not to be mourned.

Anastasijević’s first-hand reporting stood in stark contrast with the previously mapped framework of ethnic animosity, mediated insight and lack of sensitivity to the other side’s lives. His “Bloody weekend in Drenica” (Anastasijević 1998a: 5-8) opened with a description of the funeral of killed Albanian civilians attended by some 50 000 Albanians. The funeral had to be postponed until the evening as the truck with 10 bodies had to take alternative routes to avoid police blockades erected in order to prevent people from gathering in Drenica: “Twenty-four people, mostly villagers from Likošani and nearby Ćirez, were buried that day. With four policemen and one Albanian buried the day before, the death toll of the bloody weekend in Drenica went up to twenty-nine people” (Anastasijević 1998a: 5).

Anastasijević then went on to expose many gaps in the official police version of events, and did not hesitate to call their action “a massacre” (“masakr”) and to accuse them of killing innocent civilians. After chasing the KLA from these villages, the police started a raid; someone, as it seems, opened fire at the police, which triggered the “onslaught” (“pokolj”). The descriptions of the results of police brutality were so telling that readers’ discretion is advised:

Those who managed to get to Likošani and Ćirez saw a terrible scene: in the bullet-riddled houses lay dead people surrounded by distressed surviving family members. Four brothers from the Djelji family – Bećir, Nazmi, Bedri and Bekim – were murdered in their house in Ćirez. Seventy-four-year-old Muhamet Dželja from Likošani, his brother Naser and a cousin Kadri were, judging by the photos, killed from a close range, as gunpowder signs are clearly visible around the wounds. Džemšir Nabihu and his pregnant wife Rukija were also, as it seems, killed from close range – Rukija’s head is literally shattered by bullets. They all perished inside or in front of their homes. (Anastasijević 1998a: 6-7)

The reporter then provided touching testimony from Mirsije Ahmeti, who lost her father and three brothers in the onslaught, claiming that the men were taken out of the house and shot on the spot. Another fortunate survivor of the

Ahmeti family informed about the loot that the policemen took: 5000 Deutsche marks in gold, some foreign currency, 10 kilograms of meat and 200 eggs, plus a satellite receiver and a radio from the family car. A 17-year-old boy who survived by lying still for 27 hours in the attic of a nearby house where the police spent the night, testified that they were “eating, drinking and singing all night.”

The next issue of *Vreme* brought another similar first-hand report from the same journalist called “Dance of the dead,” about the funeral of an aforementioned prominent KLA member Adem Jashari, who is today celebrated as the greatest hero and symbol of the Albanian resistance, and 49 (later reports established 60) members of his extended family in the village of Donje Prekaze (Anastasijević 1998b: 10-12). The reporter described the site in Donje Prekaze as “one of those scenes that make a man wishing to leave his job and resettle somewhere where no one knows him.” In front of a warehouse where the bodies were left by the police, he counted “49 dead bodies, out of which were 12 women, 13 children between the ages of 3 and 15 and 4 old men. Others were men between 16 and 60 years of age” (Anastasijević 1998b: 10).

As indicated above, what appears to have happened is that the police came to arrest Jashari, who had previously bragged in public that he would not be taken alive. After refusing to surrender, Jashari barricaded himself with his family on their estate and they all met their end inside. His decision was perhaps not so surprising in the light of previously described summary executions in Likošani after the police entered Albanian houses. But there was another, more traditional reason for such stubbornness. Namely, as the aforementioned survey among Serbs and Albanians showed, both ethnic groups held hospitality and bravery in high regard. Traditional Balkan stories about heroism often relate to heroes who refused to surrender to the Turks or other invaders and protected their doorstep to the last man. The most popular collection of such stories, Marko Miljanov’s “Examples of heroism and bravery” (Miljanov 1901), contains many such examples by both Serbs/Montenegrins and Albanians. Jashari thus fulfilled his oath, and Anastasijević reported how legends and folk songs about him as “a superman of sorts” and “the KLA commander-in-chief for Drenica” were already being told and sung, even though local sources indicated that he did not stand very high in the KLA hierarchy. As one of the informants told the reporter: “He was a common village rascal [mangup] who stubbornly wanted to play the role of a national hero. Now he had become one for the Albanians – thanks to the police”.

Anastasijević concluded that the effects of police brutality achieved precisely the opposite from what had been planned, as did the reports of the media loyal to the regime that described in detail how Jashari fought to the last moment: “these media did precisely what they nowadays accuse the independent media of: they helped in popularizing terrorism.”

At the end of his article the reporter finally zoomed out to a broader picture. The KLA reputation was unshaken, he said and quoted the response of a local who asked where the KLA was located: “Who do you think these people from the KLA are and where did they come from? Look around you: all this is the

KLA.” The implicit message is clear – in the face of such brutality, popular Albanian uprising was a likely outcome. The situation is unfortunately hopeless, concluded the reporter: “The only thing that might help the situation, which is inevitably slipping from a crisis into a catastrophe, to turn for the better is an honest and independent investigation about who killed the Drenica civilians” (Anastasijević 1998b: 12).

To make things clear, *Vreme* did not neglect Serbian victims nor did it hesitate in exposing the KLA crimes. One such report came soon after the police got hold of the KLA stronghold in the village of Klečka in early September of 1998: “Klečka looks like a fortress rather than a village... Within the three-meter high walls, a two-story building was built with everything that such an object contains, including dorms, dining hall and warehouses... There is a prison where Serbian civilians who fell into the KLA hands in the past several months were kept, and their remains were thrown into the lime pit... Skulls and parts of jaws, spine and hipbones were clearly recognizable. According to police claims, this is all that was left of twenty-two Serbs” (Anastasijević 1998c: 6-8). Nevertheless, Anastasijević continued to question the police claims in this case as well, criticizing both sides and warning about the rising violence: “Unscrupulous propaganda from both sides, which uses news about the crimes as inspiration for further atrocities, will soon produce new, horrible fruit” (Anastasijević 1998c: 8).

This unfortunate new “fruit” arrived in the form of the Račak massacre in January 1999. The international Kosovo Verification Mission headed by William Walker – an American diplomat best known for publicly declaring that the 1999 Račak massacre in Kosovo was a crime against humanity and was thereby portrayed as biased and anti-Serbian by the Serbian regime media – was at the time a new important player on the ground, set to inspect the behavior of both sides in Kosovo, but focusing mostly on the actions of the Serbian police. In its “Verification alert” issue (“Verifikovano usijanje,” Nikolić 1999: 6-8), which has the cover photo of Walker passing by a killed Albanian on the ground, *Vreme* reported with criticism about Walker’s premature statement that “he does not hesitate to call this event a massacre, very much against the humanity, and to accuse the government forcers for it.” Zoran B. Nikolić, who replaced Anastasijević in Kosovo, first provided the version of the story from the perspective of the Serbian police, which said that the police were looking for suspects for the killing of policemen, and that during that action, several dozens of terrorists were killed. He then went on to provide the testimonies of the Račak villagers that they gave to the foreign media. *Times* and *Guardian* related stories of how the police came to their houses, separated the men from the women and the children and took the men out. The men were then ordered to run up the mountain towards the KLA positions and were shot on the spot. Among the victims were, so claimed the Albanians, twenty-year old Haljim Bećiri, found next to the lifeless bodies of his father and brother, as well as Sadik Mujota (55) and his twenty-two-year-old daughter from the village of Malopoljce. Tanjug (the Serbian state informative agency) claimed that Sadik

Mujota, with his brothers, three sons and the daughter “led a terrorist group that participated in several terrorist attacks in Štimlje municipality.” The KLA admitted that eight of the dead were their members.

Nikolić’s reporting on the Račak massacre thus still purported to offer a multifaceted view of events but relied on foreign press reports in order to provide the Albanian side’s perspective and first-hand account, and thereby presented a sort of a shift from direct to indirect or mediated experience. Too many things have changed between the Drenica massacre in the spring of 1998 and that of Račak in 1999. Moving through Kosovo at all, let alone getting information from the other side, became mission impossible for a Serbian journalist. Moreover, by presenting the claims of the Serbian side, Nikolić seemed less critical than his predecessor Anastasijević. While the subheading itself can perhaps be justified: “Yugoslav authorities continue to claim that 40 Albanians were killed in combat, most of them in their uniforms, and that they were dressed in civilian clothes overnight. The Albanian side still claims that these people were unarmed civilians,” not much was said about the apparent implausibility of the official police explanation. Instead, William Walker’s actions were subjected to rather harsh criticism, and Nikolić concluded that any medical examination and investigation “will not be able to undo the effects of political turmoil caused above all by the interpretation of the events in Račak that ambassador William Walker gave to the media” (Nikolić 1999: 8).

Salient differences between Anastasijević’s and Nikolić’s reporting should come as no surprise. *Vreme*’s editors readily acknowledged from the onset that the weekly did not comprise a politically and ideologically homogenous group, and this was also evident in their writing on Kosovo. This applied, for instance, in somewhat hesitant and inconsistent references to the KLA as terrorists by *Vreme*’s journalists. Thus, while Anastasijević avoided using the term terrorists in general, Milan Milošević, for instance, used the term terrorists only when relating official regime reports; thus, in his article he mentioned Jašari as a “guerilla leader” and talked about police action in terms of blurring the “boundaries between terrorism, guerilla and popular uprising on the one hand, [and] as obliterating the boundaries between an anti-terrorist attack, anti-guerilla operation, crushing a rebellion and retribution,” on the other (Milošević 1998: 6). Nevertheless, Milošević also related the statements of Fehmi Agani and Adem Demaçi, prominent Albanian politicians and intellectuals and sort of semi-official political representatives, to criticize the leaders of Kosovo Albanians who persistently avoided to publicly condemn “terrorists or guerilla” and to appeal to local peasants not to provide a refuge for the armed groups. He nevertheless characterized the operation in Drenica as “a robust and unacceptably non-selective police action” (Milošević 1998: 10). Stojan Cerović in “Duh vremena” did not neglect the international politics of double standards, but also observed that the “antiterrorist operation brought many civilian casualties and resembled an army operation of taking over enemy territory [...] In distinction to classical terrorists, who are always comprised of small, illegal groups of religious, ethnic, or ideological fanatics, the KLA obviously has

broad popular support and in that looks like a rebel army, but its methods are clearly terroristic” (Cerović 1998: 16).

Vreme’s first-hand reporting from this period probably presented the peak of its coverage of Kosovo and stood in stark contrast with the framework of ethnic animosity and lack of sensitivity for the other side typically demonstrated by pro-regime media. *Vreme* resisted the discourse of the mythical Kosovo as Serbian glorious and holy land, and instead reported about police brutality as a personification of Milošević’s regime and its inability to handle the Kosovo issue in a non-violent manner. Moreover, Anastasijević in his articles sometimes exposed local Serbian tycoons and criminals from Priština, travelled to the territory occupied by the KLA, openly exposed as fraudulent Serbian police reports and public officials’ statements etc. Immersed in events on the ground and apparently affected by the terrible scenes, Anastasijević was less concerned with the big picture and seldom went into broad discussions of “world politics” like Cerović and Milošević usually did. Nonetheless, despite their personal differences, *Vreme* journalists shared one voice inasmuch as they all advocated for a truce, condemned police brutality and asked for immediate independent investigation of crimes, although without much hope that this is the course the events would take. As such, they genuinely departed from the mainstream Serbian media that basically showed no empathy with the Kosovo Albanian victims and thus broke the frames of the then predominant Serbian media reporting by making the Albanian lives grievable in Butlerian terms, that is, worthy of grieving and remembering.

The Time of Censorship: Reporting on the NATO Bombing and the War in Kosovo (March-June 1999)

With the onset of the NATO bombing, a state of war has been proclaimed in Serbia, which meant limiting or suspending a number of constitutional rights, among which the freedom of expression and the press. In practice, this meant that all the media were put under strict state censorship and compelled to adopt the dominant discourse. Thus, there was some hesitation among the weekly’s editors whether to print *Vreme* at all due to censorship, but the prevailing belief was that it had responsibility towards its readership and should continue being published. The censorship, however, required changing the perspective. Apparently, “the fog of war”, the proclamation of the state of war, censorship and possible closing of the “disobedient” media, required some editorial concessions. Dragoljub Žarković later briefly explained what this censorship process looked like: “We would call them [the censors] every morning to agree on the texts that we would publish. In the beginning, we would bring them the texts, and later we arranged and resolved everything over the phone” (Milošavljević 2003: 35).

As a result, *Vreme* did not look much like itself during the NATO bombing. Firstly, it changed its appearance and was published in black and white, more

resembling daily newspapers. *Vreme* initially announced two issues per week, but after a few weeks switched to their old rhythm and published a total of 13 issues during the 78 days of bombing, which is slightly above the once-per-week dynamics. All issues were labeled as special, and the regular numbering was discontinued, so that the last prewar issue was 439 from March 21, 1999 and the next one was 440 from June 12, 1999. Another change implied that there were no regular columns and only articles dealing with sports or entertainment were signed. Articles of a more informative type were not signed personally but as “Ekipa izveštača *Vremena*” [*Vreme* Reporting Team], which only changed in the last two editions. The only exception was Dragoljub Žarković’s editorial in Special Edition 10 from May 15, 1999 that returned to the concept of signing articles by journalists’ full names.

Consequently, while *Vreme* refrained from open war-mongering propaganda and nationalistic outcries, typical of pro-regime media during this period, it lacked a critical edge and predominantly adopted the official discourse. This line of reporting is clearly exemplified by a number of titles, subheadings and statements from some of the texts they published at the time:

NATO forces committed aggression against Yugoslavia at 8 pm on Wednesday (Special Edition 1:1).

Michael Rose, a general who knows the Serbs well, stated that justice is on the Serbian side and that in war justice always wins (Special Edition 2: 2).

The Yugoslav Army demonstrated in the most persuasive way that it is capable of causing losses to a much superior enemy and that it developed a defense strategy on which the enemy did not count (Special Edition 2: 3).

Dinar [Serbian currency] resilient during the aggression and could even get stronger (Special Edition 3: 4).

The texts did not differ much from the titles. Special Edition 2 celebrated the Serbian Air Force commander Spasoje Smiljanić as the general whose name “will make its way to the army textbooks” (Special Edition 2: 6). Special Edition 5 provided a report from a *Vreme* journalist who travelled to Kosovo for a day and who saw signs of combat on civilian objects but claimed:

[i]t is visible that the houses were not systematically burned down as some reported and alleged witnesses from Macedonia and Albania related. It is particularly interesting that not a single mosque in the places where the bus with journalists passed was damaged. Apart from a few signs spelling “Serbia” and some Serbian symbols on the houses that were clearly terrorist strongholds, there are no traces of what Western war propaganda labels as “the beastly savagery of Serbian paramilitaries” (Special Edition 5: 2).

The only thing that is actually *clear* here is that the impressions of a journalist passing by on a bus are insufficient as proof that certain houses were “clearly” terrorist strongholds, not in the least because “terrorists” generally

tend not to use private houses by the road as their strongholds but, for obvious reasons, prefer hidden and inaccessible mountainous locations with strategic significance.

Still, certain evolution in *Vreme*'s reporting can be followed, insofar as later issues bring more authored articles that to some extent problematized the monolithic picture of Serbian heroic defiance and inevitable victory. Thus, Special Edition 8 contained a "problematic" interview with Vuk Drašković – Serbian writer and leader of Serbian opposition during Milošević's era, who joined the federal government in Yugoslavia as its vice-president in January 1999 and justified this move with the aim to prevent the war. Drašković spoke to Belgrade television *Studio B* a week before, and was, for that reason, immediately dismissed from the position of federal Vice President. Namely, he claimed that "from the start of the aggression, our nation has been fooled and deceived that it is just a matter of time before NATO dissolves, that there are huge gaps between the Western allies [...] our destiny is in our hands inasmuch as there is reason in the heads of those who are leading the country" (Special Edition 8: 6). Furthermore, in distinction from earlier statements about the resilience of the Serbian currency, Special Edition 10 gave a gloomy prediction of Mladan Dinkić, – then a Serbian economist, and later a prominent Serbian politician during the 2000s – that "it will probably take the whole decade before Yugoslavia returns to the economic level that it had a month ago" (Special Edition 10:8). Apart from relating critical remarks by their correspondents, *Vreme* journalists occasionally made some critical comments themselves, such as Dragoljub Žarković's remark that NATO was essentially destroying Serbian patrimony since during "a decade of being in power, this establishment did not make a single object worth being a military target" (Special Edition 12: 2).

Certain consistency throughout this period can be found in the fact that *Vreme* apparently tried to advocate for the freedom of journalism, but in a very mild, cautious and non-provocative manner – certainly not in a manner that would in any way question, let alone harm, the overall framework of Milošević's regime during the NATO bombing. Already in Special Edition 1 (March 27, 1999) they said that *Radio B92* "has been shut down with a lame explanation, and its editor-in-chief was taken for questioning. We believe that shutting down this radio is a pity, let us only remember how astutely that crew worked in 1995 in taking care of refugees from Krajina" (Special Edition 1: 4). It seems that it is the radio's humanitarian work, rather than their freedom of speech or integrity of reporting, that recommended them as patriots.

One of the gloomiest episodes of the war was the assassination of the prominent journalist and editor-in-chief of the oppositional *Telegraph Weekly* (Nedeljni telegraf), Slavko Ćuruvija, which was later proved to be the act of the Serbian Special Police. After quoting several journalist associations that condemned this act and demanded the immediate arrest of the perpetrators, *Vreme* gave its own comment that all journalist associations demanded this case to be solved "in order to avoid speculation that this was a political assassination conducted during wartime" (Special Edition 6:16).

Given that Ćuruvija was accused of treason by the regime media in the days prior to his assassination, it did not take much imagination to figure out who ordered his murder. In addition, Žarković in the aforementioned editorial vigorously argued that the so-called independent journalists are as much against the bombing as the regime ones (Special Edition 10:2), while Teofil Pančić criticized regime media for introducing the categories of patriots and traitors, claiming that in this context such distinction is unacceptable (Special Edition 11:7). Finally, *Vreme* has also made an effort to publish a denial of the Open Society Foundation in Serbia about their alleged cooperation with Albanian terrorists mentioned on national television (Special Edition 7:16), and in the following issue published an interview with the director of Open Society Fund Serbia Sonja Licht – another vocal critic of Serbian nationalism who insists on wider responsibility of Serbian society for war crimes – who repeatedly dismissed such accusations (Special Edition 8:10).

Whether or not this is sufficient to justify *Vreme*'s existence during the war is an open question. Rather than providing our own answer to it, we feel more comfortable to offer arguments on both sides of the debate over its publishing during that time, as summarized by Olivera Milosavljević in her book *Tačka razlaza* (*The Parting Ways*, 2003):

Position: *Vreme* fought against censorship during the bombing; it would be a shame if *Vreme* had not been published at the time, for if they opposed domestic unconstraint force, they had to oppose the greater one; they have compassion for all the victims, including our own; during the bombing *Vreme* was not published because of imposed mandatory labor but because of civil, professional and patriotic duty; the wartime *Vreme* was a sanctuary against primitivism and an oasis of normalcy; the wartime *Vreme* is a proof that there are people who saw similitudes in the methods applied by both NATO and Milošević.

Opposition: *Vreme* suffered a fall during the bombing, during which it was published in a poor form and now completely compromised itself; baking bread under occupation is justified, but it is not permissible that journalists support the dictator who is waging a war against the entire world, as *Vreme*'s editorial staff did at the time. It is a lie and forgery to claim that *Vreme* and ANEM [the Association of Independent Electronic Media] fought against censorship at the time of the NATO intervention. (Milosavljević 2003: 13)

The Epilogue: Journalism or Activism

After the end of the bombing and the official abolition of the state of war in Serbia, *Vreme* resumed its critical edge and advocated for an immediate abolition of censorship. As if trying to make up for their wartime activity, they later fiercely opposed Milošević in a manner which, on the eve of the election in late September 2000, blurred the difference between journalism and activism. Thus, the editor-in-chief Žarković in *Vreme* 507 (21.9.2000) called upon all the readers to vote and depose Milošević, and openly supported Vojislav

Koštunica, the candidate of the united opposition front, ending the article with the slogan: “let us all vote” (“svi na izbore,” Žarković 2000:4).⁹ While many would say that this was the right thing to do, others could argue that this was equally remote from objective journalism as was their NATO bombing coverage. Be as it may, *Vreme* certainly kept much of its reputation after Milošević’s fall, keeping its critical edge towards the political leadership during the rule of the democratic parties (2000-2012) as well as the subsequent reign of Aleksandar Vučić’s regime to this day.

In summarizing, it could be said that *Vreme* initially set and often maintained the highest professional standards of independent reporting in Milošević’s Serbia in the 1990s. Regarding the Kosovo issue, *Vreme* had no illusions about the outcome of Milošević’s politics on Kosovo, which they criticized to the core as the main (but not the only) culprit for the Kosovo crisis. Its journalists did not hesitate to expose Milošević’s policy towards Kosovo, advocating for serious concessions to the Kosovo Albanians, and predicting the devastating results of his refusal to enter into negotiations with Albanians and his stubbornness and contempt for the international community, the price of which will be paid by Serbian citizens.

Arguably, Dejan Anastasijević’s reporting from Kosovo in 1997 and 1998 was the peak of *Vreme*’s war reporting, and perhaps of its journalism in general, while Special Editions during the bombing presented its nadir (perhaps alongside the “low kicks” posthumously targeting Srđa Popović). Anastasijević was well-connected and apparently stubborn and brave enough to go to the crime scenes himself, showing clear human concern and empathy towards individual victims, especially for the tragedies of “common, rural people” of both nationalities, whose perspective he often put up front at the expense of a wider political framework and context. As such, in line with Burtler’s terminology, he truly broke the frames of war established by the mainstream Serbian media in the 1990s, that presented the Others as terrorists and enemies that deserve no empathy or justice, and instead presented the Albanian lives as grievable and Albanians as often the victims “whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned” and worthy of grieving and remembering. Arguably, such profound empathy towards the Albanian victims has not been matched since, either in *Vreme* or in other Serbian media.

9 For instance, *Vreme* 506 from September 14, 2000, has the title “He is Finished” (“Gotov je”), which was a popular parole at the time, meaning to signify Milošević’s final and ultimate defeat. *Vreme* 507 (September 21) in the mentioned editorial and other articles calls the readership to overthrow Milošević. The following issue has the title “Victory” (“Pobeda”) and, like the previous one, has the photo of Koštunica on its cover. This issue is labeled a *Special Edition*, and the editors apologize to the readers for the absence of regular columns (*Vreme* 508: 14). Everything was subject to the electoral victory, reactions and discussion of the upcoming Milošević’s moves. There was no need for this, however, as, Milošević’s reign was finally ended after huge protests in Belgrade on October 5, 2000, and all that was left to *Vreme* was to declare “The end” (“Kraj”) on the cover of their following issue (510) from October 12, 2000.

Overall, then, during Milošević's authoritarian rule, *Vreme* found itself between two poles: the one being their initially declared ideal of maintaining "top standards in the journalistic profession" as exemplified by their US and German role-models, while the other being the dominant tone of Milošević's pro-regime media that were either purely propagandistic or little short of it. Between these two poles lay the real world of contemporary Serbia, of objective possibilities paved by the pressure of the authoritarian regime, public accusations of treason, economic benefits, personal courage and compromises. The reporting in *Vreme* in the 1990s, and the subsequent 2002 debate in the same magazine, showed that, in a way, for a number of journalists, intellectuals and readers, Serbia under Milošević was reminiscent of Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic words: "the worst of all possible worlds and indeed that, if it were only a little worse, it would be no longer capable of continuing to exist." Perhaps *Vreme* provided some of that "little" – the part that still made dignified human existence possible under Milošević's regime and that, ultimately, facilitated its demise.

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Aleksandar Pavlović, Katarina Beširević

Probijanje okvira rata: Izeštavanje u nedeljniku *Vreme* o kosovskoj krizi (1997-2000)

Apstrakt

Ovaj članak razmatra izveštavanje jugoslovenskog/srpskog nedeljnika *Vreme* u doba režima Slobodana Miloševića, posebno sadržaj posvećen kosovskoj krizi i njenim posledicama krajem devedesetih godina prošlog veka. Osnovano neposredno pred raspad bivše Jugoslavije kao jedan od prvih privatnih medija, *Vreme* je postavilo standarde odgovornog i kritičkog novinarstva o ratovima i politici tokom Miloševićeve vladavine, ali je upitno da li je i u kojoj meri uspelo da izbegne i prevaziđe ograničenja koja su bila nametnuta srpskim medijima. Ovo pitanje medijskog izveštavanja tokom Miloševićeve vladavine ispituje se u radu u širem kontekstu sukoba i političke konstelacije u Srbiji tokom turbulentne poslednje decenije dvadesetog veka. Osim toga, članak takođe razmatra debate o nasleđu ratova i zločina iz ovog perioda koje su se pojavile u *Vremenu* 2002. godine, pružajući time uvid u postkonfliktne dileme, izazove i ideološke podele u srpskom društvu uopšte.

Ključne reči: *Vreme*, 1990-e, Srbija, Kosovo, rat, NATO bombardovanje, novinarstvo, izveštavanje

