

Preserving the Integrity of National Identity: Metaphors for Kosovo in Serbian Political Discourse

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This paper is part of a wider research project dealing with Serbian political discourse, and focuses specifically upon the metaphor as one of the important argumentative strategies in political discourse, with the example of Serbian political discourse on Kosovo.

1. Introduction

As Lakoff and Johnson remarked in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980, 2003), much of our conceptual system is metaphorically structured. Metaphors enable us to understand complex areas of experience in terms of more familiar ones. This explains why metaphorical expressions are a common feature of all languages, especially when it comes to explaining such abstract topics as the politics, or the ‘imagining’ of a national identity (El Refaie, 2001: 353-354). Nevertheless, metaphors are not universal, and some authors have begun to stress the cultural and social dimension of metaphor (for ex. Quinn, 1991). As El Refaie (2001: 353) observes, studies of public discourse in different countries have demonstrated that the choice of metaphors is fundamentally a social and political issue.

My aim in this presentation is to show how Serbian politicians apply metaphor as a means of constructing Serbian national identity, through the creation of an *ethnoscape*, a sacred territory of a nation, invested with emotional connotations and cultural meanings (Smith, 1999). The *ethnoscape* can generate powerful and long-lasting myths, symbols and memories within a community (Smith, 1999: 24). These myths and memories are represented and recreated in the political discourse. The loss of this *ethnoscape* has serious consequences for a nation²¹. Such is the case for Serbia, which has been losing Kosovo in the last two decades. The process culminated in 2008, when the Albanian majority in the province proclaimed independence from Serbia. In order to challenge and deal with this “historic wrong” (Smith, 1999: 24), Serbian politicians create and recreate a discourse on Kosovo by using specific metaphorical language. Their choice of metaphors is not arbitrary, but serves the discursive construction of Kosovo as Serbia’s *ethnoscape*, the holy ancestral land, a crucial concept in the argumentative strategy aimed at redeeming the political situation and recovering the threatened national identity (cf. Smith, 1999).

²¹ As Smith puts it, “to be without [the] ancestral homeland, or even a part of it, is [...] to be without memory or posterity, for the community to be incomplete, [...] almost a non-nation, or at any rate seriously deficient and impaired” (1999: 24).

The choice object of observation here are speeches delivered by different Serbian politicians, as well as the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church (whose speeches often have political connotations). The chronological benchmark of my corpus, in general, is the period leading up to the proclamation of independence of Kosovo in 2008, and its immediate aftermaths.

2. Theoretical Framework

My main theoretical and methodological approach is that of conceptual metaphor as a “fundamental argumentative feature and crucial tool for addressing persuasion in text” (Ferrari, 2007: 604). Metaphors constitute mechanisms of conceptualization for understanding and expressing complex, abstract concepts (Aponte Moreno, 2008: 40). This is why, as it is often claimed, the use of metaphor is particularly frequent and necessary in politics. Politics represent an abstract and complex domain of experience, and metaphors are suitable for simplifying these complex domains, making them less abstract and, therefore, more accessible (Semino, 2008: 90). A major function of political metaphor, in general, is “to link the individual and the political by providing a way of seeing relations, reifying abstractions, and framing complexity in manageable terms” (Thompson, 1996: 185-6, cited in Semino, 2008: 90).

The choice of a particular metaphor over another is extremely important. It is not arbitrary; it frames a topic in such a way that some aspects of the target domain are highlighted and others are hidden (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), and therefore construct the reality in one way rather than another (Fairclough, 1992: 194). Thus, metaphors are a powerful ideological tool.

Many different aspects of the political domain can be constructed metaphorically, particularly the acute social and political problems that need to be solved (Semino, 2008:91). Accordingly, Kosovo has been one of the most important issues on Serbian political agenda for several decades. It is the problem addressed equally by the left and the right wing politicians. Later on, I will briefly explain the historical background of the problem. In order to understand the metaphorical language of the Serbian political discourse, it is important to keep in mind that

“Serbs regard the province of Kosovo as the heartland of the Serb people and the original center of their homeland. The conflict in that province between its [...] Serb minority and the Albanian majority [...] derives in part from the strong attachments to this historic area which witnessed the decisive defeat of the latest Serbian king, Lazar, by the Ottomans at the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, and hence the dissolution of the Serbian kingdom. The large monument that marks the site of the battle is still a place of pilgrimage for Serbs; just as the epic ballads of Kosovo and its hero, Marko (Kraljevic), hold a special place in the hearts of the people to this day. For these reasons, the province of Kosovo remains a sacred and integral part of the homeland and history of the Serb people, and could not easily be relinquished” (Smith, 1999: 25).

For the present analysis, it is also useful to keep in mind that not only the choice of a metaphor, but also the very choice of topical information in political discourse is crucial for the construction of the reality in one way rather than another. Thus, typically, negative information about Us will not be emphasized or topicalized in political discourse, whereas negative information about Them, the Others, tends to be topicalized. And *vice versa*: Our positive characteristics will be emphasized, while Their positive characteristics will not (van Dijk, 2002: 228). Thus, it is possible to identify two types of metaphors in Serbian political discourse with the same source domain - Kosovo - but with different

target domains, depending on whether they refer to Kosovo as *our* homeland or Kosovo as a territory occupied by *them*.

3. The Historical Context of Serbia

Kosovo and Metohija make up Serbia's southern province. The first Serbian state was founded on Kosovo territory in the early Middle Ages; also, Kosovo has been the base of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which numerous churches and monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija still testify (Metohija, by the way, comes from *metoh*, property or land of a monastery). Kosovo was the site of the legendary Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, which marked the end of the Serbian medieval kingdom and the beginning of five centuries long Ottoman dominance in the Balkans. During that period, the demographic situation in Kosovo radically changed. Islam was introduced to the province; there were several waves of migrations of Serbs from the province, especially in the 17th century, during the Turkish-Austrian wars, when the Turkish terror over the Christian population intensified. On the other hand, most of the Albanian population in the province converted to Islam, which led to their better treatment on the part of the Turkish ruling class, and different privileges for their chiefs. Nevertheless, the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church remained in Kosovo, in the ancient town of Pec.

The independent Serbian state took over the province of Kosovo in 1912 after the Balkan Wars and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. The ethnic tensions among the Serbs and Albanians were an issue during all of the 20th century. Serbs continued to flee from Kosovo, especially during and after the WWII, and by the 1990s they constituted only 10% of the population. The conflict culminated during the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, with the direct armed confrontation between the Serbian police and the newly created Kosovo Liberation Army, an Albanian guerrilla group. The conflict rapidly grew into a real war, resulting in numerous civilian casualties. The war ended with the NATO bombing of Serbia in March 1999. Kosovo has become a U.N. protectorate, run by the United Nations' Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Soon after the end of NATO bombing, Milosevic's regime fell, and a new democratic government was established in Serbia. Nevertheless, the ethnic issues in Kosovo were far from being resolved. In March 2004, violence escalated again, this time against Serbs. Dozens of people were killed, and many churches and medieval monasteries were completely destroyed.

In February 2006, U.N.-supported talks on the future of Kosovo began. Albanians from Kosovo insisted on the independence, while Serbs claimed it should remain an autonomous province of Serbia. Finally, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on February 17th 2008. Many countries have recognized Kosovo as an independent state, but even more of them have not. Serbia is, certainly, refusing to give up on Kosovo, and the struggle for keeping Kosovo an integral part of Serbian state remains one of the pivotal tasks of the Serbian politics.

As I have just pointed out, there are several historical reasons for the strong attachment that Serbs feel towards Kosovo. It is the territory of the first Serbian state, the see of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the place where one of the decisive battles in Serbian history took place, the land filled with churches, monasteries and graves of our ancestors, the land where many of the legendary Serbs lived and fought. Kosovo is, no doubt, the *ethnoscape* of Serbian people. It is not surprising that Serbian politicians focus on that aspect of Kosovo in their efforts to come to a favorable solution of the Kosovo problem. They emphasize it not only when addressing the Serbian public, but also when communicating with foreign politicians and their general public. As I will show, the representation of Kosovo as Serbia's *ethnoscape* is the key argumentative strategy in Serbian political discourse on Kosovo, and it is achieved by a frequent use of metaphor.

4. Examples of Different Metaphors in Serbian Contemporary Political Discourses

I will now present different examples of metaphors Serbian politicians apply in the discursive construction of Kosovo. One type of metaphors serves to construct Kosovo as Serbia's *ethnoscape*, holy land that has always belonged to Serbian people. The other type of metaphor with the same source domain refers to different problems and/or dangers related to the Kosovo independence.

The construction of *ethnoscape*

1. Vuk Jeremic, Foreign Minister in Serbian Government since 2007; at Wheaton College, Chicago, March 17 2011: "Well, for us, Serbs, Kosovo is like *the very air we breathe*. It's *the beating heart of our culture* - and home to our most sacred shrines. Kosovo is the land where hundreds of thousands of Serbs gave their lives for their country and the cause of freedom. [...] [Kosovo] is in our dreams at night, and in our prayers in church. It is *the apple of our eye*. It is *our Jerusalem*."

2. In the same speech, the Minister is quoting the late Serbian Patriarch Pavle, who said: "[Kosovo] is *the well spring* of the Serbian spiritual tradition, and of our statehood; *the heart and soul* of our nation - indivisible and essential. That is why our forefathers consecrated its soil with thousands of beautiful garlands, adorning the land with magnificent churches and monasteries dedicated to the glory of God."

3. In an interview to Aljazeera (Sep. 2010), Minister Jeremic said: "For Serbs, Kosovo is widely seen as *the cradle of the nation* and *sits at the heart of* national folk histories."

4. In an interview to Der Spiegel (May 2010), Minister Jeremic stated: "Kosovo has deep historical and spiritual meaning for the people of Serbia. In a certain sense, *it is our Jerusalem*."

5. In a speech delivered at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center (Israel, July 2008), Minister Jeremic stated: "We think of Kosovo *as the cradle of our civilization*. Kosovo is *like our Jerusalem*."

6. In London, Nov. 2007, commenting on the possibility of British recognition of Kosovo independence, Minister Jeremic said: "I want to appeal to your sense of fair-play and honesty. Our country is ancient, just like yours, with ancient principles. And Kosovo is *the cradle of our civilization*."

7. On the other hand, Albanian politicians from Kosovo reject the metaphorical language. In Sp. 2010, Kosovo Prime Minister, Hashim Tachi, in an interview about the UN's Kosovo Resolution, asked about how did he feel about the Serbian claim that Kosovo is the birthplace of their nation, the cradle of the Serbian history and culture, responded: "Kosovo is a country of [the] people of Kosovo [...] and Serbia is a state - it is our neighbour, nothing more, nothing less."

8. Boris Tadic, the President of Serbia, in a speech delivered for the 150th anniversary of the Serbian Orthodox Municipality in Vienna (Jun 2010), stresses how important is Kosovo for Serbian identity: "For Serbia, the Kosovo problem [...] is not just a question of territorial integrity and sovereignty, but, above all, a question of preserving the identity. [...] Today, we are facing the attempts to usurp the Serbian orthodox identity in Kosovo and Metohija [...] No one without the identity has a future. That question is transcendent and it is the core of our existence. [...] Serbia is *the Christian cradle of Europe*."

9. Patriarch Irinej, after the ceremony of his enthronement in Pec (Kosovo, Oct. 2010) said that "*Serbian spiritual traces and historical roots* were being erased in Kosovo" and asked "[f]rom this holy place [...] the powerful world factors, in whose hands the fate of Kosovo is" not to deprive the Serbian people of "a century-long right to their homeland, to their property, to their ancestors' graves, to their glorious holy places."

10. Patriarch Irinej (Sep. 2010), at one ceremony in the South of Serbia, stated: "Kosovo is *our cradle* and we will never renounce it."

11. In Vienna, during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Serbian Orthodox Municipality, Serbian Patriarch Irinej said that “Kosovo [is] not only a geographical region of the Serbs, but the holiest land, *the cradle of Serbian spirituality and independence*.”

12. Patriarch Irinej’s Enthronement Homily, Patriarchate Pec, Kosovo, October 3rd 2010: “*The Throne of the Patriarchate of Pech was and remains the soul of the Serbian people*. [...] Similarly, the Bishops of Dalmatia have titled themselves as „Metropolitans of Kosovo and Exarchs of the Throne of Pech”. In so doing they expressed and confirmed the bond of Krajina-Dalmatian Serbs to *their Kosovo cradle* and canonical bond to the Patriarchate of Pech. [...] All that has been said is, sadly, still visible on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. We cannot, but mention *the gaping wound on the body of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people*, here in Kosovo and Metohija, in this truly ‘dread place of judgment’. Today we are visiting and bowing before this sanctuary in our most sacred Serbian land, *the cradle of our history, spirituality*, Christian, Orthodox culture of the Serbian people.”

13. Serbian ex-PM, Vojislav Kostunica, in Jun 2007 stated: “A *new Kosovo battle* is being fought between Serbia and the U.S.”

Their dangerous mission impossible

14. In March of 2011, Patriarch Irinej stated that “*a dark cloud lingers over the sacred Serbian land, Serbian Jerusalem, Kosovo*.”

15. Oliver Ivanovic, State Secretary of Serbia’s Ministry for Kosovo (Feb. 2011), as one of the successes of the Serbian policy in Kosovo sees the fact that Serbia “stem *the tide of recognition* of Kosovo.”

16. Marko Jaksic, the President of the Community of Kosovo Municipalities (Feb. 2011): “We see today that Kosovo cannot survive as an independent country. It is *isolated island* that has no access anywhere.”

17. Serbian Minister for Kosovo and Metohija, Goran Bogdanovic, in an interview for the Radio B92 (Feb. 2009), commenting on the creation of Kosovo Police Forces: “At the same time when *Kosovo remains a tinderbox*, [...] the creation of such a force can only worsen the situation.”

18. Serbian ex-Prime Minister, Vojislav Kostunica, Sep. 2008, commenting on Kosovo independence: “Kosovo is not a unique case, but a *dangerous virus* of one-sided declaration of independence that *will plague other countries*.”

5. Analysis

Basically, two types of metaphors for Kosovo in Serbian political discourse can be identified.

1. Metaphors that compare Kosovo with *cradle, heart, soul, apple of the eye*, that is, invoke essential parts of the body, or the most cherished and innocent period of life, such as early childhood.

The metaphors such as KOSOVO IS THE HEART (ex. 1, 2) or KOSOVO IS THE SOUL (ex. 2, 12) allow us the following inference: SERBIA IS A PERSON (and has the heart/soul); just as you cannot live without the heart or the soul, so Serbia/ Serbian people/ each one of the Serbs cannot survive without Kosovo.

The frequently used metaphor KOSOVO IS THE CRADLE (ex. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12) allows us to make the following inference: Kosovo is related to the childhood of Serbia, Kosovo is in the origins of Serbia, Kosovo is at the very beginning of the life of Serbia, Kosovo is crucial for Serbia’s life and survival, Serbia (that is, its citizens) wouldn’t be alive without Kosovo.

In the metaphor KOSOVO IS THE APPLE (LIGHT) OF THE EYE (ex. 1), the inference is as follows: Kosovo is as precious for Serbian people as the sight of the eyes; without Kosovo, Serbia is handicapped, blind, crippled.

But, KOSOVO IS also A WOUND (ex. 12). Again, SERBIA IS A PERSON and the wound that Kosovo represents on its body threatens its life and well being.

These conceptual metaphors draw inferences that depend on person's beliefs and experiences. Kosovo is the origin of our lives, Kosovo is vital for our survival etc. Each of these entailments may have further entailments.

These metaphors are also used to describe Kosovo as Serbia's *ethnoscape*, holy land, crucial to the Serbian identity and, therefore, future existence. They present Kosovo as the essence of Serbian being, hence, for Serbian people it is impossible to relinquish Kosovo without renouncing themselves. The metaphor that best represents this concept is KOSOVO IS JERUSALEM (ex. 1, 4, 5, 14). Just like Jewish people have never betrayed nor renounced Jerusalem, their holy land, so Serbs can never betray and renounce Kosovo.

These metaphors refer to *us* and *our land* in a positive way, as a nation with a long tradition and a strong identity rooted in our holy land.

2. The other type of metaphor is not as frequent in the shown examples as the previous one. It is a group of metaphors pointing to natural phenomena related directly (*isolated island* in ex. 16) or indirectly to Kosovo (*dark cloud* in ex. 14, *tide of recognition* in ex. 15), as well as diseases (*dangerous virus*, *plague* in ex. 18), or explosive materials (*tinderbox* in ex. 17). All these metaphors are aiming to stress the danger that the independence of Kosovo represents for the entire international community, and the unsustainable nature of such a project. These metaphors refer to *them* as the side that creates problems, rather than trying to solve them.

As the ex. 13 shows, Serbia needs to keep fighting for Kosovo. Nowadays, the Turks, "the traditional enemies" of the Serbs, are replaced by the U.S. in this modern version of the "Kosovo Battle".

6. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to show that metaphors used in Serbian political discourse on Kosovo are one of the important tools in the process of constructing Serbian national identity. Metaphors help create an *ethnoscape*, a sacred territory of a nation, invested with emotional connotations and cultural meanings. *Ethnoscaping* tends to mobilize fairly large numbers of people, because they generate powerful and enduring communal myths, symbols and memories. (Smith, 1999: 24). These communal myths are particularly important to evoke in times of national crisis, such as the one that Serbia has been facing since the loss of its southern province, Kosovo.

In order to determine which metaphors Serbian politicians exploit in their discursive construction of Kosovo as Serbia's *ethnoscape*, I have examined speeches delivered by different Serbian politicians, such as the President of the Republic, the ex-Prime Minister, or the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I have also included several examples from the homilies and speeches of the Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church, because of their strong political connotation. All of the examples are from the period immediately preceding the proclamation of Kosovo independence in 2008, and the aftermaths of the proclamation of independence.

As it was shown, it is possible to identify two groups of metaphors. The first group serves to present Kosovo as Serbia's sacred land, and the most common among them have *heart*, *soul*, *apple of the eye* or *cradle* as a target domain. The other common target domain in this group of metaphors is *Jerusalem*. All these target domains point out to Kosovo as something as precious for Serbs as the life itself, while at the same time explain why Serbia can never renounce it.

The other group of metaphors has different target domains for the same source domain, Kosovo. These target domains include natural disasters and diseases, and are deployed to represent possible consequences of Kosovo independence, negative for Serbia. Each of the identified entailments can have further entailments.

The main function of this argumentative strategy of Serbian political discourse is to present Kosovo as the key to Serbian national identity. Kosovo is discursively constructed by a careful choice of metaphors in a way that contributes to the maintenance of the nation as a unified and unique culture community of citizens (cf. Smith, 1999).

The analysis of the metaphor in Serbian political discourse brings additional evidence to those studies of public discourse in different countries which have demonstrated that the choice of metaphors is fundamentally a social and political issue. That choice helps present the reality in one way or another, which makes metaphors a powerful ideological tool and one of the crucial elements of political discourse in general.

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