Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the Croatian Association for American Studies

MEDIA, AMERICAN CULTURE, AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
Images, Ideas, and Illusion

Edited by

Lovorka Gruić Grmuša

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Hospital Beds Prepared in Croatia's Largest Concert Hall. Photograph by Ronald Goršić/Cropix. Reproduced by permission of Ronald Goršić and Cropix.

Introduction

This volume compiles the proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the Croatian Association for American Studies, *Media, American Culture, and Global Perspective: Images, Ideas, and Illusion*, held on March 31, 2023 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka. The conference brought together eighteen scholars from Europe and the United States, who collectively explored the intricate interplay between media, technology, and culture. This scholarly assembly provided a platform for in-depth discussions on how media influences our global society. The keynote lecture, delivered by Professor Emerita Denise Pilato from Eastern Michigan University, titled *Patterns of Perception in Media Culture: The Paradoxical Effect of Digital Images*, set the stage for an intellectually stimulating exchange of ideas. Contributions from various disciplines reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the discussions, offering multifaceted perspectives on the construction, perpetuation, and significance of media representations within both the global landscape and the American cultural milieu.

The five chapters presented in this volume are intended to extend and deepen the conversation initiated at the conference. Apart from addressing the West's long-standing influence over the world's media systems and how it has surveyed and shaped the economy, affected human consciousness, and promoted ideologically biased reality, the contributions to this volume also examine the complexities inherent in the rapid proliferation of data and imagery, drawing attention to the vulnerability in the consumption of ideas and the potential for disinformation fueled by both legitimate media outlets and overseas bots, along with important facts and essential information that characterize our increasingly interconnected digital era. Through a

thorough investigation of a wide array of cultural and semiotic practices—ranging from fiction, TV series, docuseries, and film to the far-reaching implications of digital platforms, such as war blogs, podcasts, and propaganda mechanisms particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic—this collection offers a profound examination of media's role in shaping contemporary cultural narratives and emphasizes the need for critical assessment and enhanced media literacy, recognizing that everyday digital images and other media outlets are consumed by global audiences that interpret meaning through diverse cultures, values, traditions, and life experiences.

In Chapter 1, "Media and Language as Political Instruments in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*," Valentina Markasović analyzes the use of media and language via political articulation as platforms of indoctrination and control in two dystopian series—*The Hunger Games* trilogy (*Hunger Games* [2008], *Catching Fire* [2009], and *Mockingjay* [2010]) by Suzanne Collins and *Red Queen* series (*Red Queen* [2015], *Glass Sword* [2016], *King's Cage* [2017], *War Storm* [2018], and a collection titled *Broken Throne* [2019]) by Victoria Aveyard. Drawing on Michel Foucault's work on power, knowledge, and ideology, which exposes people as compliant, "docile bodies," Theodor Adorno's study about the impact of television on the spectators, and, most importantly, George Orwell's take on the vagueness of political language—long words, euphemisms, exhausted idioms, and obfuscated phrasing—to distract the public and disguise the governments' intentions, the author closely examines the mechanisms of control by which those in power regulate, supervise, and manipulate the populace of these dystopian novels, molding them into obedient subjects who conform to their regimes' expectations. The paper argues that, starting with schooling, the child characters in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* are misinformed and deprived of critical thinking, as historical

knowledge is censored and monopolized, and that they mature into law-abiding, pliant citizens, controlled by "linguistic manipulation" and the totalitarian regimes' ideologies, which are spread "overtly and subliminally" through media, "with mandatory viewings and public video screens." The author also delves into the lives and activities of the series' protagonists, who question the status quo of their abusive habitats, rebel against the totalitarian parties, and overthrow them by usurping "the very platform used by the oppressive system—the media," addressing the masses with "directness and simplicity hailed by Orwell."

Chapter 2, "The Representation of Trauma via Remediation: Digitality in Jonathan Safran Foer's Print Novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*," authored by Lovorka Gruić Grmuša discusses the significance of remediation in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), one of the first novels about the 9/11 attacks. Drawing upon Marshall McLuhan's understanding of media, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's notion of reciprocal remediation, Samuel Weber's and Katherine Hayles's multimodality theories, and W. J. T. Mitchell's "picture theory," this chapter explores how the representation of trauma in Foer's novel is articulated through various remediation strategies. The author argues that by mobilizing a "synergistic interplay" of language with different visual and graphic forms— photographs, word images, diagrams, handwritten letters, die-cut holes, a series of illustrations made into a flipbook, or manipulation of typographical elements—as well as haptic and kinesthetic cues, Foer not only developed an effective technique to address and communicate the "unspeakability of trauma," which extends beyond mere representation by engaging the readers "in acts of signification" that convey the immediacy and emotional intensity of a traumatic experience, but that he also demonstrated how, "in the era of computationally in-

tensive environments," print literature and textuality itself can be reinvented and enriched by digital contexts and experimentation with new media technologies.

In Chapter 3, drawing on examples of media events surrounding Prince Harry and Meghan Markle—the Netflix productions *The Crown* and the *Harry & Meghan* docuseries, Meghan Markle's Spotify podcast, *Archetypes*, as well as articles in American and British media and social media posts—Jadranka Zlomisić's discussion "Analysis of the News and Social Media Coverage of the British Royal Family: Recollections May Vary" explores how varying reactions to cultural differences reinforce American audiences' preexisting attitudes toward the British royal family. Informed by the *uses and gratifications theory* and the *negativity bias theory*, the analysis focuses on the shifts in mass media coverage of and media user's response to the ex-royal couple's "victimhood narrative," demonstrating the relevance of combining the two methodological frameworks to identify and explain sociocultural, psychological, and experiential factors related to media content consumption and production, in particular the correlation between the negativity bias and media-audience interaction.

Jasna Poljak Rehlicki's discussion "War Blogs: Alternative Media in Narrating the War?" (Chapter 4) examines how wars are reported and represented by focusing on the unlikely new medium—the war blog. Indicating that the phenomenon of military blogging often contradicts the tone of the traditional war narrative and fills it with an unexpected immediacy and pathos/ethos from those on the front lines, Poljak Rehlicki looks at how each war finds its own specific medium in its diversity, with blogs emerging as the defining medium of the Iraq War of the early 2000s. Her analysis highlights the perspective of American soldiers and the way perceptions of wars fought overseas in the name of the American flag have been shaped over the decades,

significantly influencing public attitudes and, in turn, the military's response to it, offering specific television coverage of the war to gain approval through a controlled, "trustworthy . . . sanitized version of combat." Analyzing Colby Buzzell's war blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which he launched during his deployment to Iraq in 2004, and his memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005), Poljak Rehlicki, drawing on Baudrillard, reminds us that the various forms of state-orchestrated media representation of war are not identical to the actual events but are, rather, their manipulated simulation, offering a spectacle to which affective war blogs provide an interactive, commentary-friendly alternative and a genuine antidote.

In Chapter 5, "'Give Us Our Daily Dread': Dystopian Traces in the COVID-19 Media Discourse on the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters," Jelena Pataki Šumiga explores the parallels between the media discourse used by the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters during the COVID-19 pandemic and the rhetorical strategies found in canonical dystopian literature, particularly George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* The author argues that the crucial role of the media in shaping public perception and maintaining compliance with lockdown measures resembles the propaganda methods employed by authoritarian regimes in dystopian narratives. The analysis highlights the manipulation of language and the framing of Civil Protection representatives as benevolent leaders, fostering trust while simultaneously instilling fear. Pataki Šumiga maintains that strategies such as promoting social isolation, ostracizing of the infected people, applying peer pressure, and using monitoring and control as instruments of surveillance, along with the paradoxical use of "doublespeak," reflect a calculated effort to command the populace's behavior, reinforce obedience, and force the population into submission. By examining specific statements from Civil Protection

representatives, the chapter reveals the dystopian elements embedded in the rhetoric of crisis management, suggesting that the COVID-19 media discourse may serve as a contemporary manifestation of the dynamics found in fictional totalitarian societies.

With its cross-cultural breadth and interdisciplinary methodology, this volume aspires to broaden the horizons of American studies and contribute to the field's evolution by discerning pioneering research trajectories and charting unexplored scholarly terrains as well as by offering invigorating perspectives on well-established domains. As editors, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all contributors for generously imparting their scholarly insights into the complex intersections of media and culture as well as the intrinsic tensions that shape and mediate human experience within an increasingly technology-governed world.

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11

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Media and Language as Political Instruments
in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*

Abstract

In real life, as in fiction, political leaders use the media to disseminate their messages to the public. In other words, their speeches and statements are televised to reach the widest possible audience, and the messages they convey are linguistically modeled to suit their political goals. When writing about political discourse in his famous essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946), George Orwell highlights how language is manipulated and kept vague in order to achieve specific political goals. This paper uses Orwell's observations to examine the political language in two works of Young Adult dystopian fiction—*The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010) by Suzanne Collins and the *Red Queen* series (2015–2018) by Victoria Aveyard. After explicating the use of media in dystopian literature, the paper elaborates on Orwell's claims and delineates how the villains of these two series employ the same strategies and actively find ways to keep their subjects docile, confused, fearful, and divided. The analysis also shows that the series' protagonists are not deceived by these lies. Instead, the protagonists recognize the false propaganda, question the regime's inner workings, and, ultimately, rebel against the system through their own use of media and language.

Keywords: Media, language manipulation, George Orwell, Suzanne Collins, Victoria Aveyard

1. Introduction

At its core, dystopian fiction ponders upon the possible futures that await us: after some type of a cataclysmic event—nuclear destruction, a total war, or an ecological catastrophe—a totalitarian regime comes into power and either begins or continues to oppress given groups of people. While placing characters into an imagined future, dystopian novels have a great deal to say about the present as well. They often cast light on the happenings in the real world and comment on pressing issues such as racial, gender, economic, and social inequalities. Frequently, dystopias examine the regimes and how they wield power, including the means of subjugating and controlling the masses. One such theme is the political use of media and language, both of which are used to shape and govern the subjects.

Such a political use of media and language is prominent in the widely popular series by Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* trilogy—*Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). The novels focus on Katniss Everdeen and her fight against the oppressive government in Panem, her country (based on the United States of America). Its seat is the Capitol, and the people in power control the common people primarily by annually hosting the Hunger Games, in which twenty-four tributes fight to survive the battle royal. While *The Hunger Games* series has inspired heaps of scholarship, the second series this paper deals with, *Red Queen*, remains academically unexplored, which this article attempts to remedy. The series was written by the American author Victoria Aveyard and consists of *Red Queen* (2015), *Glass Sword* (2016), *King's Cage* (2017), *War Storm* (2018), along with a collection of novellas and additional material titled *Broken Throne*

(2019).[1] Set in North America in a not very far future, *Red Queen* introduces the reader to a world in which people are divided by the color of their blood to Reds or Silvers, whereby the Silvers have super-human powers and the Reds do not. The Silvers are also the ruling class and governors of the Kingdom of Norta. The protagonist is Mare Barrow, a poor Red girl who finds work at the royal palace and is entangled in politics and romance, navigating the court of the villainous Queen Elara and the relationships with two princes, Cal and Maven. Mare's Red blood coupled with Silver abilities makes her a so-called "newblood"; it shakes the foundation of the country based on the oppression of the powerless Reds and encourages a rebellion led by a group called the Scarlet Guard. In both series, the regimes rely largely on media and (televised) political speeches to help them uphold the rule in their respective countries.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the use of media and political language in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* to determine how the regimes take advantage of the media and how closely their use of language aligns with George Orwell's observations. To achieve this, the paper draws on Theodor Adorno's work about the repercussions of televised contents and their hidden messages, Michel Foucault's seminal works on ideology, power, and subjects, and George Orwell's 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language" to explain the use of political language in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*. The paper first contextualizes the use of media in (totalitarian) regimes, such as the ones in the countries of Panem and Norta. After discussing the examples of media manipulation in the two-novel series, the examples of linguistic manipulations, such as presenting lies as truths and using vague and confusing language to hide the true sentiment, will be addressed. Fi-

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[1] In-text citations will shorten the titles as follows: *Hunger Games* (*HG*), *Catching Fire* (*CF*), and *Mockingjay* (*M*); *Red Queen* (*RQ*), *Glass Sword* (*GS*), *King's Cage* (*KC*), *War Storm* (*WS*), and *Broken Throne* (*BT*).

nally, the paper will also show that the young adult protagonists of these two series see through the political lies and work to deconstruct them.

2. What the Government Wants You to Think: The Use of Media in Dystopia

Media play a crucial role in upholding dystopian regimes. To reach a position of power and remain there, the regime develops an ideology which is then disseminated by the media. As Louis Althusser explains, the subjects are ruled by the "ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief" (170). Ideology is thus subtly disseminated via social practices, into which it is ingrained. When people consume media, they simultaneously internalize whatever ideology is integrated into specific media products and reproduce it. Ideology thus turns people into subjects or, in Foucauldian terms, docile bodies. A docile body "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" through disciplinary measures (Foucault, *Discipline* 136). According to Foucault, the authorities take "a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (*Discipline* 138). In this way, the ideological transformation of people into obedient subjects allows them to be used as the state desires, and the role of media in this process is uncontested.

While holding the monopoly on what is aired and what is not, the government has the ability to use the media as an extension of its own power to transfer government-approved messages. This can be done both overtly and subliminally. Writing about commercial culture, that is, popular media that people are exposed to and consume on a daily basis, Todd Gitlin notes that "it *relays* and *reproduces* and *processes*

and *packages* and *focuses* ideology that is constantly arising both from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout the society" (253). In other words, the general public's media consumption habits influence and shape the media themselves, prompting those in charge to produce more of the same popular content.

In discussing "media events," John Fiske underlines that what is shown in the media "is not a mere representation of what happened, but [that] it has its own reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it" (2). Instead of being true, the media constructs the truth in accordance with the requirements set by those in charge of the program. This new reality is, therefore, frequently crafted so as to suit the needs of the regime. Similarly, Theodor Adorno observes that television shows often "aim at producing or at least reproducing the very smugness, intellectual passivity, and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds" (222). The media programs have a great potential for influencing people because the media messages may be crafted to easily embed themselves into the consumers' subconscious. These "hidden message[s] may be more important than the overt since this hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be 'looked through,' will not be warded off by sales resistance, but is likely to sink into the spectator's mind" (Adorno 221). Accordingly, the framing of a scene, the editing, the background music and sounds, backdrops, and other elements of the media which are being consumed may influence the viewer just as much, if not more, than the text being spoken.

Importantly, this effect is reinforced by people's inability to look beyond the messages that are being instilled. Booker quotes Hannah Arendt's observation that "[t]he ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction . . . and the distinction between true and false . . . no longer exist" (83). The goal of such a

regime is to create subjects who take everything at face value and forgo any deeper meaning.

The same processes of disseminating ideology through the media are observable in dystopian fiction. Societies presented in these texts are ruled by oppressive governments that often utilize the media to achieve their own ends: to present and reinforce desired narratives. That is, dystopian "protagonists are often manipulated and lied to in order to keep society running smoothly" (Basu et al. 4). While Gitlin has emphasized that in the real world, media products frequently depend on what the general public wants to see, in dystopian societies, it is only the powers-that-be that have a say in what is filmed and shown. In these societies, the majority of people do not have the power to express their opinions; instead, the social elites, more specifically, the government, decide everything about the media program, including what type of message and ideology it is spreading. Discussing *1984*, Booker observes that dystopian populations are under "a constant barrage of video propaganda" that establishes and perpetuates the desired ideology (78). In other words, the media programs in dystopian novels are specifically produced to buttress the rule of the oppressive government and manipulate people into obedience. These manipulations start from an early age, when children are first officially exposed to the teachings of the government—in schools. Education is a key building block of an obedient society, as is shown in the following analysis of the education and the consequent lack of media literacy and susceptibility to media manipulation in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*.

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss attends school, but her education is narrow in regard to both the subjects the school covers and the skills it develops. Don Latham and Jonathan M. Hollister observe that it is "unlikely that a Capitol-sanctioned curriculum would emphasize the development of information and media literacies, skills often associat-

ed with democracy and empowerment" (36). Instead, education is limited, and the content is strictly prescribed. Students are to blindly accept what they hear instead of being inquisitive and critical. Moreover, what they learn is also limited in terms of the scope of the material. As Katniss proclaims, "Somehow it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and maths, most of our instruction is coal-related. Except for the weekly lecture on the history of Panem. It's mostly a lot of blather about what we owe the Capitol. I know there must be more than they're telling us, an actual account of what happened during the rebellion" (*HG* 50). Clearly, the education in each district is oriented towards the trade in which the district is engaged (for District 12, that is coal mining). The narrowness of the subject, combined with only the selected bits of information about the history of their country that are approved by the government, creates docile children who grow up to be docile adults, thus preventing any thought of widespread rebellion. Information continues to be limited outside of the school system, as is apparent from the lack of knowledge characters display about events in other districts (*CF* 25), all of which precludes any drive for unification in the country. Likewise, in *Red Queen*, Mare claims she is "learning nothing in a classroom full of children" (*RQ* 1). She does not elaborate on the scope of education, but one can infer that they are taught only the basics needed for a life of labor. The masses are deliberately kept in the dark, with some portions of the population not even being literate. As Mare later on adds, "Reds are kept stupid, kept ignorant. It makes us weaker than we already are. My own parents can't even read" (*KC* 201). This effectively stunts the development of intelligence, including the level of the people's media literacy. In both cases, the government's careful involvement in education ensures that their subjects are largely unable to rebel.

This practice allows the space for media programs whose goal is to subtly lull people into complacency. To begin with, the prevalence

of media as a mode of indoctrination and spreading of government-approved messages is clear. In *The Hunger Games*, the people are kept ignorant by prohibiting contact between districts and via Capitol's monopoly over the media (Henthorne Ch. 3). The Games are a mandatory viewing for all the citizens, and even a poor family like Katniss's has a TV, while public screens are also placed around town. Despite frequent power shortages, electricity is always available during the Hunger Games screenings as well as when the government is transmitting a message that is obligatory to watch (*HG* 20, 98). The media in *Red Queen* operate in the same way, with mandatory viewings and public video screens that ensure that the message is conveyed (*GS* 415, *BT* 185).

In both series, the media are not used merely to represent reality. On the contrary, they serve to create it, which is in agreement with what Foucault notes about the performative powers of discourses—that they create "the objects of which they speak" (*The Archaeology* 49). By creating a narrative, the desired story becomes the truth and, in the novels, this is evident in the careful editing of the media content that is arranged so as to propagate a specific notion. The state television of *The Hunger Games* has full authority over the story the government is choosing to present, and the Games are edited to suit the Capitol's desires (Wezner 153). An example is to be found in Peeta and Katniss's Victory Tour in District 11, when both of them veer away from their pre-written speeches. Peeta uses his time on air to donate to the families of their late co-tributes a portion of his and Katniss's winnings, and Katniss expresses her gratitude for all the help she got in the arena with simple yet striking words: "Thank you for your children. . . . And thank you all for the bread" (*CF 75*). However, the wider public never hears these speeches: "[N]eedless to say, the ones we gave in District 11 were edited out before the event was broadcast" (*CF* 88). This means that all that goes on air has been sanctioned by the Capitol

and that, at this point, Katniss has no power to stand against the rigid, impenetrable one-party system, which wants to remove all signs of dissent and free thinking from the media.

Interestingly, the Capitol also exhibits proficiency in media manipulation with the scenes that they *do* show but that *appear* unplanned. For instance, when Peeta warns the rebels about an imminent attack on District 13, the camera is suddenly knocked over, showing only a splatter of Peeta's blood on the tiles, and the viewers hear his screams (*M* 150). The purpose of the camera still rolling may be twofold. Firstly, as media can be used to "intimidate the oppressed through gruesome reminders of the repercussions that await any citizen who contemplates rebellion or escape" (Latham and Hollister 39), the sight underlines to the audience what happens to those who fight the system. Secondly, the footage urges Katniss to go save Peeta from the Capitol, which is in accordance with President Snow's actual plan. The President of Panem is, then, manipulating both the general public and the protagonist herself.

Yet, the government is not the only one manipulating the media to obtain favor. To win points with the viewers, Katniss and Peeta's team works to present them as star-crossed lovers. In this, they follow the idea of contemporary reality television shows that "structure interpersonal conflicts and friendships through serial narratives" (Kraszewski 220) with the aim of heightening drama and attracting viewers. When Katniss attempts to reject the act, her mentor points out: "Who cares? It's all a big show. It's all about how you're perceived" (*HG* 164). Katniss is repeatedly learning the lesson that the media is to be manipulated to generate a favorable image, not a true one. Ironically, her staged romance with Peeta "reiterates the spectacle of the games themselves, typifying all that is wrong with the dystopian regime" (Broad 119). That is, the romance develops alongside the Games, emphasizing the drama but also, importantly, drawing atten-

tion away from the real problem—the continuation of the annual child killing. Later on, President Snow demands that Katniss's relationship with Peeta continue even after the show has ended, which marks an attempt of the government to regain the authority over the narrative that is being presented.

In *Red Queen*, Mare's introduction to governmental deceit is initially not conducted with the help of the media. Once her abilities are discovered, she is painted with make-up to disguise her red blood, paraded around, and presented as a lost Silver noblewoman to hide the fact that the Reds can also have Silver abilities. All this is done in direct contact with the gathered nobles, with no media present (*RQ* 95–100). To keep up the pretense, however, Mare is instructed: "*From now until the end of your days, you must lie*" (*RQ* 96). The royal family's swift action to cover up the Red girl with Silver abilities, a person whom they rightfully fear may cause dissent and rebellion, and their reliance on lies foreshadow the use of media throughout the series. For instance, the royal family, led by Queen Elara, manipulates the media to present an accidental gas explosion as a targeted attack by the rebel Scarlet Guard on civilians. As Mare protests, "She's beating us without firing a shot or drawing a blade. Words are all she needs" (*RQ* 273). This highlights how much power the government has in adjusting events and presenting them in a new light.

Another striking example is found at the end of the first novel in the series. Mare, who has joined the rebellion and secretly worked against the Kingdom, is joined by Maven, the younger prince, who pretends he is sympathetic to the rebels. However, the end of the novel reveals his real objective—overthrowing his father, King Tiberias, and his older brother, Cal. Maven fabricates the tale about how Cal, conspiring with Mare, willingly killed the king, although he was forced to do so by Queen Elara's mind-controlling ability. Notably, Maven's narrative is supported by the media. Before the attempted

public execution of Mare and Cal, a security camera footage is shown to the gathered audience (*RQ* 361). The tapes show the murder of the king and, as they are playing with no sound, it is impossible to tell that Cal is being coerced. Additionally, all the moments of closeness between Cal and Mare are broadcast for all to see, making Maven's claim that they are conspirators sound true. Mare observes that "[t]he crowd gasps and murmurs, eating up the perfect lie. Even [her] own parents would have a hard time denying this" (*RQ* 361). Maven's plan is thus heavily supported by the media, both in capturing the footage that contributes to his narrative and in effectively distributing the story to the malleable minds of his subjugated subjects. Even so, Mare trusts that not everyone will fall for Maven's persuasive words: "*And some will believe. The fools. But others will not. Red and Silver, high and low, some will see the truth*" (*RQ* 353).

While the rebel cause eventually gains sympathizers from both the Reds and the Silvers, Maven's lies are shown to be effective. Even Mare, who has herself been subjected to having her image manipulated by the media, takes a long time to begin "read[ing] between the lines. To see the words left unsaid" (*KC* 201), showing how deeply the people are affected by the lack of development of their critical thinking and media literacy. When Mare's speeches are broadcast later on, while she is Maven's prisoner and forced to denounce the rebels, outsiders are shown to believe her words condemning the Reds: "'And [Mare] Barrow isn't a prisoner,' I add. I saw one of her broadcasts myself when I was far upriver, when the Red girl decried the Scarlet Guard and their agenda. She wore jewels and silk and spoke of the king's kindness and mercy. 'She joined up with the Nortan king willingly'" (*BT* 229). Clearly, the people are swayed into thinking what Maven wants them to think, and it takes a significant effort from Mare and the Scarlet Guard to undo the damage enabled by his utilization of the media.

As has been shown, powers-that-be have the ability to adjust the media content to their own liking, primarily by controlling the broadcasts and the editing process. Yet, it is important to note that the spoken messages may hide even more than what is obvious. The analysis will hence focus on the use of language in dystopian media, more specifically in political speeches.

3.   "Make Lies Sound Truthful": Language Manipulation in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*

Language is one of the platforms that totalitarian dystopian governments use to establish and reaffirm their ruling positions. It helps to spread ideology and create docile, Foucauldian subjects. Language in totalitarian regimes was one of Orwell's great preoccupations. He "was particularly keen to recognize the importance to the totalitarian mind of the control of language" (Quinn x). He emphasizes this in *1984*, *Animal Farm*, and, significantly, in his 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language." According to Quinn, that particular essay "stands as a key document in the movement for 'linguistic plainness,' the effort to purge English prose of pretentiousness and cant" (265). Orwell is criticizing the trends he observes in the way English is spoken, specifically in formal, political circles. The essay is referring to the use of pretentious long words and verb, noun, conjunction, and prepositional constructions, as well as the passive voice for the sole purpose of "pad[ding] each sentence with extra syllables" (Orwell, "Politics" 130). For example, simple words are switched for phrases—*exhibit a tendency to* instead of *tend to*. By cramming in unnecessary words, a simple sentiment may be turned into an over-complex sentence, and the core meaning is thereby obscured. Often, words that are used are of foreign, Latin or Greek, origin, with the aim of sounding scientific. This particular strategy could easily be misused because it lends credibility to manipulated facts or outright lies. Finally, "stale

metaphors, similes and idioms," according to Orwell, "save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague" ("Politics" 134). This means that neither the speaker nor the audience feel that they need to analyze these general, widely applicable phrases on a deeper level to gain insight into what they actually indicate. Instead, they are accepted at face value. Orwell concludes that "[p]olitical language . . . is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" ("Politics" 139). This approach to language results in misinformation and manipulation that keep the people ignorant and pliant.

This line of thinking translates well into dystopia, in which governments do everything they can to control language and media messages. For example, in *Animal Farm*, the pigs gradually introduce changes into the initial commandments and manipulate others into thinking the original ones are still preserved and followed. In *1984*, in "probably the best known and most overt example of this kind of dystopian control of language" (Booker 80), language itself is modeled to suit the government's needs. It is designed to shrink the people's ability to express themselves, but it also works to prevent them from thinking. The novel propounds that language is inextricably intertwined with the people's ability to think. As Booker observes, "Dystopian governments tend to focus on language not only because it is a potentially powerful tool with which to control and manipulate their subjects but also because language may harbor powerfully subversive energies" (81). Thus, to be able to control people, their language must be kept in check, too. When designing Newspeak, the government in *1984* approves of or deletes words, keeping the creativity to the minimum.[2] Deleting words from a language is effective because "if you

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[2] Contradictorily, *1984* presents a language distinctly characterized by its reliance on the concrete, with all abstractions being excised from Newspeak (Spencer Kingsbury 112). At first glance, the regime here has accepted the essence of Orwell's proposals

don't have the word available for an idea, you have trouble thinking of it. Or *for* it or *against* it—it isn't quite there" (Tibbetts 164). It seems as if removing signifiers of abstract concepts removes the ability to ponder upon the signified. If the people do not have the words to express their dissent or to think about it, their dissent effectively ceases to exist. These are some of the ways that the regimes in these novels "keep control of the people by systematically denying them a sense of reality" (Tibbetts 163). Many of them are evident in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*.

3.1. "I Could Set This World on Fire and Call It Rain": Manipulation and Vagueness of Speech in the Novels

As evidenced, the manipulation of media programs entails the Hunger Games being abundantly broadcast, along with everything preceding and following them—the reaping, the interviews, the victory tour, and so on. Likewise, *Red Queen* showcases how much the editing of video footage influences the final media product. Yet, the media offer another element that is under the oppressive government's control—the televised speeches. The villains in these novels manipulate the media by overtly lying, bending the truth, and using vague language, includ-

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in "Politics and the English Language," rendering his propositions totalitarian. However, it could be said that the novel shows the other extreme of political language – the exaggerated plainness as opposed to the flowery style. The ideal is somewhere between these two sides of the spectrum. Speaking specifically about foreign words, Orwell himself hedges that his observation does not "imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning" (135). Understanding this in a more general sense, he is not in favor of blindly insisting on plainness but argues for a mindful use of language. Importantly, he underlines that words should be chosen with meaning in mind (138), highlighting that words must never obscure the meaning. From this, it is clear that Orwell's idea of direct language as presented in "Politics and the English Language" does not condone the language that removes the ability of people to think independently, as happens in *1984*. The plainness he proposes has instead been twisted into another tool of the regime.

ing clichés and foreign phrases, much in accordance with what Orwell has written about.

While the majority of media manipulation in *The Hunger Games* comes in the form of heavy editing of events and attached programs, the series also provides some examples of political speeches shown in the media. In the first two novels, the majority of the media content is in the form of entertainment—interviews and clips of the tributes. When Katniss and Peeta say something the Capitol disagrees with, they simply edit it out, and the population never sees it. In the final novel, during wartime, the media are used as a platform for the Capitol's endeavors to extinguish the rebellion: "It's always the same. War footage. Propaganda. Replaying the bombings of District 12. An ominous message from President Snow" (*M* 23). The repetitiveness instills the message that the government will ultimately prevail in the conflict with the rebels and serves to discourage the public from supporting the rebel cause. Before analyzing some of Snow's wartime speeches, it is useful to look at how the government has kept the people in check through the narrative about the Hunger Games.

The first novel opens with the introduction of the Games, and Katniss shows awareness of how they are coded "as a festivity, a sporting event" (*HG* 22). It is clear that the media is presenting the regime's version of reality. This approach is supposed to mollify the common people and make them comply with the annual bloodbath. Moreover, the Games serve as a reminder of what happens if someone dares to rebel. The government even goes a step further by trying to convince the people that they should be thankful. In line with Orwell, the language contributes to the "defence of the indefensible" (Orwell, "Politics" 136). The Capitol is trying to assure the people that the annual murders are somehow good for them: "It is both a time of repentance and a time for thanks" (*HG* 22), says the mayor of District 12 in a televised speech taking place at the Reaping. This message op-

erates on two levels. Firstly, the Games explicitly warn against any thought of rebellion. As Katniss explains, "Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. 'Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you'" (*HG* 22). Simultaneously, the Games seem designed to indoctrinate the people into liking the oppressive system that they live in. They should be thankful for the gifts that the winning District receives throughout the following year and thankful for living in such a generous country. On top of that, if the message that they are guilty is drilled into the minds of people, it follows that they must be punished. Ultimately, the regime's propaganda about the Games is also convincing the people that they should be thankful that they are graciously being punished only once a year, with only two dozen people being killed each year. Thus, by manipulating the media and holding speeches that consciously and subconsciously propagate devotion towards the government, the regime stays in power.

In *Red Queen*, the villains are notorious for bending the truth in their public speeches. As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that "[t]he truth doesn't matter. It only matters what the people believe" (*RQ* 343). In a distinctly Orwellian fashion, Maven aptly demonstrates this by saying: "The truth is what I make it. I could set this world on fire and call it rain" (*RQ* 353), echoing *1984*'s O'Brien and his statement "Whatever the Party holds to be truth, *is* truth" (261). Maven's control of the media allows him to utter a blatant lie as the unvarnished truth. While fighting for a city called Corvium, the rebels note that "King Maven has been careful with the Corvium narrative. He paints everything here as terrorism, not rebellion. Anarchy. The work of a bloodthirsty, genocidal Scarlet Guard" (*KC* 218). Significantly, the word used is *narrative*, indicating that the version of the events he presents through media is an invented story, rather than a true account of the events. Yet, much like Maven's manipulation of

media footage that he edits into a story he desires while twisting video evidence to support it, his speeches rely on truths that he inverts to fit his narrative. According to Mare, Maven is skilled at spinning "twisted half-truth . . . into propaganda" (*KC* 409). For example, when he captures her, Maven forces Mare to lie about how the Scarlet Guard is an evil organization fighting not for equality but for the supremacy of the Reds over newbloods and Silvers: "I was forced to serve them as a spy, to follow their orders, and to facilitate their infiltration of the king's court" (*KC* 89). While Mare's inner circle and the Scarlet Guard know that she was not forced into serving the Scarlet Guard, it is true that she acted as a spy. This speech works primarily to persuade the general public into siding with the regime, but it also contributes to sowing discord among other rebels, who would know she was a spy but not whether she acted out of her own will.

Finally, the villains in both *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* deliberately use vague language to sway the masses to their side. As Quinn puts it, such language "is fatally compromised by its preference for persuasion rather than truth" (267). The governing figures employ cliché phrases and purposefully veil what they mean by using a needlessly complicated register. Aimed at creating a reality they desire, these stock phrases are evident in examples from President Snow's and Queen Elara's speeches:

> We almost went extinct fighting one another before. Now our numbers are even fewer. Our conditions more tenuous. (M 29)

> Their goal is to harm innocent civilians, Silver and Red, to incite fear and hysteria. (RQ 134)

Terms such as *numbers are fewer* and *innocent civilians* are stock phrases that do not require a deeper inspection. As Orwell says, these "ready-made phrases . . . will construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent" ("Politics" 135). Clearly, these regimes and the populace, presented as a whole, are painted as

victims under the attack of villainous rebels. The sentiments are accepted uncritically by the people who hear these messages—President Snow's message is heard by all of Panem, while Queen Elara is here speaking to a gathering of nobility, but the effect is the same. The message of the regime's innocence is being conveyed and ingrained.

Besides the stock phrases, the above examples also include "pretentious" words such as *tenuous* and *incite*. As has been said, according to Orwell, such words of foreign origin serve to further hide one's meaning. The impact is heightened because the intended audience, in President Snow's case at least, probably does not know the meanings of these words. Further speeches provide more examples of words whose meanings may be completely inaccessible to the vast majority of the people listening to the media messages:

> Snow plows forward, saying that clearly the rebels are now attempting to disrupt the dissemination of information they find incriminating, but both truth and justice will reign. (*M* 149)

> We are a kingdom on the brink, threatening to shatter under the weight of war and terrorism. It is my solemn duty to prevent this from happening, and save us from the horrors of whatever anarchy the Scarlet Guard wishes to instill. . . . My own brother corrupted by the insurrectionist forces. . . . I pledge my life to eradicating the Scarlet Guard, in any way possible. (*KC* 194-95)

In his televised speeches, President Snow is speaking of *dissemination* of *incriminating* information, whereas Maven vows to *eradicate* the *anarchist*, *insurrectionist* forces. Keeping in mind that most of the people in their countries get little to no education, these Latinate words probably do not call forth a corresponding image in the people's minds. As Orwell observed, this is a strategic use of "phraseology [that] is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them" ("Politics" 136). For example, when Maven promises to eradicate the terrorists, he means he is going to kill every rebel that he can. The neat, distant *eradication* does not, to the uneducated masses, evoke im-

ages of bloodshed and executions. Yet, these words sound "important," giving credibility to President Snow and Maven, and their goals of truth, justice, and the readiness to lay down their own lives to save the country.

The eradication of rebels is doubly important because the rebels are always presented as terrorists. Like other dystopian villains who work towards a degeneration of the human capacity to think and who achieve this through the "dissemination and subversion of language" (Spencer Kingsbury 108), the *Red Queen* regime makes sure to choose their words carefully:

> *Terrorism, anarchy, bloodlust*, those are the words the broadcasts use when describing the Guard. (*GS* 164)

> Not once does he say the word *rebel* or *revolution*. The Scarlet Guard are always terrorists. Always murderers. (*KC* 195)

Following Orwell, if the word does not appear or exist, the ability to think about the concept itself is also non-existent. Therefore, the word *terrorism* is pushing the word *revolution* to the margins, and out of existence, too. Choosing to present the rebels as terrorists not only turns them into villains but also prevents others from thinking about joining the cause. Maven is insisting on the connotations of violence and unprovoked attacks instead of calling these people rebels or revolutionaries. In this way, he is obscuring the idea of rebellion and preventing people from getting the idea that there is something to rebel against in the first place. Thus, the public sees the Scarlet Guard as terrorists threatening their lives instead of as revolutionaries trying to create a better world. As has already been said, the people are prone to accepting the images and messages at face value: "[Maven] knows how to use his appearance to his advantage. . . . It works on his country, the people spoon-fed his lies and painted-on innocence. Reds and Silvers outside his court lap up the tales. . . . A juicy story, a lovely piece of gossip for people to latch on to" (*WS* 49). The media appearances,

combined with the carefully constructed speeches, lend his rule and prosecution of the rebels a sense of justice, lend his rule and prosecution of the rebels a sense of justice and legality.

4. "If We Burn, You Burn with Us": Recognition and Resistance through Media

Despite the efforts of villains in these novels and their skillful use of political language, the protagonists, Katniss and Mare, as well as their rebel groups, see through the lies and manipulations. Unlike in canonical dystopias, such as *Animal Farm* and *1984*, where the endings see the main characters resigned to the status quo, *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* allow their protagonists to become heroes. While dystopian novels warn about bleak futures, they also, especially those intended for a young adult audience, provide some hope for solving present and future problems, thus highlighting "the possibility of utopian change even in the darkest of circumstances" (Basu et al. 3). The reason for this lies in the nature of young adult literature. The aim of the young adult dystopian protagonist is "to assert their own identity by recognising and more or less successfully subverting the oppressive world around them" (Pataki Šumiga 107). Accordingly, young adult protagonists operating within a dystopian setting are able not only to recognize the truth of the regime but also to actively work to dismantle it. Seelinger Trites locates the tension in young adult novels in "discursive contrasts" and claims that the protagonists must learn "to discursively negotiate their place in the domination-repression chain of power" (52). In other words, the protagonists navigate the issues with, for example, the government and the church while learning the language of these institutions. For Katniss and Mare, this means learning and effectively using the language of the media.

To begin with, Katniss undergoes a significant change over the course of the trilogy. Initially, she is aware that the media cannot be trusted, which Latham and Hollister find peculiar (36) since the socie-

ty she lives in goes to great lengths to prevent people from developing critical thinking, as is evident from their education. However, she is not interested in uncovering the truth. She is preoccupied with the practicalities of surviving: "Whatever the truth is, I don't see how it will help me get food on the table" (*HG* 51). Katniss's situation proves how successful Panem's regime is—the less time people have to spend at leisure and the fewer means to think critically they possess, the lower the chances of rebellion. Yet, the nature of the young adult dystopian protagonist is closely connected with rebellion, specifically, fighting against the "aspects of society that seem fundamental and unchangeable" (Fitzsimmons). This means that the protagonists may learn from the regime itself and take advantage of it. Writing about Katniss in particular, Kelly Welzner notes that her knowledge of the inner workings of the oppressive system, the "panopticons, disciplinary structures that use surveillance and spectacle for control and punishment, allows her to manipulate and exploit those very mechanisms" (148). Katniss is aware of the "micro surveillance" (Murray and Ouellette 5), which is ubiquitous in reality television, where the contestants are constantly filmed, even when they do not know it. Her knowledge of Panem's use of media enables Katniss to craft her own image, making a point to control her facial expressions, general demeanor, and behavior in the arena (*HG* 42, 49, 220).

Initially, she manipulates the media image only to ensure her survival in the Games. By pandering to the Capitol and audiences' wishes, Katniss establishes herself as the most popular contestant in the Games and a likely winner, thus escaping death in the arena. Later, Katniss's use of media evolves into a rebellion against that very system. This is evident in the scene that is arguably the turning point for Katniss and her compliance with the world order (Wezner 155)—the death of her friend Rue. Rue is a young girl whose demise devastates Katniss and propels her on the path of standing up against the Capi-

tol: "I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (*HG* 286). Aware that the cameras must show the dead tributes being lifted from the Arena, Katniss arranges flowers around Rue, making it clear that the two girls were friends despite the Capitol trying to pit them against one another by placing them in the Hunger Games.

Rue's funeral flowers mark Katniss's rebellion, but also inspire a more widespread movement against the government. At this moment, Katniss is perhaps not aware of the revolutionary potential of her actions, but her act is clearly that of defiance. As in other young adult dystopias, a "small teenage rebellion becomes the spark for a larger societal rebellion that eventually brings down the ruling power" (Fitzsimmons). Following this, other contestants follow Katniss's lead and attempt to use the Capitol media against the Games and the system. During interviews before the next Hunger Games, the victors join hands in an overt show of unity in the face of Capitol, which wishes to see them slaughter each other (*CF* 311). In an attempt to prevent more damage, the cameras stop transmitting the feed, tacitly admitting defeat.

Over the course of the rest of the series, the people of Panem witness the propaganda war between the Capitol and District 13. That is, the war between the regime and the rebels is waged not only literally but also through propaganda, with "both sides realizing that control over this medium of communication means control over reality" (Wezner 153). While recognizing that all warring sides need to utilize such language during times of duress to pacify, encourage, or influence people, Orwell "was never very happy with the compromises with truth and the verbal trickery that he was sometimes asked to employ" while working for the BBC during the Second World War (Quinn 266). Similarly, Katniss, accepting the role of a figurehead for

the revolution, is not blinded by idealism and actually recognizes the same modes of media presentation in the rebel District 13 that marked the Capitol programs: "They have a whole team of people to make me over, dress me, write my speeches, orchestrate my appearances—as if that doesn't sound horribly familiar—and all I have to do is play my part" (*M* 12). Moreover, the entirety of the propaganda videos is "based on a fundamental lie . . . one that Katniss is aware of from the start: she is no rebel leader, even though she plays one for the cameras, Coin reserving all real power for herself" (Henthorne). The government of District 13 does not hesitate to use the same methods of distorting and airbrushing reality into an image that suits their own needs of creating a popular figure who will appeal to the masses and prompt them into a rebellion. To achieve this, Katniss is given lines to say in propaganda videos. Yet, when she tries to deliver the proscribed slogan "People of Panem, we fight, we dare, we end our hunger for justice" (*M* 80), she ultimately fails because of the stilted phrasing. It is unclear what the rebels want people to do, where this fight should take place, or what they should dare to do. The phrase *hungering for justice* is both a cliché and too vague because there is no clear objective or an outline of what this justice should look like. The issue is solved when "the stale line agonized over by the rebels' team" is replaced by Katniss's "rallying cry born of her outrage" (Eskin 187). Akin to Orwell's recommendation to let "meaning choose the word, and not the other way about" ("Politics" 138), Katniss, in the spur of the moment and while at the front lines and not in a production studio, comes up with a genuinely moving motto: "You can torture us and bomb us and burn out districts to the ground, but do you see that? Fire is catching! And if we burn, you burn with us!" (*M* 119). Katniss is drawing on real experiences of torture and bombing, and, by pointing to the real battlefield behind her, she is pointing out the truth. Fire is indeed catching, and the metaphor for revolution

is not a veiled, obscure one, but a palpable one. Therefore, while both groups rely on similar modes of disseminating messages and on convincing people to join the cause, the general public is finally exposed to more than one narrative and is able to decide whom to side with. Moreover, Katniss's honesty and the simplicity of her pleas largely contribute to District 13 being able to win people over. Ultimately, it is Katniss's care for the rebel cause, as well as her clever use of media and language, that ignites the rebellion and continues to fan its flames.

As is the case with Katniss at the beginning of her story, "the protagonist's main concern is with the survival of her or his closest friends and family" (Fitzsimmons). Likewise, Mare's primary focus is to keep her family afloat financially and to somehow avoid being conscripted for the perpetual war with the Lakelands, Norta's neighboring country. When she picks the pocket of Cal, the Nortan prince, who then offers her a job at the palace (*RQ* 46), this measure is simultaneously a way out of financial ruin and out of conscription. Yet, Mare's time at the court swiftly reveals her powers as well as the operations of the rebel group. Her deal with the king ensures that her brothers will be brought back home from the frontlines and her best friend, Kilorn, will not be conscripted (*RQ* 88). Nonetheless, Mare recognizes that her personal struggles are only a fraction of the injustice suffered by the Reds, who are pointlessly dying in a war between Norta and the Lakelands that was engineered to keep the population numbers down and make the people obey. Mare is thus set on the course of rebellion, as well. Despite her new proximity to the Silvers, which allows her an insight into the truth and the extent of their manipulations, Mare is not yet free of the political manipulations. She believes Maven is on her side, but he then betrays her, as explained above. While inside the palace and serving as the spy for the Scarlet Guard, Mare's acts are limited to the acknowledgement of media lies. She joins the manipulation in so much that she goes along with the pretense of being a Silver

noble called Mareena, but she does not make use of the media other than that. Because of this, her ability to navigate media and politics does not seem to be as proficient as Katniss's. Still, it should be kept in mind that Mare's position is, at this point, vastly different from Katniss's, as her primary function is to be a spy. Had she overtly rebelled and disobeyed during media events, her status as a spy, as well as the whole rebellion, would have been imperiled. Only after Mare and Cal escape the execution, can she, as the first publicly acknowledged newblood in Norta, serve as a figurehead of the revolution, just like Katniss. From then on, there is no need to manipulate the language or the media, but rather, there is a need to tell the simple truth and expose Maven's side of the story as a carefully fabricated narrative. Unlike in *The Hunger Games*, the rebels' speeches in *Red Queen* do not use vague language that obscures the meaning. Instead, the speech written for Mare is straightforward and speaks directly to the viewers' experiences: "Unlike the Silver kings, we see no division between ourselves and other Reds. We will fight for you, and we will die for you, if it means a new world. Put down the ax, the shovel, the needle, the broom. Pick up the gun. Join us. Fight. Rise, Red as the dawn" (*GS* 400). The speech communicates its message in simple terms familiar to the people, unambiguously inviting them to fight, telling them how to do that and with what goal in mind. The slogan *Rise, red as the dawn* has been established early on during the rebellion, and it too conveys the clear message that the Red-blooded people should rise up in order for a new era (day) to begin. It could be argued that the language of the Scarlet Guard is so accessible because they differ from the government in District 13. In *The Hunger Games*, the latter is revealed to also be corrupt, and it makes sense that their way of using the media is closely aligned with the Capitol's mode of media manipulation. In contrast, in *Red Queen*, the Scarlet Guard keeps a moral high ground by

never turning evil, and their speeches exhibit their honesty and dedication to the cause.

5. Conclusion

The analysis has shown that in both *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* the media and political speeches play major roles in upholding the ruling, oppressive regime. First of all, the media are a platform through which people are indoctrinated into the desired ideology. The effect is heightened when the media are completely controlled by the party in power, which is the case in these dystopian novels. Put simply, until the rebel groups appear, the media shows only the government-approved programs, designed and edited to perpetuate the status quo. Relating to media consumption, the education given to children in dystopias is under strict governmental rule, and historical fact is either obscured or manipulated. Furthermore, schooling does not encourage critical thinking, which means that most people in dystopias are not equipped to interpret media messages. The lack of the apparatus to read between the lines turns the vast majority into docile subjects. These subjects will uncritically consume the images represented in the media. These images include the narrative of the Hunger Games spectacle being a time of thanks, the feigned relationships, such as the one between Katniss and Peeta, an imaginary lost noblewoman played by a common Red girl, or the fabricated story of how a king was murdered by his firstborn. The people also accept what is said in political speeches and do not examine what the offered linguistic expression may be hiding. Both series show that language can be used as an extension of the government, which employs it to shape people's thoughts and prevent rebellion by keeping them misinformed and not allowing room for original and critical thinking. The governments, thus, model their language to suit their needs. In addition, both of these dystopian series reflect the postulates about manipulation and

vagueness of language as observed by George Orwell. The oppressive governments sometimes use language unfamiliar to the masses that is intended to keep them in the dark. Sometimes they fall back on cliché phrases, the repetition of which invites no further examination of what has been said.

Nevertheless, not everyone is lulled into complacency. The protagonists of *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* are capable of thinking for themselves, and they do not passively embrace "alternative facts" that are the product of language misuse and abuse. Katniss and Mare learn to navigate the media messages and question the regimes, which inevitably leads them to rebel against the system. To make their messages reach the wider populace, they usurp the very platform used by the oppressive system—the media. In coining their messages, people dedicated to the rebel cause strip the political language of its vagueness and complexity, reaching instead for the directness and simplicity hailed by Orwell. This use of language is ultimately shown to be far more effective, as the regimes are overthrown in favor of a new, honest, and fair order.

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The Representation of Trauma via Remediation: Digitality in Jonathan Safran Foer's Print Novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

Abstract

This article addresses the question of how the contemporary novel evolved, modified, and adjusted to media-rich environments and how it engaged in confabulation with electronic textuality. This inquiry is part of a larger study that recognizes an interdependent exchange of literature and other media, which complement one another in a dynamic and vitalizing process of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 11) while emphasizing intermedial reflexivity from screen to paper. The focus of this study is on the influence of the digital culture on print media in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), in which the author experiments with printed textuality by incorporating the textual, the visual, the graphic, and even the kinetic by using digital affordances that are possible in print. The paper argues that as the mediums in Foers's novel interpenetrate in a synergistic interplay between language, visual elements, and codes, they capture the unspeakability of trauma. To this end, it explores intricate ways in which attention-grabbing reproductions of photographs, unconventional typesetting, and other graphic devices made possible via digital technologies augment the comprehension of trauma tied to the 9/11 catastrophe recounted in the novel.

Keywords: Remediation, trauma, digitality, Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly* Close, 9/11

The last two decades have generated groundbreaking research in intermediation (the interplay between speech, code, writing, and human and machine cognition), adaptation (the interaction between literature and cinema), multimodality (multiple modes of communication in a text, including music, color, language, and vision), and remediation (open-ended influences and interrelationships between media). This article takes interest in the fourth category, taking as its starting point Jonathan Safran Foer's rhetorical question: "What if novelists were . . . willing to borrow [from other media]?" (qtd. in Hudson). It analyzes how print literature is informed and reshaped by new media technologies by focusing on the representation of trauma in Foer's print novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), marked by an ingenious blending of language and graphic images. My argument is formulated around the idea that, since this novel spotlights a highly visual catastrophe, Foer's mixture of textual, visual, and graphic configurations offers a much better insight into trauma than each of these modes would do separately.

This paper acknowledges Marshall McLuhan's postulate that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (7). The study is grounded in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of media interaction, according to which all media partake in reciprocal remediation by honoring, rivaling, and revamping other media, whereby modern mass media do not dispose of earlier media forms but instead reshape and animate them (Bolter and Grusin 15). Moreover, Samuel Weber's and Katherine Hayles's concepts of media as dynamic processes in relentless relation among themselves expose the indeterminable divisibility of media, for they are continually combining, mutating, and reappearing in different forms (Weber 29; Hayles, *Electronic* 160). Multimodality theories underline the importance of communicative practice and interactivity, as well (see also Kress and Van Leeuwen; Bateman). In the same vein, W. J. T. Mitchell's "picture theory"

established that "all media are mixed media," as there are always other sensory and cognitive mechanisms involved in decoding various semiotic modes in a single act of communication or representation (monomodal artefacts) so that multimodality is a "natural" cognitive act of meaning-making (*Picture Theory* 5; 94–95). All these theories corroborate the idea that media are in permanent transmutation and interaction as "the boundaries of all kinds have become permeable to the supposed other" (Hayles, My Mother 242) and "the image/text problem is not just something constructed 'between' the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an unavoidable issue within the individual arts and media" (Hallet 27), while the constantly morphing digital medium and its widespread accessibility make it an exemplary model for rethinking about textuality at large (see also McGann; Manovich; Stefans; Hayles). Accordingly, these theories expose "the book as a multimedia format, one informed by and connected to digital technologies" (Pressman 465).

The rise of digitality and the pronouncements about the end of print have had a paradoxical consequence for they have provoked a pervasive interest in the history of the book, "proclaiming the power of these bound bundles of print and paper" (Pressman 465), proving that "digitality has not endangered print books" (Hayles, *Postprint* 5). Electronic textuality has become a part of modern reality, engaging various users with "its flexibility, variability, nonlinearity, interactivity, and indeterminacy" (Sandor 144). It features animated texts that could alter the visual with just one click or is programmed by an invisible code-text to change, which could perform other maneuvers impossible for print novels. Thus, one of the responses to the attractiveness of digital affordances has been the interest of young authors to experiment with various forms of digital technologies in their printed textualities. A number of novelists, such as Mark Danielewski, Salvador Plascencia, Dave Eggers, W. G. Seabald, Jonathan Safran Foer, Steven

Hall, and Graham Rawle took a leap of faith and experimented with various forms of electronic textualities, applicable through comparable devices in print, creating compelling verbal-visual constellations in their print novels.

This analysis focuses on Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* to demonstrate how the print novel has profited from digital contexts and how nonverbal forms of meaning-making such as photographs, flipbooks, images made of words, die-cut holes, colors, handwritten letters, diagrams, etc. support the representations of trauma in literature. Psychologists and neuroscientists tell us that the strategies employed for expressing and understanding emotional responses to trauma are often compromised and restrictive, meaning that trauma's trials and tribulations are generally beyond description (see Stamm and Friedman; Foa et al.), which is why representations of trauma should be as unsettling as the events in question. As Walter Ben Michaels argues, when traumatic (historical) events are conceptualized in a written form, the representation can distort the unspeakability of trauma, which "requires a way of transmitting not only the normalizing knowledge of the horror but the horror itself" (141). This is why visual elements in combination with linguistic skillfulness and other multimodal practices work so well in this novel.

Laura Mulvey explains that "(t)rauma leaves a mark on the unconscious, a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace of an original event," linking the photograph as an affordance of the unspeakable (65). Foer drew from digital technologies, molding the graphic surface of his texts (visible also in his novel *Tree of Codes*), "struggling to find the words for an experience so complex that it mocks the black and white simplicity of printed paper" (Baer, "Introduction" 2), as he tried to represent something as "inarticulable and unrepresentable" as trauma and attempted to expose "that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of mean-

ing" (Young 667). If it is true that to be traumatized means to be "possessed by an image" (Codde 5) and if, rather than with respectful silence towards horrifying events such as 9/11, the Holocaust, and the firebombing of Dresden, the traumatized choose to share their experiences with empathic audiences (LaCapra, *Writing History* 47), then the possibility of expressing trauma via graphic rather than solely verbal articulation should be validated as a constructive possibility in narrative expression. The psychological fragmentation of the subject can certainly be expressed in language "through ellipsis, indirection and detour, or fragmentation and deformation" (Schwab 107), but adding arresting visual elements delivers the traumatic memories more accurately, rendering the subject's (and possibly the reader's) exposure more embodied, allowing for a reenactment of the experience.

Foer's novel depicts the protagonists that navigate through trauma of a profoundly visual tragedy, so that its subject matter already entails visuality. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is one of the first fictional responses to the catastrophe of 9/11, featuring graphic elements as fully integrated visual items which articulate what words alone could not, displaying remediation, particularly the mark of the digital in print textuality. Foer explained in two interviews that "to speak about what happened on September 11 requires a visual language" (qtd. in Hudson); "[s]o [he] really wanted to explicitly look at those things in the book, not only through the writing, which [he] tried to make as visual and direct as [he] could, but also through these images" (qtd. in Mudge). Thus, the author tackled mental and visual "snapshots" of trauma and the progression of anguish of several characters, drawing attention to the limitations of language in portraying and documenting trauma in the aftermath of an extremely violent and disruptive event.

9/11 has received extensive media coverage, featuring constant repetitions of the Towers being struck and memories/images thereof

haunting the public. The extent of such a visual catastrophe is substantiated by recent theories in trauma studies that show how cataclysmic experiences register as photographic images, whereby moments experienced empirically by the distressed psyche and those captured mechanically by photography are correlated (see also Baer, *Spectral*). Mulvey acknowledges how both "the mark of trauma" and "the mark of light" (cinema and photography) inscribe "an unprecedented reality into its representations of the past," pointing to an original event that "needs to be deciphered retrospectively across delayed time," so that "[t]his literal link between trauma and the photograph enable[s] an element of the unspeakable" (9; 66). Accordingly, to capture the tragic event and communicate the unspeakability of trauma as effectively as possible, Foer drew from the affordances of digital technologies by using attention-grabbing reproductions of photographs, unconventional typesetting, and other graphic devices.

Not all the critics have responded to these visual elements with enthusiasm. Some of them even labeled them as "gimmickry" (Meyers) or "gimmicks" (Upchurch), to which Foer responded that "September 11 had such a strong visual component, [as] the most visually documented event in human history," which is why he "really just wanted to tell the story as forcefully as [he] could," using "flamboyant" images that parallel the main character's imagination (qtd. in Whitney). Foer's "borrowing" from other media is necessary to express trauma's peculiar visuality, the urgency of the image to engage in acts of signification beyond solely verbal expression. Ross Watkins explains how Foer "incorporate[d] the image as an integrated element, contributing meaning over mere 'gimmickry'" (Watkins 107).

In this particular novel, remediation practices are visible in various forms as one medium is represented in another. For example, the mark of the digital is featured through a gradual reduction of text, using Photoshop, where lines are crunched closer together until the last

page is almost solid black (Foer 280–84), and when Oskar's grandfather, Thomas, who does not speak due to trauma he experienced during Dresden bombing, uses numerical code—a performance of digital computers—to communicate (Foer 269–71), and it is clearly detectable in the fuzzy resolution of the falling man images, which Oskar complains about (Foer 257), and on the distorted photograph on page 246, which exposes surrealistic photomontage, all of which indicates that the novel is duplicating digital images and imitating electronic text (Hayles, *Electronic* 170–71). For the first two examples, Katherine Hayles notes how they imply "that language has broken down under the weight of trauma and become inaccessible not only to Thomas but the reader as well" (*Electronic* 166). Complementing verbalization with visualization, the author was able to do what Alan Gibbs deems as necessary "to transmit rather than represent" trauma because "as readers of trauma texts we desire affect and emotional response" (28), which is precisely what those images provoked.

The overpowering influence of images, specifically the ones that allude to 9/11 and archetypal angst, is visible as the main protagonist, a nine-year-old boy Oskar, whose father died when the Twin Towers collapsed, experiences the world via various forms of media. He keeps a "scrapbook of everything that happened" (Foer 42) to him that consists of assorted photographs, sheets with colored signatures, the reproduction of his fingerprints, a paper plane design he made with his father, etc., which are included as digital reproductions of photographs in the novel. Some of the alarming images do not appear visually in the text, but the boy still mentions them: ". . . a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, that actress getting a blowjob from her normal boyfriend, a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq, the place on the wall where a famous stolen painting used to hang" (Foer 42). Most of the images are contextualized and in direct relation with Oskar's story, which supports the

reader's sensation of direct witnessing as visual counterparts create an analogy with real events of 9/11. We must keep in mind that the 9/11 attack was an exceptionally visual incident, and Oskar was born into a highly visual culture, which makes him susceptible to manipulation from various actors via mass media, shaping the way he makes sense of the world. He keeps his pictures in a booklet that he named "*Stuff That Happened To Me*" (Foer 42), which bespeaks not only that "in the age of the spectacle, the consumption of images counts as experience" (Gleich 168) but also "the passive manner in which Americans allow images to colonize [their] daily lives" (Gleich 168).

The image of a falling man, which Foer narrates through Oskar and launches via full page photographs (Foer 59; 62; 205) and as a flipbook at the end of the book, was widely used by the media and has become an archetype of the 9/11 attack, which changed the way we perceive the world. What before the crash of the Towers would have been an innocent photograph of a falling/jumping cat, or a descending rollercoaster cart, or an airplane design (Foer 191; 148; 56)—"ambiguously evocative of both a child's craft and the craft involved in executing the twin towers attack" (Watkins 111)—and even of birds flying (Foer 166–67), which the author implemented as images within his novel, now alludes to the catastrophe, indicating the still-lingering presence of 9/11. A digital black and white image of a flock of birds features on the cover of the 2006 Penguin Books edition of the novel, as a second frontispiece photograph, and as a double page spread to emphasize powerful emotional associations with the falling man and post-traumatic stress. These blurry images are highly engaging digital reproductions connected to the trauma narrated in the story.

A particularly captivating effect of the oversized double page spread of birds is felt when Oskar and his elderly neighbor, Mr. Black, who has just turned on his hearing aids (after a long silence) experience a close encounter with a flock of birds. The scene is narrated as,

"out of nowhere, a flock of birds flew by the window, extremely fast and incredibly close" (Foer 165), after which comes the birds' image to stress the visual effect of the event. This is the first mention of the "loud and close" analogy in the story, emphasized in the title of the novel, and the old man starts crying promptly. He has not been outside of his building in twenty-four years and has now decided to accompany Oskar across New York in the boy's search for the other Blacks (one of whom Oskar hopes has the lock that matches the key he discovered in his father's closet). Mr. Black's weeping (Foer 168) is connected to his ability to finally hear the voices and noises of his surroundings after the self-inflicted silence, which sheltered him both from the cacophony and agonies of the world and from a human sense of hearing the world's subtler or sublime sounds and movements. His unwillingness to experience or hear the world around him echoes Oskar's trauma due to 9/11 exposure and the loss of his father as well as the grandfather's agony and muteness as a consequence of the loss of his fiancé, Anna, during the fire-bombing of Dresden, and now the death of his son in the 9/11 attacks. In the midst of this narrative, the blurred black and white visual of the swirling birds engages the reader with the imagery of the falling man from the Northern Tower via unmistakable associative linkage. The author underlines this connection at the beginning of the novel when Oskar considers flying as a means of rescue via his invention, a birdseed shirt, for "there are so many times when you need to make a quick escape, but humans don't have their own wings, or not yet, anyway, so what about a birdseed shirt?" (Foer 2).

The carnage of monumental proportions is again associated through the birds' death imagery when Oskar talks to Ruth Black, disclosing how "'[t]en thousand birds die every year from smashing into windows,' because [he]'d accidentally found that fact when [he] was doing some research about the windows in the Twin Towers" (Foer

250). The same quote reveals how exposed Oskar is to the Internet and what miscellaneous facts and photos he can find, including inappropriate, distressing, and violent materials. Searching for information about his father's death, Oskar learns that a lot of facts can be found on foreign sites, so he had "to go to a translator program and find out how to say things in different languages" because "there was all sorts of stuff they weren't showing here, even though it happened here" (Foer 256). Foer draws attention to how the American media, due to public complaints about the *Falling Man* photograph by Richard Drew in Associated Press (Junod) and mobilized by government authorities (Mitchell, *Cloning Terror* 6), modified collective opinions and imageries by eliminating certain visual contents from circulation and steering the public to what they deemed acceptable or legitimate materials and in tune with their political agendas, which makes Oskar "incredibly angry . . . because it happened *here*, and happened to *me*, so shouldn't it be *mine*?" (Foer 256). As Michell notes, "images have always played a key role in politics, warfare, and the shape of history," which is particularly striking in our age, with the availability of digital media in almost every corner of the world, "especially the combination of digital imaging and the spread of the Internet . . . along with the speed of their circulation" (*Cloning Terror* 2). But Foer's observation about how Oskar needs to "translate" information in order to understand what happened "to him" also speaks of the fallibility of language to express trauma and how individual reactions to and perceptions of trauma are different, as are interpretations, translations, and representations thereof. The visual medium is maybe more truthful than the verbal, even though the visual is also manipulated by whoever is behind the camera as s/he decides on camera shot angles and can project the subject's vulnerability, supremacy, and any specific point of view, thus making the image of reality subjective. According to Mitchell, in the era of the War on Terror, "the accelerated production and circulation

of images in a host of new media . . . ushered a 'pictorial turn' into public consciousness" (*Cloning Terror* 2). It is beyond doubt that "9/11 was a seismic cultural event with far-reaching cultural implications" (McSweeney 5), and Richard Drew's photograph of the falling man, "perhaps the most powerful image of despair at the beginning of the twenty-first century" (Thompson 63), was represented and re-produced by numerous authors and artists to serve as a spectrum through which prevailing perspectives of the event are revealed and naturalized.

This exposure to or omnipresence of images in the digital age, and the reason why Foer chose multimodal narration through remedi-ation of digital media, is further problematized in the novel when Os-kar finds a video of the falling man on a Portuguese site (as it could not be found on sites in the USA). He "print[s] out the frames and examine[s] them extremely closely" to check if they contain an image of his father as he needs "to know how he died" so he "can stop in-venting how he died" (Foer 257; 256). Unable to identify his father because the photo's resolution is very poor, Oskar magnifies the pix-els until they are "so big that [the figure in the photo] stops looking like a person" (Foer 257). Drawing on Mitchell's view of images as vi-tal, animated signs, Gleich observes that "[d]espite the lifelike attrib-utes of the image, . . . the digital medium cannot tell Oskar anything new about the details of his father's death" (168). Similarly, Oskar's grandmother wishes to locate her son and watches the footage from 9/11 repeatedly, coming to a dead end as she observes: "The same pictures over and over. / Planes going into buildings. / Bodies falling. / People waving shirts out of high windows" (Foer 230). The same lines (with a few variations of the fourth sentence) are repeated on the same page five times, one sentence beneath another as written tran-script, echoing dreadful images she observes as if in trance and in vain for the footage will not tell her anything about her son. Gleich indi-

cates that the viewer's compulsion to watch bodies and buildings fall-
ing "highlight[s] the neurotic nature of the repetitive instinct" (170).
In the same way, Foer's photographs of the falling man and birds fly-
ing revoke the trauma associated with the event. The remediation of
photography, television, film, and the digital medium makes the trau-
ma more operational, visible, or experiential for the reader, but it does
not illuminate the event itself in the sense of meaning-making.

However, the grandmother's and the public's recurrent watching
may also be the sign of incredulity as if they/we wanted to confirm
that the cataclysm actually happened. The event seems unreal in its
apparently filmic ambiance as if it were the spectacle of terrorism on
film. Hathaway draws attention to "the irony inherent in this juxtapo-
sition of cinematic display and genuine tragedy," in which the aesthet-
ics of the image and the terror "form the foundation of the standard
narrative for those who 'experienced' the events only via television"
(48). But apart from seemingly unreal images of the actual destruction
of the towers, the looped TV-sequences of 9/11 included the moment
they were in one piece, making space for an illusion that the "intact"
moment can be consecrated indefinitely. Hathaway notes how "[o]nly
in the realm of the visual—where images can be recycled and replayed
in a continuous loop—is the fantasy of turning back time possible"
(44). A similar idea is presented by Foer on page 246, where the read-
ers are shown a photograph of people in a building, which demon-
strates how digital technology allows editing, special effects, and ma-
nipulation of photography. The photograph in question does not just
use cropping or lighting adjustments but it also illuminates people as
shadows, adding one transparent image of a man blurred and super-
imposed over another. Even though the pages around the photograph
describe Oskar's adventure at the Empire State Building, it is clear to
the reader that this image is hinting at the towers and what they used
to be, with crowded corridors and offices that are now destroyed, il-

luminating ghost-like images of people that once walked these hall-ways.

Graphic details of horror were immediately broadcast and re-peatedly aired across America and in many countries, which provoked identification with the victims, heightened anxiety, and caused a large-scale stress response. The whole world was shocked as the "fantas-matic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality" as if the Hol-lywood disaster movies from the nineties came true (Žižek 16). Žižek's take on how the real and the fantastic or fictional merge corre-sponds to the effect of intermediation, for media mirror our world as much as our reality has become the reflection of the media; only the images of 9/11 were real, and they shook and transformed the world. Foer's novel demonstrates how media and various forms of remedia-tion of 9/11 images try to keep intact what Baudrillard and Valentin call "the unforgettable fulguration of images" and "the gigantic abre-action to the event itself and people's fascination with it" (403-404). This is discernible in the grandmother's inability to turn away from the TV screen, mirroring millions of actual viewers, and in the repro-duction of digital images scattered throughout the novel to demon-strate how 9/11 still lingers from the shadows, including the film-like progression of photos of the falling man, remediated by the flip-book—an old paper-based technique.

The World Trade Center was the epicenter of capitalist macro-cosm and technological development, and the Twins were among the tallest buildings in the world; as a result, its destruction meant visibility and received unprecedented media coverage as it was aired in real time. Real-life footage acquired almost fictional dimensions via live and repetitious streaming, previously experienced only through Hol-lywood disaster movies, as "[t]he unthinkable" (Žižek 16) was now happening in the USA and thus became even more "traumatic be-

cause it confront[ed] spectators with a new definition of the possible—the sudden and dramatic reversal of the safety-danger spacetimes. The West [was] now a sufferer and a witness of suffering" (Chouliaraki 175). This duality of the real and the fictive is also problematized through remediation as the infiltration of Oskar's amateur and unfocused photographs of people and places in New York (scattered throughout the novel) is associated with the documentary footage from 9/11, when materials were unframed and uncorrected, often taken with an unsteady camera.

Turning back to the spectators who were unable to switch off their televisions on the day of the tragedy, "frozen" in the repetitive looping of the event, we should have in mind that the differentiation between the embodied and the virtual reality is no longer viable. In Tanner's words, "As technology enables us to inhabit preestablished networks of connection regardless of the physical space our bodies occupy, the grafting of digital imagery onto sensuous apprehension extends and destabilizes our experience of embodiment" (63). Tanner acknowledges that in contemporary image culture, the immediacy of digital affordances enables the disintegration of phenomenological differentiation between the virtual and the real, between immediate experience, "bodily proximity," and the mediated, remote experience, so that secondhand spectators experience trauma they did not personally endure (62). This is what Foer aimed to accomplish with his falling man photos and other graphic affordances, "[i]nvoking the cinematic, captured through the photographic, accessed on the Internet" (Tanner 61) because visual language helps to represent the unspeakability of trauma and enables "an experience for a reader to imaginatively suffer" (Kowalewski 203).

Suffering and other symptoms of trauma, such as paralysis, are represented via grandmother's reluctance to turn away from the screen, with grandfather's incapacity to speak, and through Oskar's

inability to answer the phone when his father is calling from the burning Tower. Michell notes that "[t]error is a form of affect that tends to express itself as paralysis, the 'deer in the headlights' syndrome" (*Cloning Terror* 6), which is exactly what happened to Oskar. He came home earlier from school on "the worst day" (Foer 68) and found four messages on the answering machine, all from his father, who attempted to hear from his family. When the phone rings again, Oskar is so traumatized with what is happening, as he heard in previous recordings "people in the background screaming and crying. And you can hear glass breaking" (Foer 301), that he is paralyzed and unable to answer the phone, even though his father assumes that Oskar is home and addresses him in particular: "It's . . . dad. . . . You hear me?" (Foer 280). Later, Oskar re-plays the fifth message to his grandmother's tenant, not knowing at the time that Thomas is his grandfather. The readers observe a block of imperfect, capital letter text with irregular spacing (Foer 280), which imitates the flawed and noisy answering machine, the last recording of Oskar's father. At that point, the readers observe how Thomas's narration becomes infused with trauma, clearly visible in graphic changes in the text, which run for several pages (Foer 281–84). According to Watkins, by condensing leading and tracking, Foer manipulates typographical elements to the point where "the legibility (perception) and readability (comprehension) of the words and what they are generally understood to signify are obliterated, instead signifying collectively as one image" (110). The critic further argues "that words can prove inadequate in their communicative and expressive purposes particularly in the articulation of traumatic memory," which is why Foer "incorporat[ed] the image as an integrated element" (Watkins 110; 107). The lines appear on top of one another, and there is less and less space between them. "Crunched closer and closer together," they are illegible, and the last page is almost entirely black, demonstrating "[t]he recursive dynamic between

print and digital technologies" as Foer engages "digital technologies on multiple levels while still insisting on [the novel's] performance as print text" (Hayles, *Electronic* 170; 163).

Katherine Hayles has done an elaborate study of how this and some other novels profited from digital technologies. She used specific theoretical strategies of *imitation* (of the digital techniques) and *intensification* (of print-based materiality) to explain how electronic textuality affects print textuality (*Electronic* 162). As Hayles explains, in this particular scene, when Oskar and Thomas listen to the recording from the answering machine,

> The text, moving from imitation of a noisy machine to an intensification of ink marks durably impressed on paper, uses this print-specific characteristic as a visible indication of the trauma associated with the scene, as if the marks as well as the language were breaking down under the weight of the characters' emotions. At the same time, the overlapping lines are an effect difficult to achieve with letter press printing or a typewriter but a snap with Photoshop, so digital technology leaves its mark on these pages as well. (*Electronic* 169)

The next example of how the representation of trauma is strengthened via remediation—using the numeric representations of electronic text in print—is the scene when Thomas arrives in New York and calls his wife, whom he has not talked to for forty years. He left her when she was pregnant, unwilling to witness the birth of his child into a world that brought him so much pain, and he never met his son, who now died in the 9/11 attack. Thomas lost his speech due to trauma when his fiancé, Anna, (who was the grandmother's sister) and their unborn child, died in Dresden during the fire-bombing. After the event, he married Anna's sister and they moved to the USA, but when she got pregnant, he returned to Germany. Four decades later, mesmerized with grief and guilt, Thomas comes for his son's funeral, seeking some kind of atonement and reconciliation with his wife (Foer 269). Since Thomas does not speak, he breaks his "life down into let-

ters," meaning that he uses the telephone's keypad where each digit from two through nine stands for any one of three alphabetical letters, and presses keys to create words and sentences that his wife cannot understand, for she only hears "beeps" (Foer 269).

Hayles explains that Thomas applied a "one-way algorithm" code, which is rather easy to construct, but challenging and at times impossible to decrypt as the reader can easily get lost with the possibility of combinations, especially if the message is lengthy and this one is (*Electronic* 166). The question is why Foer used this incomprehensible code because previously, even when Thomas could not speak, the reader knew what he was thinking as the narrative revealed it. With two and a half pages of numbers and occasional exclamation marks or question marks, the reader is helpless to decipher the meaning; we just know that Thomas laid bare his soul. The connotations of this episode are quite clear; trauma cannot be faithfully enlightened. It is a lasting and incomprehensible process. Symptomatic of deeply traumatized people is that "the injury cannot be healed: it extends through time," and some survivors "have returned mute," as Primo Levi acknowledges in relation to the Holocaust survivors (14; 70), which could apply to the Dresden fire-bombing and the 9/11 tragedy as equally atrocious experiences that include silence, denial, and evasion. Thomas feels burdened with pain, remorse, and culpability; he is unable to communicate his trauma person to person so he makes a phone call and uses a code that he knows his wife would not understand for she does not even know who is calling, but he is "trying to try again" (Foer 269). LaCapra explains that "giving testimony may itself be crucial to working through trauma and its symptoms," as telling one's story to emphatic audience should be healing ("Trauma" 381). Thomas is finally willing to share his feelings, but the traumatic emotional response to the horrendous experience is so intense that he chose indirect communication. The numerical code thus represents the inca-

pacity of language to express trauma, and "what initially appears as imitation of the numerical representation of language, the modus operandi of the digital computer, turns into intensification of techniques native to the print novel" (Hayles, *Electronic* 168). Although there is a move toward network aesthetics, opportune in the age where digitality has become a culturally dominant mode, underneath this emergent electronic textuality, the readers observe a nostalgic gesture toward print-based trajectory, intensified by these remediations.

The last pages of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* disclose remediation via a series of illustrations made into a flipbook, "so that an illusion of movement can be imparted by flipping them rapidly" ("Flip-book"), revealing an animated scene and extending a spirit of corporeal performance. Morley argues that "the September 11 terrorist attacks engendered a new form of narrative realism, a form of realism born of a frustration with the limits of language as an effective and representative tool" (295). This is the reason why Foer experimented in his printed novel by incorporating the visual and even the kinetic with the flipbook trajectory. Kinetic interaction is anticipated for the reader needs to flip the last fifteen pages to produce the meaning. Consequently, the meaning-making demands corporeal interaction, which is particularly distressing since it involves the photo of the falling man in the reader's hands, and we know there were real people jumping from the Towers. However, after printing out the images from the video of the falling man, Oskar reversed the order so that the man appears to ascend. Astonishingly, the flipbook reverses the man's actual death: "Finally, I found the pictures of the falling body. Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody. I ripped the pages out of the book. I reversed the order, so that the last one was first, and the first was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky" (Foer 325).

This scene reverses time and negates the tragedy. Huehls argues that "[w]hile this reversal is clearly just so much wishful thinking, its temporal form—the flip-book's cinematic, real-time performance of motion—proves crucial to Oskar's healing process. He must relegate the event to the past by embracing time's forward progress into the future" (43). The flipbook's visual execution associates with the video footage from 9/11 and reminds us of (or equates the readers with) the spectators who watched it over and over again in the aftermath of the attack. Ann Kaplan speculates that this repetitive mediatization of the event strips the viewers of identification and makes it more "manageable" so they can work through the never-closing wound of trauma (17). In a similar manner, Oskar is no longer haunted to diagnosticate the image as his father; he is no longer trapped and "can move beyond melancholia" (Gleich 171), engaging with trauma more effectively, even if through fiction. Gleich notes how Foer employs the final pages to carry out the subversion of the spectacle as instead of "the primitive repetition compulsion of the spectacle, Oskar creates his reverse flipbook . . . to achieve a form of mourning that until now has eluded him" (171). By reenacting the falling man incident in his own way, Oskar has sabotaged the man's fall, implicating fantasy but also demonstrating his willingness to work through the trauma via his own artistic articulation for "fiction plays an important role as a healing factor in trauma resolution" (Buráková 94).

To demonstrate the importance of confronting such a highly visual traumatic event via artistic creation, in "an attempt to make 'real' what [one] could barely comprehend," as the wound could never be closed (Kaplan 19; 2), Foer chose un unanticipated technique, adding the flipbook trajectory. Hayles notes how "[t]he novel remediates the backward-running video in fifteen pages," and the fuzzy resolution suggests the book is reproducing digital images and imitating electronic text (*Electronic* 170–71). Analyzing the flipbook technique within a

different novel, Kiene Brillenburg Wurth acknowledges that "[b]ecause one never flips these pages in quite the same way, the inscriptions emerge differently with each reading which mimics the instability of electronic textuality" (90). However, with this imitation of digital techniques, the specific traditions of print are intensified—trauma in particular—and the sentimental gesture towards print is authenticated. Foer makes use of digital technologies but underlines his inclination toward print-based trajectory, demonstrating "a remediation of the instability of electronic textuality" and acknowledging print "as more authentic and more intimate than its digital counterparts" (Brillenburg Wurth 90; 87).

To conclude, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a print-based novel with digital influences that displays textual, visual, and graphic aspects which combine and reverberate, foregrounding a story about trauma. Foer's novel disseminates an explosion of creativity, illustrating how print-based medium is refashioned in the era of computationally intensive environments as he molds the graphic surface of his text with pictorial, haptic, textual, and even kinaesthetic elements, using digital affordances that are possible in print. In conjunction with narrative expression, the author extends visual reverberation and tactile sensations to illuminate how the remediation of the digital medium takes the readers back to print-based traditions, underlining the instability of electronic textuality, and demonstrating how trauma and visceral feelings of loss are best expressed via synergistic interplay between various mediums. Combining linguistic proficiency with miscellaneous typography, using irregular spacing, handwritten text, photographs, cutting, and other visual and multimodal elements as literary devices, Foer conceptualizes and accomplishes an ethos of corporeal performance so that allegedly "fixed" pages activate, become dynamic, while expressing the inescapable pathos of tragedy and insisting on the book's performance as a print text.

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3

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Analysis of the News and Social Media Coverage of the British Royal Family: Recollections May Vary[1]

Abstract

The fascination with the British monarchy, which spans the globe, is particularly visible in the United States. Despite fighting a bloody war to separate themselves from Great Britain, Americans are still heavily obsessed with the British royal family. The interest endures in great part due to the air of mystery and celebrity depicted in media productions as well as real-life events that keep providing media fodder on both sides of the pond. Among the latest and most controversial royal family moments are those regarding Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. This study analyzes the treatment of the Sussexes in the mass media and on social networks by examining the Netflix productions *The Crown* and the *Harry & Meghan* docuseries, Meghan Markle's Spotify podcast, *Archetypes*, as well as the correlation between articles and interviews in both American and British media and the social media posts. Employing the uses and gratifications theory and

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[1] The three words, "recollections may vary" (Lang), are credited to Queen Elizabeth II in her attempt to defend the monarchy without directly accusing her grandson Prince Harry and his wife of lying after they made their severe allegations against the royal family during their infamous interview with Oprah. The phrase has since been used numerous times by the media to point out discrepancies between the truth and the couple's truth. It is worth mentioning that seventeen of the couple's allegations that triggered a media frenzy were proven to be false.

the theory of the negativity bias, it aims to demonstrate that the combination of the two approaches can be useful in explaining shifts in media coverage that catered to the needs of media users whose changing gratifications shaped media representations of the ex-royal pair. The analysis reveals how varying reactions pertaining to cultural differences reinforce preexisting attitudes regarding the British royal family in order to expose the gratifications and experiential factors accompanying the participation of individuals in news production and diffusion in large global virtual communities.

1. Introduction

The fascination with the British monarchy, which spans the globe, is particularly visible in the United States, which has a history with the monarchy in several ways. First, the British colonies in America fought a bloody war to separate themselves from the British monarchy and ensure for themselves life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Having gained their independence, however, the thirteen American colonies operated under the weak Articles of Confederation and a weak Continental Congress, so that even General George Washington described "the condition of public affairs [as] almost anarchic" (Krauel 48). To overturn the rule of the mob and strengthen the executive power, the newly independent colonies even considered establishing a constitutional monarchy. It sounds unbelievable that this could have been considered an option after seven years of war to throw off British rule. Just as strange is the name of the person who was considered for monarch, the namesake of a well-known "spare" of the British royal family, Prince Henry Charles Albert David, usually referred to as Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, who is not likely to ever be the "heir."[2] Rufus King reveals that in 1786, the President of the

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[2] The reference to the word "spare" is significant because Prince Harry's choice of his memoir's one-word title *Spare* comes from the phrase "the heir and the spare," which

Continental Congress, Nathaniel Gorham, "had written a letter to Prince Henry, brother of the great Frederic [Frederick the Great], desiring him to come to the U.S. to be their king and that the Prince [Frederick Henry Louis of Prussia] had declined" (qtd. in Krauel 46). The idea of having a constitutional monarch as the Head of State instead of an elected President is hard to grasp because the United States would have had to agree to be modeled on the very same English system that the colonies had fought a war to overthrow. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is another source claiming that in 1786, Prince Henry was offered the candidacy for monarch of the United States, but the offer was quickly revoked before he declined it ("Prince Henry of Prussia"). Regardless of whether the offer was declined or revoked, we know for certain that the Continental Congress delegates found a new solution more in line with the core American ideals and values of a democratic government elected by the people. American Presidents achieve their position through elections and not through hereditary succession.[3] In contrast, in the United Kingdom, royal titles are conferred, bestowed, or inherited, which undermines the American belief that rank is earned.

The above-mentioned story about Prince Henry [Frederick Henry Louis of Prussia] and the possibility of the US becoming a constitutional monarchy is significant for this paper as it exemplifies the American public's perspective towards royalty since the founding of

emphasizes the superior position of the first-born son as the heir and the inferior position of the second born as the spare. In his memoir, Prince Harry mentions disparagingly that his father used the phrase in reference to him as did the media and some members of the royal family.

[3] The United States Constitution states: "No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State" (U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 9, cl. 8.1).

the country. On the one hand, Americans are fascinated by royalty, while, on the other, they prefer democratically electing their heads of state and have no regrets regarding their country's independence from Britain. This has been confirmed by the results of an *Economist/YouGov* poll according to which "three in five Americans say it would be bad for the U.S. to have a monarchy" (Frankovic and Sanders). However, although Americans do not want to be ruled by a royal family, according to a *Gallup* poll, "the highest-ranking members of that institution [are] more popular in the United States than the nation's own democratically elected and appointed leaders" (Saad).

Although in 1776 Americans rejected the governance of British royalty, many never lost their admiration for the royal pomp and pageantry. As Maria Tatar, a professor of folklore and mythology at Harvard University, explains, "The monarchy becomes a kind of Holy Grail for everyone because that is the ultimate in terms of wealth, power, glamor, charisma — all of those things which you don't have in that boring at-home situation" (qtd. in Hajela). Edward Owens, British royal commentator, historian, and author, comments that the relationship between royalty, the media, and the public is impacted by "new kinds of journalism and new media technologies [that] combine to shape how members [of] the royal family became celebrities" (15). Mass media outlets cater to the American audience's increasing fascination with news and gossip on the British royal family, and the media users are not only consuming the spilling of the royal tea but also actively, via social media, expressing their views, impacting the mass media production and creating and disseminating royal news content. Milestone royal events, like royal weddings, coronations, jubilees, official state events, celebrations, and funerals, attract and engage royal fans, as is also the case for some media productions that have been drawing huge audiences, such as Netflix's *The Crown*.

One of those milestones was the wedding of Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and the American actress Meghan Markle, which was initially seen as a relief to both the royal family and the British public after a somewhat reckless lifestyle the younger sibling of the future king of England displayed. A series of events surrounding the reception of the American bride by the royal family, the move of the Sussexes to the US, and the shift from the image of victims of racial discrimination to their disclosure as failed business venturers, was largely covered by the mass media, either the traditional ones, such as newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio shows, or social networks. As the couple's informative role very frequently intersects with their commercial function, it is not surprising that the consumers dictate the choices of topics and the type of their coverage and that the number of clicks determines the value of a story.

Using the uses and gratifications theory and the theory of negative bias, this paper analyses traditional and digital media coverage of the British royal family. The paper intends to show how the varying of media content to meet the gratifications of media users in the UK and the US led to the rise and fall in the media of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The analysis offers an overview of media content in the UK and the US that resulted in a shift from being among the most celebrated royal couples to the most criticized ones. The starting premise of this analysis is Katz et al.'s observation that "seeking reinforcement of one's attitudes and values may derive from a need for reassurance that one is right" (513). In the search for objectivity, factuality, and the truth in media coverage, this key tenet of the uses and gratification theory can shed light on the varying attitudes of British and American media towards the new royal couple from the beginning of their relationship to their exiting the royal family. The analysis focuses on the UK and US users' motivations and a comparison of the gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, in particular on

the ways in which gratifications of media users differ even when they are exposed to the same content. In other words, "[t]he needs are specific in nature to the individual and how the media satisfies the need is subjective. . . . The media is the same, but people use it for different needs" ("Communication Theory"). This is relevant for this research as it aims to expose a discrepancy in the gratifications obtained from similar media content by media users in the UK and the US. This paper argues that the shift away from positive media discourse surrounding Prince Harry and Meghan Markle was the result of them not being able to maintain the media users' support using their victimhood narrative. Following a string of narratives instigated by the audience's negativity bias that augmented the number of news that painted the Sussexes in a very negative light, the initial gratification needs of media users were shattered. Following a timeline of events concerning the activities of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, this paper attempts to determine key moments that exposed Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in the UK and US media and how the needs of the audience led to the flop of brand Sussex in the UK and the US. This paper also seeks to establish how the news and social media coverage of the British royal family, more specifically, the Sussexes, in the UK and the US shifted in news narratives, resulting in views variations due to cultural differences between the two countries as well as the gratifications of media users.

It is to be expected that cultural differences regarding the monarchy differ significantly in the two countries since one has a monarchy and the other one does not. The United Kingdom has a 1,000-year-old monarchy that has been shaped by centuries-old traditions and ceremonies, symbolizes unity and continuity in a rapidly changing world, and prides itself on duty and service. The United States does not have a centuries-old history and heritage; it is one of the most diverse countries in the world that celebrates multicultural customs and

traditions, and its residents are not subjects but citizens who strongly believe that no man is privileged by nature and that each of its citizens has equal freedom to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. These cultural differences have at times triggered different views among media users in the two countries, as will be discussed in addressing the discrepancy in the coverage and gratifications of particular news items.

2. The Impact of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Negativity Bias on Mass Media Production and Consumption

The present research focuses on the impact of mass media on the audience not only as users but also as producers and shapers of media content and public opinion. The paper draws upon the uses and gratifications theory by Blumler and Katz (1974), which asserts that media users actively choose media to fulfill certain needs to reach the gratifications they seek. It also refers to the study of the impact of culture on the formation and gratification of human needs (see Ruggiero 27), in particular the postulate that "culturally situated social experience reinforces basic biological and psychological needs while simultaneously giving direction to their sources of gratification" (Lull 99).

According to Lull, the uses and gratification approach can enable our understanding of the origin of our needs and how they are gratified (qtd. in Ruggiero 27). In 1942, Cantril observed that the uses and gratifications theory was already in use in the early days of the communications research, in the study of the gratifications that captivate and maintain the attention of audiences to the types of media and media content that cater to their social and psychological needs (qtd. in Ruggiero 3). According to Ruggiero, "uses and gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium" (3). This is evident in the continuing relevance of the mentioned theory in the twenty-first century, in which technological and communication transformations have

led to major changes in the production and distribution of media content. Traditional mass media outlets (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) and digital media (blogs, tweets, online publications, podcasts, and social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Yelp, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Pinterest, MySpace, Snapchat, and WhatsApp) have converged to offer media users a plethora of options to interact with each other by generating and sharing content as well as to impact on the coverage of mass media outlets by making their needs known and providing the gratifications they are seeking. Focusing on communication scholars' research on the gratifications of media users, Moon et al. distinguish two types of gratifications: "gratifications sought" and "gratifications obtained" (109–10). In other words, media users turn to particular media sources with the intention to find satisfaction for their needs, and their satisfaction is the gratification (Moon et al. 110). According to Katz et al., "audience gratifications can be derived from at least three distinct sources: media content, exposure to the media per se, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media" (514). The impact of instant gratification provided by such exposure to media very frequently overshadows the necessity to acquire factually correct information, especially if the options of media users' interactions multiply exponentially. The varying reactions are also shaped by cultural differences that reinforce preexisting attitudes in order to reveal the factors related to the gratifications and experiences of individuals participating in the production and distribution of news in large global virtual communities. The uses and gratification theory has been selected for this analysis as it is user-oriented and focuses on mass media users that are motivated by their psychological and social needs to select particular media channels and content choices (Katz et al.); likewise, [media users] play an active part in mass media consumption and production by delivering and posting their own media con-

tent (qtd. in Gallion; Bumgarner). Katz et al. specify five basic assumptions of the uses and gratifications approach:

1. the audience is active and its media use is goal oriented;
2. the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member;
3. the media compete with other resources for need satisfaction;
4. people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use;
5. value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

(qtd. in Kunczik and Zipfel 190)

The five abovementioned elements of the uses and gratification theory highlight the fact that this is a user-centered approach that focuses on active media users who know where to find the needed information, which media to choose to fulfill their needs, and how to share their experiences as active media users. According to Katz et al., the three basic tenets of the theory are that viewers are (1) "goal directed in their behavior," (2) "active media users," and (3) "aware of their needs and select the appropriate media to gratify their needs" (58). In addition, Katz et al. classify uses and gratifications into five categories with regard to five groups of human needs:

1. cognitive needs, including acquiring information, knowledge and understanding;
2. affective needs, including emotion, pleasure, feelings;
3. personal integrative needs, including credibility, stability, status;
4. social integrative needs, including interacting with family and friends; and
5. tension release needs, including escape and diversion.

(Tan qtd. in Tanta et al. 87)

The five mentioned categories exemplify the abundance of needs of media users as well as the main tenet of the uses and gratifications

theory that "media use is selective and motivated by rational self-awareness of the individual's own needs and an expectation that those needs will be satisfied by particular types of media and content" (Katz et al., qtd. in Ruggiero 18).

According to Rozin and Royzman, "[p]eople generally tend to be more attuned to negative faces, words, and social information, and both the autonomic and central nervous systems tend to have measurably higher levels of activation in response to negative than positive stimuli" (qtd. in Hibbing et al. 303). If we assume that media content caters to the motivations and gratifications of the media users, then the widespread presence of negative news content is to be expected. Negativity bias is the principle according to which "negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations, and generally efficacious than positive events" (Rozin and Royzman 297, qtd. in Hibbing et al. 303; see also Baumeister et al. 2001). The reason behind the dominance of negative news content, based on the human tendency to respond more strongly to negative information and elements in their environment than to positive ones (see Soroka et al. 18888; Hibbing et al. 303), is relevant for news coverage because "[n]egativity biases affect news selection, and thus also news production, as well as citizens' attitudes about current affairs" (Soroka et al. 18888). In the same vein, Zhuo Jing-Schmidt explains the negativity bias as a "pervasive cognitive-affective pattern" that results in "an automatic tendency to pay significantly more attention to unpleasant than pleasant information," which means that negative events impact our behavior more than positive ones (418). Likewise, in their article "Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames," Marc Trussler and Stuart Soroka discuss the media users' proclivity towards negative news content, and similar findings are presented in research by Roy F. Baumeister et al. (2001), Paul Rozin and Edward B. Royzman (2001), Claire E. Robertson et al. 2023, and Cacioppo et al. (1997). Similarly, Shelley E. Taylor

and Ito et al. also argue that "negative information more strongly influences people's evaluations than comparably extreme positive information" (887) as "[n]egative (adverse or threatening) events evoke strong and rapid physiological, cognitive, emotional, and social responses," which accounts for negativity bias in forming one's judgment and evaluating information (Shelley E. Taylor 67-70).

Employing the aforementioned uses and gratifications methodology, the present study explores the effects of media-induced negativity bias by shedding light on the shifts in mass media coverage of the Meghan and Harry story and the concomitant response of media users in the UK and the US. It is based on the premise that, "instead of depicting the media as severely circumscribed by audience expectations, the uses and gratifications approach highlights the audience as a source of challenge to producers to cater more richly to the multiplicity of requirements and roles that it has disclosed" (Katz et al. 521). In other words, media users are not a passive audience but active participants in the consumption and generation of media content. In line with this argument, this study seeks to determine the extent to which British and American "users approach the media with a variety of needs and predispositions" (Katz et al. 518) and explain the variations and discrepancies in the media coverage and public opinion in the two countries regarding the members of the British royal family.

3. The Rise and Fall of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Duke and Duchess of Sussex, in the Media in the UK and the US

The initial UK media content about the young couple brought satisfaction to all those media users who were motivated by the gratification of the royal family's generosity in embracing the biracial actress bride of their beloved prince. The media painted an ideal picture of an open-hearted royal family and the British nation as very accepting of Prince Harry and Meghan's romance. The positive coverage gratified

the media users in the UK and the US who had high and very favorable expectations of the royal family and the British public embracing the American newcomer into the royal fold. Although Soroka et al. claim that "the average human is more physiologically activated by negative than by positive news stories," they do add that "[e]specially in a diversified media environment, news producers should not underestimate the audience for positive news content" ("Cross-national Evidence"). Confirmation that the news coverage targeted at positive news content was meeting the users' needs is evident in the article "Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Duke and Duchess of Sussex," in the American lifestyle magazine *Town & Country*, in which Morgan Evans and Eileen Reslen document an abundance of media content produced in the US and the UK that provides Prince Harry and Meghan's relationship timeline, which reveals positive coverage disclosing the agreeable reactions of the royal family, the British public, and the British press. It is important to point out that the royal family went to great lengths to keep the media coverage positive, which is evident in the fact that, as soon as some negative media stories about Meghan Markle appeared, the palace approved the issuing of a statement by Prince Harry's spokesman condemning the media harassment of the prince's new girlfriend. Prince Harry expressed his revolt by describing the negative coverage as "[a] smear on the front page of a national newspaper; the racial undertones of comment pieces; and the outright sexism and racism of social media trolls and web article comments" (Erlanger). After the statement was issued, positive media accounts prevailed as the couple's engagement interview sparked a media frenzy and the UK as well as global audiences were satisfying their media needs through media content leading up to the royal wedding. According to Pat Robins, "a royal wedding, provides an ideal occasion for placing the Royal Family at the center of national life, linking the happiness and hopes of the individual and the family with that of the

nation" ("Media Representations"). Their wedding resulted in 100,000 (Whitty) spectators lining the London streets and 18 million Britons (Waterson), 29.2 million Americans (Grady), and a huge TV audience around the world gathered to watch the fairytale wedding of Queen Elizabeth's grandson Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, his biracial American television celebrity bride. The wedding was broadcasted by the major television networks such as CNN, ITV, and BBC in addition to Internet and radio coverage in over 180 countries (Misachi). An estimated twenty-eight million people in the UK (half of the population) and twenty-nine million in the US watched the Sussexes' wedding, which cost over £32 million. Furthermore, the 3.4 million tweets sent during the ceremony confirm the intense social media interest and engagement (Waterson). The approval ratings of the abovementioned media going through the roof reflect the significance of the historic moment of an American and one of the first mixed-race members being welcomed into the British royal family in a ceremony that included an African American preacher and a gospel choir (Grady). Meghan and Harry's wedding, "with its explicit connections to the black and African American communities . . . is living proof that a real princess doesn't have to be white" (Gaither qtd. in Vinopal). If we consider the extent of media coverage and the attention it garnered, it is evident that the royal wedding gratified all five of the basic categories of needs regarding uses and gratifications named by Katz et al. The belief that the monarchy is good for Britain was satisfied, and media headlines highly publicized the new hopes for the royal family's future by teaming up Prince Harry and Meghan Markle with Princess Katherine and Prince William as the fabulous four senior working royals (Martinez-Ramundo and Pavni Mittal).

Although the young couple became a trending sensation on mainstream and social media, the couple's subsequent media output revealed that, behind the scenes, they felt sidelined by the royal family

and discriminated against by the British media. After only two months in the role of senior working royals, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle began calling out the British press and insinuating the lack of support from the royal family. In their interview with Tom Bradby during their African tour in 2019, the couple shocked the world with accounts of their struggles. While Prince Harry focused on his mental health issues and a strained relationship with his brother, Meghan Markle emphasized the tabloid intrusion and a lack of support from the family she married into (Tominey). As the couple began their attacks on the royal family and the British media, the royal family closed up, and the media took control. To avoid direct confrontation and not draw additional public attention, the royal family's usual response to public attacks was in line with their mantra "never complain, never explain." Since the British media users' need for an ideal picture of the newlyweds was no longer satisfied, they were not gratified and thus sought media content painting a negative picture of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The Sussexes' dissatisfaction with the British press accelerated on October 1, 2019, when Prince Harry released a statement commenting on the shift in the British press from praise to harassment and explained that he and his wife were taking legal action against *The Mail on Sunday* and its parent company, Associated Newspapers. In his statement, Prince Harry voiced his concerns over what he called "a ruthless campaign" by the British tabloid press against his wife during her pregnancy and after giving birth and explained that his "deepest fear is history repeating itself": "I've seen what happens when someone I love is commoditized to the point that they are no longer treated or seen as a real person. I lost my mother and now I watch my wife falling victim to the same powerful forces" ("Statement by His Royal Highness").[4] In Jan-

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[4] It is important to note that Prince Harry's anger at the British press, especially at the negative coverage of his wife, reminded him of the paparazzi that hounded his mother in France and, according to him, were to blame for the automobile crash that

uary 2020, several months after Prince Harry's statement, the fairytale illusion shattered. After effectively working just 72 days in their 22-month-long stint as Senior Royals, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex "released an explosive Instagram statement saying they were to 'step back' from their duties" (Elise Taylor) to create a new life for their young family in the USA, outside the constrictions of life within the royal bubble.

They wanted to become financially independent by earning their own income in the US but at the same time to continue to carry out royal duties. This was not an option for working royals, so they accepted to give up their senior roles in the British royal family along with the funding and the patronages and Prince Harry's official military appointments and embark on a journey termed as Megxit, a play on Brexit that refers to the British withdrawal from the European Union. With Queen Elizabeth's blessing and assurance that "Harry, Meghan and Archie will always be much loved members of [her] family" ("Statement from Her Majesty"), the couple decided to break away from royal life, give up the use of their HRH titles, and refrain from using their royal titles for financial gain. According to the agreement with the royal family, "While they can no longer formally represent the Queen, the Sussexes have made clear that everything they do will continue to uphold the values of Her Majesty" (Dymond). Media outlets reported both the disappointment of the royal family as well as the split views of the British public. As was the case with Brexit, while many Britons voiced their support for the couple to embark on their journey of independence, others viewed their departure as a great snub to the British royal family. According to the findings of a *YouGov* poll conducted on January 9, 2020, 45 percent of the British were in

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caused her death. In many of his subsequent interviews, his memoir, the Netflix docuseries, and numerous court cases against the British press, Prince Harry returns to his childhood trauma, which has deeply affected his life.

support of Harry and Meghan's stepping back, 29 percent were neutral, and 29 percent were opposed ("Do You Support"). Thus, as the Sussexes exited, the initial expectations for a fairytale with a happy ending in the UK were shattered. The gratifications of the media users were not satisfied as the Duke and the Duchess of Sussex literally left the kingdom. Failing to meet the gratifications sought, the media users turned to negative media in the UK, which outweighed the positive.

To get away from negative press, the Sussexes moved to the US, which bought into their victimhood narrative and brought new hopes for new gratifications. Their breaking royal news sparked a global media frenzy that caused a divide in the media coverage in the UK and the US. Praise turned to scorn as the UK media outlets and social media platforms were expressing their disappointment and disapproval at Prince Harry's decision to abandon the Queen and country, with all his royal and military duties, in order to move to the US and carve out a new future for himself and his family (Perraudin). The negative UK news coverage is evident in an analysis that found that, out of 843 articles published in fourteen print newspapers since mid-May 2018, 43 percent were negative and only 20 percent were positive, whereas 36 percent remained neutral (Duncan and Bindman).

The previously discussed US fascination with the British royal family generated great excitement among American media users to satisfy the need for a fairy-tale image of the British royal family presence in the US. Americans applauded the independent streak of the couple and expressed a favorable view and high expectations for a brighter future for the couple in the US. According to a *YouGov* poll conducted on January 16, 2020, by more than four to one, Americans supported the couple's decision to carve out a better future for themselves and their son away from the Royal family. The poll also showed overwhelming support from Black Americans who were very approving of the couple's fleeing victimization and racism and finding their

safe haven in the US. It is interesting that, despite the show of support regardless of race or politics, the poll also revealed a great lack of sympathy for the couple along with the opinion that they should finance themselves independently and not receive benefits from the British government (Frankovic). Cultural differences came into play as the polled American citizens underscored the basic American values of individual freedom and self-reliance, making clear that they were supportive of those looking to achieve their American Dream but only through hard work and not privilege and entitlement. Also, although they supported Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's walking away from the Royal Family, Americans were still fond of the Royal family, found Queen Elizabeth to be the most popular member, and considered William, the heir to the throne, as popular as Harry. The US still held on to the fairy tale image of the British royal family until Prince Harry and Meghan put their victimhood on full display in the Oprah interview, their *Harry & Meghan* Netflix docuseries, Prince Harry's memoir, *Spare*, Prince Harry's interviews to promote his memoir, their *Archetypes* podcast, and a series of other media appearances focused on the victimization by the British press and the British royal family. The American need for a fairy tale image of the British family was being destroyed as media content focused not on their glamor and celebrity but on their scandalous treatment of the Sussexes and colluding with the British tabloids.

Americans were welcoming to the royal couple as the latter told their truth of disparagement by the British press and the royal family, who, according to their claims, were in cahoots together and destroying the couple's mental health. While the Sussexes' leaving the UK went against the British belief that a royal does not abandon the monarchy, in the US, which fought a war to abandon the monarchy, the departure of the couple was in line with the American belief in freedom and independence. This example illustrates the varying British

and American preexisting attitudes and confirms the postulate of the uses and gratifications theory that the same or similar media content can be viewed differently in diverse cultural contexts, once again confirming late Queen Elizabeth II's comment that recollections may vary. As introduced previously, cultural differences are based on personal integrative needs and social integrative needs, which, according to Katz et al., is the principal tenet of the uses and gratification approach. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex were aware of the different interpretations of their story, and they took every media opportunity offered to them in the US to tell their own truth and their own story. In his *Late Show* interview with James Corden, Prince Harry explained that he had not given up on living a life of public service but that he had stepped back from royal duties and life in the UK and relocated to the US because of the toxicity of the British press that had been endangering his mental health and creating a threatening environment for his young family (Crawford-Smith, "Prince Harry's Surprise Visit").

The victim-friendly initial mass media coverage in the US empowered the Sussexes to carve out a better future free from the constraints of the royal family. As long as the American public and the mass media highlighted the injustices the Sussexes suffered in the UK, the couple were not concerned with Americans questioning their victimhood claims and the negativity they targeted at their families and Harry's homeland. Initially, the US mass media drew support for the Sussexes as underdogs fleeing racism in the UK and taking refuge in the US. Media stories of their victimhood led to numerous opportunities for the Sussexes to share their truth with the American public that is especially sensitive to racial victimization and was eager to discover the shocking behind the scenes revelations. In *Rolling Stone* magazine, Staples explains that "[a]fter fleeing to the U.S. to start a new life in the wake of a racist and misogynistic smear campaign in the British

press—which they accuse the royal institution and their family members of actively colluding in—the pair signed a string of lucrative deals with the biggest streaming platforms" ("Meghan Markle and Prince Harry"). Although the couple claimed that they wanted to get away from the intrusive tabloid press and toxic social media, in order to finance the lavish lifestyle they were used to, they turned to major media outlets to earn their living. On their road to financial independence, they have attempted several business ventures. In 2021, Meghan Markle's bestselling children's picture book, *The Bench*, was released, for which she is reported to have received an advance of up to $618,000 (500,000 British pounds) (Porterfield and Ponciano). Thereafter followed their first significant undertaking, the explosive tell-all interview with Oprah Winfrey entitled *Oprah with Meghan and Harry*, which was broadcast on CBS and ITV in 2021. The couple garnered much sympathy in America through this interview, which portrayed them as victims of a racist royal family, the British public, and especially the British press, which caused them emotional trauma and threatened their personal safety. The interview included a discussion of the couple's relationship, wedding, their children, estrangement from both families, racial trauma, safety concerns, and financial worries that resulted in severe mental health struggles of the couple and their decision to move to the US. Among the so-called "bombshell allegations" were claims that Meghan was dealing with suicidal thoughts and being refused help by the palace, that she was falsely accused of offending Princess Catherine, and that Prince Harry had been cut off financially by his father. However, the severest allegation was that the royal family was potentially racist because their son, Archie, the only mixed-race great-grandchild of the monarch, was going to be refused a title, and thereby security, and that even concerns had been made questioning the potential implications for the royal family if their child's skin was too dark. By failing to expose the per-

son or persons who made the derogatory comment, the Sussexes caused a media frenzy as speculations were raised about the identity of the royal racist or racists who voiced these concerns.[5] It is evident that the Sussexes were aware of the damage this particular allegation would have because, the morning after the interview, Oprah told "CBS This Morning" that Harry wanted Oprah to make known that neither his grandmother nor grandfather were involved in the conversation about the baby's skin color (Lewis). Nevertheless, to Queen sympathizers it must have been disheartening to consider she died the following year knowing that their family reputation was besmirched by the accusation that there was a racist in the royal family. After a legacy of devoting her 70-year reign to the Commonwealth and the work of the royal family with patronages and scholarships offered to thousands of people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, this would likely have been a devastating and hurtful accusation to bear. Because of the family motto of "never complain, never explain," which was particularly practiced by the Queen, the family refrained from addressing the accusations publicly. However, the day after the interview was broadcast, Buckingham palace released the following statement on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II:

> "The whole family is saddened to learn the full extent of how challenging the last few years have been for Harry and Meghan," the release read. "The issues raised, particularly that of race, are concerning. Whilst some recollections may vary, they are taken

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[5] It is also important to note that, during the interview, there was a discrepancy because Meghan said that when she was pregnant with their son, Archie, there were several conversations with Harry during which racial concerns were expressed, but when Harry joined the interview, he said that at the beginning stage of their romance, there was a conversation in which mention was made about what the color of a future child might be. The discrepancy could have been recognized as a red flag that something regarding this claim was off. This discrepancy led to further questioning of the allegations and, after fact checking was done, seventeen of the couple's allegations were proven to be false and induced media users to fact check other allegations made by the Sussexes.

> very seriously and will be addressed by the family privately. Harry, Meghan, and Archie will always be much loved family members." (Lang)[6]

In contrast to remaining silent, Prince Willliam defended his family against racist allegations, saying: "We are very much not a racist family" (Davies). Regardless of the royal family's counternarrative, media users followed their negativity bias and championed the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, even presenting them with the Ripple of Hope human rights award by the Robert F. Kennedy foundation for their "heroic" stand against "structural racism" in the monarchy (Beal).

After the Oprah interview, "[i]n September 2020, the Duke and Duchess signed a multiyear, $100 million contract with Netflix to produce documentaries, docuseries, feature films, scripted shows and children's programming" (DiSalvo). To date only three productions have been realized. Following the framing of negativity bias and victimhood, in December 2022, the couple released their six-part *Harry & Meghan* Netflix's documentary series, in which they continued their victimhood narrative, whereby they garnered sympathy from the media users who gratified their feelings of solidarity with the couple's struggles and the negative role of the British royal family. The docuseries covered their relationship from the very beginning to Megxit, Prince Harry's memories of his mother's tragic death, Meghan's mom's recollections of racial discrimination, the events that led to the estrangement from her father and half-brother and sister, the intrusion of the press into their lives, and the awkwardness of meeting and interacting with the seemingly unwelcoming royal family. The

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[6] The timing of the interview was unfortunate as Prince Philip was very ill, in hospital, and passed away just one month later. Although seventeen of the allegations proved to be false, they were damaging and very likely contributed to the failing health of the aging Queen, who was coping with her husband's worsening health and soon thereafter losing her husband after 73 years of marriage during the time the whole world was dealing with COVID lockdowns and other restrictions.

docuseries made no mention of racism in the royal family, but Meghan claimed that the Royal firm endeavored to disparage her, and she gave a detailed account of the emotional anguish she and her husband suffered as a result of the mistreatment by the British media and the royal family.

It is worth mentioning that the Netflix's *Harry & Meghan* documentary series was one of the most successful Netflix documentaries, while their other two Netflix projects by 2003 did not do as well (Crawford-Smith, "Prince Harry's Netflix Show"). According to the ratings, it leads to speculation that media users preferred negative media content that satisfied their needs for behind-the-scenes royal scandal and gossip. Neither the *Live to Lead* series, highlighting the contributions of notable global figures, released in December 2022, nor the five-part documentary tribute to extraordinary veterans, *Heart of Invictus*, released in August 2023, were popular enough with viewers to make the Netflix Top 10 charts (Crawford-Smith, "Prince Harry's Netflix Show"). The fact that only their *Harry & Meghan* documentary series attracted viewers confirms that media users select content that gratifies their needs and that their choice of content tends to give more weight to negative than positive content. Both of these assertions worked well for the Sussexes' strategy to present their victimhood narrative within a negative frame. However, their strategy backfired as media users delved deeper and deeper into negative content and uncovered negative information that put the couple in a negative light. If their media strategy had emphasized their positive accomplishments as much as their victimhood, the public would have had a more balanced view of them. However, the Sussexes' strategy of sticking to their victimhood narrative, together with the media users' proclivity for negative news content, resulted in American viewers being less attracted to news within the affirmative frame. This was confirmed once again with the couple's podcasting venture, which failed.

The couple signed a twenty million Spotify deal with their Archewell production company in December 2020 that intended to deliver inspirational podcasts "that build community through shared experience, narratives, and values" (Noven). They produced a 33-minute holiday special in December and, two years later, in August 2022, Meghan's podcast, *Archetypes*, ran one season with twelve episodes. The podcast had some success and received the 2022 People's choice award but was cancelled, and the whole Spotify deal was cut short because of a lack of produced content during the three-year period (Noven). It became obvious that the podcast content did not meet the listeners' needs. It is noticeable that the *Live to Lead* series, the *Heart of Invictus* documentary, and the projects by the couple that did not deliver bombshell attacks on the royals did not gratify the media users as the projects that satisfied the audience's need for gossip behind the scenes, which, once again, demonstrated the "negativity biases in human cognition and behavior" (Soroka et al. 1) and the tendency of media users to focus mainly on negative news.

After the interview and the *Harry & Meghan* docuseries, Prince Harry's highly anticipated autobiography, *Spare*, followed, generating headlines, once again unsettling his royal family. Just like the *Harry & Meghan* docuseries, this tell-all book became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, confirming one more time that the media users' need for royal scandal and gossip was being satisfied. His memoir revealed his truth about his life events that led to new disclosures regarding the rift between the Sussexes and the royal family, the trauma caused by the tragic death of Prince Harry's mother, Diana, the mistreatment of Meghan by the British press, and his extensive drug and alcohol use because of his failing mental health. Prince Harry's fury regarding the British media implicated his brother as he expressed his belief that William had been directly involved in "the 'dirty game' of negative briefings to members of the media by royal communications teams

extended to Prince William's office" (Razzall). Also, he shed a nega-
tive light on his brother's wife, Princess Catherine, and his father King
Charles III's Queen Consort, Camilla. The only allegation he did not
make against the royal family was the racism claim expressed in the
Oprah interview. Furthermore, the inflammatory allegations made in
the memoir were also disclosed in sit-down interviews to promote the
book with journalist and ITV News presenter Tom Bradby, *The Late
Show* host Stephen Colbert, ABC co-anchor Michael Strahan at *Good
Morning America*, Anderson Cooper on *60 Minutes*, and renowned
speaker and bestselling author Gabor Maté, MD. According to
McFarland, "Fame is the only currency the Duke of Sussex truly has;
his truth and reputation are the main products he has to trade. . . .
Harry needs the American media to be on his side to get the American
people on his side" ("Prince Harry's Special Relationship"). Americans
tend to support the underdog, which Prince Harry represented as the
spare to his brother, Prince William, the heir. The support was initially
strong, but "[w]hile, at first, it seemed the couple's potent mix of psy-
chobabble and British-bashing had found a readymade audience in the
US, the more Americans [had] learned about the Sussexes, the more
they [had] taken against them," and many former allies of the Sussexes
were turning on them (Slater).

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's aspirations to go from work-
ing senior royals to Hollywood celebrities backfired in terms of gar-
nering public support. As their materialistic side was revealed, they
quickly went from victims to villains, destroying the gratifications of
their supporters. By focusing on monetizing their victimhood by mak-
ing scathing comments about the British press and Prince Harry's
family, the Sussexes kept the media focus on negative news content.
This worked well as long as they fed the media users' needs to see
them as victims and the media painted the picture according to the
audience's needs. However, as media users discovered negative con-

tent that put the Sussexes in a bad light, their gratifications were no longer satisfied. There was a shift to a negative perspective of the couple, and they sought content to gratify their changing attitudes. The public, struggling to make ends meet during times of a cost-of-living crisis, had less and less understanding and empathy for the constant whining of the privileged couple living in their $14.5 million mansion in Montecito. As media users discovered that many of the so-called bombshell allegations made by the Sussexes were proven to be false, the victimhood narrative was no longer satisfactory, and they were looking to satisfy their needs by selecting content that exposed and ridiculed the Sussexes in the most negative ways. The US and the UK media outlets, especially social media, gratified the users' needs by providing the sought content.

Prince Harry's questioning of America's Bill of Rights, which protects the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, was heavily criticized on the Internet in both the US and UK media. Prince Harry caused a media frenzy on Twitter when he called the First Amendment "bonkers" (Kirkpatrick). This angered many Americans and provoked the following tweet by Meghan McCain: "We fought a war in 1776 so we don't have to care what you say or think. That being said, you have chosen to seek refuge from your homeland here and thrive because all of what our country has to offer and one of the biggest things is the 1st amendment—show some utter respect" (qtd. in Kirkpatrick). Nigel Farage, British broadcaster, former politician, and Brexit leader, tweeted: "For Prince Harry to condemn the USA's First Amendment shows he has lost the plot. Soon he will not be wanted on either side of the pond" (qtd. in Kirkpatrick). Farage's comment foreshadowed the negativity bias by mainstream and social media outlets and platforms in the US and the UK directed at the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who, within four years, have gone from extreme praise to intense backlash on both sides of the Atlantic. Addi-

tionally, in the *Daily Mail*, British broadcaster, writer, and journalist Piers Morgan claimed that Prince Harry "hates anything which affords any protection to journalists to say things he doesn't like" and called him an "indignant media-loathing Prince" (qtd. in Kirkpatrick). Morgan's criticism brings to mind that, since 2019, the couple has filed a number of lawsuits against UK and US media outlets as well as the fact that, at present, Harry is "involved in four cases against U.K. tabloid newspapers" (Ott). Although the Sussexes claimed to serve others, not much was to be found in the press about them that could compare to the daily accounts of charity work—the media's counternarrative about the royal family. Even the American media consumers and the American press in their counternarrative were voicing criticism aimed at the Duke and Duchess, whom the media represented as continuing to emphasize their victimhood despite living a privileged life. They were also constructed in the media as hypocrites for their frequent private jet travel while preaching about the responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint and reminding us that our behavior affects the environment. Consequently, these conflicting narratives of the couple led to a loss of credibility. Criticizing the royal family was no longer acceptable despite everything Prince Harry had gone through in grieving his mother's tragic death. Just 24 hours after his book, *Spare*, was published, the couple were requested to vacate their residence at Frogmore Cottage by furious King Charles III. The British media were eager to report Frogxit, the couple's being evicted from their Frogmore Cottage. After the media storm over the book *Spare*, the perception of Brand Sussex was beginning to plummet, and this was obvious as they were mocked by *Southpark* in an episode called "The Worldwide Privacy Tour" (Crawford-Smith, "How Prince Harry"). The episode caused a sea change and opened the floodgates for open criticism of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. Up to that point people were wary of criticizing the Sussexes, fearing to be pro-

claimed as racists, misogynists, or White supremacists. After the *South-park* episode, the Sussexes faced heavy public backlash, especially by entertainers. Even the *Rolling Stone* magazine reported that the couple's brand was in crisis and that they were entering their flop era (Staples). Conservative commentators and media personalities in the US, like their counterparts in the UK, have come after Meghan using the same tropes. On her podcast, Megyn Kelly called Meghan "whiny, woke, and annoying" (qtd. in Blanchet). Similarly, after Prince Harry and Meghan Markle lost their multi-million-dollar Spotify deal because of their unproductivity, Bill Simmons, a Spotify executive, also accused the couple of being privileged whiners as he labelled them "effing grifters" and criticized their monetization of their royal status by saying: "You live in fucking Montecito and you just sell documentaries and podcasts and nobody cares what you have to say about anything unless you talk about the royal family and you just complain about them" (qtd. in Flam). Comedian Chris Rock ridiculed Meghan's claims of victimhood and mistreatment by the royal family and lampooned the couple in his new Netflix stand-up special, "Selective Outrage," by alluding to Meghan's claim during the Oprah interview that the royals were racist for having expressed concerns over how dark their child would be. "Sometimes it's just some in-law s---," Rock said on the special of Meghan. "Because she's complaining, I'm like, 'What the f--- is she talking about? 'They're so racist, they wanted to know how brown the baby was going to be. . . .' I'm like, 'That's not racist,' cause' even Black people want to know how brown the baby gon' be. S---. We check behind them ears." The couple have also been ridiculed by the cartoon *Family Guy* for receiving millions from Netflix for no one knows what (Petit). Katie Nicholl, a royal expert, author, and *Vanity Fair*'s correspondent, has revealed that sources close to the royal family are of the opinion that Prince Harry's book, *Spare*, and his interviews are heading him in a path of destruction ("Why Insiders").

His book gave ammunition to the media when he disclosed his Taliban kill count, which could have put himself, his whole family, and fellow soldiers in danger. His oversharing about his brother's private parts revealed his lack of discretion, to say the least, and references to his own as he called it "todger" led to him being savagely mocked by show host Jimmy Kimmel with a parody on his book entitled *The Prince and the Penis* (Crawford-Smith, "How Prince Harry"). In addition, his detailed descriptions of his past drug use put in question the validity of his being granted a Visa to reside in the US. The illicit drug consumption caused concerns and prompted presenter Kirstie Allsopp to criticize Prince Harry, tweeting: "If you have a vast platform, you don't mouth off about using illegal drugs, the trade which kills people" (Duffin). Prince Harry was also criticized for lamenting about the intrusion into his privacy by the British press, while at the same time intruding on the privacy of the members of the royal family to ridicule them.

The above examples illustrate the ridicule and scrutiny faced by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex as the negativity bias, which initially worked in their favor but eventually destroyed their reputation. The Sussexes were eager to generate negative media content that focused on their victimhood, but they did not expect that the tendency to search for negative news content would result in exposing their mistruths and undermining their credibility. The negative bias frame of their victimhood narrative was challenged by a counternarrative, disputing the Sussexes' statements, and, as the above examples show, the American media and public turned against the couple, who were described in the counternarrative as going against the core American values, such as loyalty to one's country and family. As media shattered the users' gratifications regarding the couple, they turned to negative coverage of Harry and Meghan to satisfy their audience's needs. Thus, the media users' perspective of the Sussexes shifted as the varying

views became their source of gratification, and Prince Harry and Meghan became objects of scandal and gossip. In line with the Jing-Schmidt's uses and gratification theory of cognitive-affective patterns, Jaworski offers a psychological explanation of how the Sussexes' narrative of victimhood led not only to their initial empowerment and favor but also to their consequential downfall in the US, claiming that people have a "proclivity for paying attention to negative rather than positive information" as "negative events and experiences get quickly stored in memory, in contrast to positive events and experiences" ("The Negativity Bias").[7] Jaworsky's assertion is observable in the sympathy the Sussexes garnered as American audiences were drawn to the compelling media headlines focusing on the injustices the Sussexes suffered at the hands of British media and the Royal family. However, the shift in the audience empathy occurred as headline negativity turned to the Sussexes' extensive use of private jets, their public disrespect towards their families, exploitation of royal titles for private financial gain, and charity scandals. They failed to realize that the initial negativity bias frame directed at the royal family would garner short-term success in their favor until the media and their consumers would be so consumed with the negativity bias that they would look for it in all the actions, which included those carried out by the Sussexes themselves.

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[7] It could also be argued that some of the pervasive cognitive-affective patterns, which put a stamp on a collective memory of the British, were the historical traumas caused by the role of American Bride, Wallis Simpson, in the abdication of Edward VIII, or the failed marriage of Lady Diana and the then Prince Charles, which followed after a spectacular wedding, one of the most memorable events of the twentieth century, as people's expectations and the harsh reality of the events that follow fairytale-like stories offer a framework for the clash between the positive and negative outcomes of events covered by the media. Very frequently, such conflicting situations are a haphazard combination of affective and social elements that streamline the narratives in a specific direction.

As discussed previously, while the Sussexes have been free to speak out in the media, the royal family tends to keep to their nearly 1,000-year-old tradition of silence and the "never complain, never explain" adage. However, in recent years, the royal family's counternarrative has been expressed through royal PR statements debunking more serious rumors. Thus, media users seeking gratifications in support of the royals turned to the media outlets that generated the counternarrative that debunked the couple's misinformation and disinformation spread to gain public support and sympathy. As a result, Prince Harry has come under heavy criticism for monetizing victimhood, trauma, and basically exploiting his mother's death. In both the UK and the US, media users have leapt upon all the inflammatory material of the Sussexes trashing the monarchy while trading on their royal titles (Royston). While some media users have demanded that the couple stop using their royal titles of Duke and Duchess of Sussex, others have insisted that their titles be stripped. Even Bob Seely, the Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight, has called out the Duke and Duchess for their disrespect of the institution that has given them their titles ("Isn't It time"). Instead of the promised life of service, Prince Harry has been accused of selling his soul by what the media represented as vile attacks on family, country, and especially the British press, which in his narrative Prince Harry makes accountable for all that has gone wrong since his mother was hounded to her death by the paparazzi in France. Going into sensational topics in his narrative opened him up to criticism that he had been previously shielded from through the media's initial narrative about his victimhood. The Sussexes' ultimate drastic fall in popularity in the UK and the US, paralleled by the media gratification of the users' propensity for negative content by directing their attention to the discrepancies between the Sussexes' representations of their "truth" and the representations of their "alternative truth" by the royal family, corroborates the uses and

gratification position that media users are active participants in the consumption and generation of media content. At the same time, as this analysis has attempted to show, media users' fluctuating response to the Harry and Meghan saga also validates Katz et al.'s claim that the users' need for instant gratification frequently obscures their ability to acquire correct information and determine what the "real" truth is while being exposed to the competing narratives and counternarratives created by the media.

4. Conclusion

Using the uses and gratifications theory as an analytic lens, the present paper aimed to explain the correlation between the negativity bias and the shift from positive to negative media coverage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, which led to the turning of the tide against the royal couple. The Sussexes' path from Hollywood royalty and high celebrity status to a fall from grace in the US is closely linked to their business model and their media branding, which was based on the negative bias frame of their narrative that monetized their victimhood and their truth. By using the victimhood narrative to justify their exit from the royal family and their flight to freedom to the US, the Sussexes kept the media users' attention focused on negative news content trying to retain this highly clickbaitable narrative. However, this strategy backfired as media users were exposed to an abundance of negative media content, which revealed a counternarrative disputing the Sussexes' claims of victimhood and ruined the couple's credibility. Thus, as positive needs of media users were not gratified, they turned to the negative coverage, which gratified their needs by reassuring them that their changing views regarding the couple were correct. Media users, who shape their narrative according to their needs and preconceived narrative frames, selected and, at times even dictated, the media content by switching sympathy towards Prince Harry and

Meghan Markle to animosity because of the negativity bias and failed needs. The findings of this analysis highlight the relevance of combining the uses and gratification theory with the theory of negative bias in interpreting the complexity of media content consumption and media-audience interaction.

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War Blogs: Alternative Media in Narrating the War?

Abstract

The nature of war has a major impact on how it will be represented and re-membered in the media and literature. Unlike in previous wars, the develop-ments and the availability of technologies and media have enabled twenty-first century soldiers to become the immediate protagonists of their own war narratives. Technology has allowed for a more instantaneous, first-hand ex-perience of the war to reach the public gaze and, even more importantly, to challenge, disprove, or even subvert official military, political, and media re-ports. One such example is Colby Buzzell's blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which he launched during his deployment to Iraq in 2004, and turned into a memoir, *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, in 2005. Writing the blog in the midst of the war, in which he disputes many official reports, put him under the surveillance of his commanders and of the Pentagon itself. This paper will focus on how the cynicism, sarcasm, and honesty of Buzzell's memoir and blog entries indeed contradicted the mainstream media and mili-tary reports of the Iraq War. With that, the blog seemed to challenge Baudrillard's insights on the media, simulation, and spectacle. However, the analysis will also point to the fact that the power of Buzzell's blog as an alter-native media was brief since the military managed to undertake actions that regulate (censor) twenty-first century war narratives.

Keywords: Media, war, war blogs, Colby Buzzell, *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*

1. The Media and Representations of War

Every war in history is specific and different from previous conflicts concerning the nature of war, timespan, geography, the use of weapons, casualties, causes, and consequences. The same applies when we consider the representations of war which Kate McLaughlin in her study *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* corroborates, "[I]t now seems evident that the First World War's natural form was the lyric poem, that the Second World War's was the epic novel, that the Vietnam War's was the movie," and that the Iraq Wars' natural form "may well turn out to be the blog" (10). It is noteworthy to mention that the Vietnam War was the first televised war, granting the American public access to images of combat, destruction, and crimes, which, consequently, added to the public's disapproval of the war. After the war, it was "widely believed that . . . the United States lost the war *because* it was televised," an argument made by President Lyndon Johnson (Mandelbaum 157). It is clear that, since the Vietnam War, the media became a tool not just for reporting about the war but also for the way in which the war would be perceived by the public: "[T]he television coverage revealed the truth of what was going on, even in the face of constant Pentagon reports of successes and victories" (LeShan 92). Since the Vietnam War was the first one the United States lost despite their technological and military superiority, in the following decade, the nation desperately tried to make sense of the fiasco, however, mostly by blame-shifting; soldiers blamed the military strategy, the government blamed the media, and the majority of the public blamed the government. All this compelled the American military to question and consider the role of media in war reports, which would prove to be an extremely clever tactic less than twenty years later.

In fact, a peculiar turn happened in 1991, during the Persian Gulf War. That particular war was also televised to the point that CNN covered all of its stages 24/7 in an unprecedented way. In many ways, it "resembled a miniseries" ("Television") with its memorable graphic introduction and a distinct jingle.[1] There were images of American air-strikes, interviews with American troops, constant reports from embedded journalists, all of which seemed so authentic, immediate, and trustworthy that the public utterly ignored the fact that the sanitized version of combat was provided by the Department of Defense. All aspects of the TV coverage of the Gulf War "seemed fantastic and futuristic, something that reminded many viewers of a video game" ("Television"). In his study *The Psychology of War*, LeShan explains the function of mainstream media and the objective of military officials during the First Gulf War:

> The media as a whole was magnificently managed by the military, showing how well the military has learned the lessons of the Vietnam fiasco. . . . Not only was the Persian Gulf War different from Vietnam, it was the cleanest, most bloodless, most ideal *picture of war* we had seen. . . . The military had solved the dilemma of how to present war to the civilian population. (93–94; emphasis added)

In other words, the military now controlled the media by carefully selecting how and what should be disclosed to the public eye, and the war was presented as a swift and surgically executed victory, light in casualties. This was, however, far from reality, since the information that reached the public disregarded the fact that there had been an ecological disaster in the Gulf with oil wells burning for months after the end of the war, that soldiers were afflicted with severe chronic disorders (such as sclerosis, neurological disorders, cancer, migraines, seizures, skin disorders, and respiratory conditions) upon their return

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[1] See: "CNN – Gulf War Theme '91."

home,[2] and the fact that the war's mission, the New World Order, almost entirely failed.[3] Indeed, the coalition that fought Saddam Hussein's army in 1991 did not overthrow the dictator from power. Because of this, Jean Baudrillard made, at first, a seemingly ridiculous statement that the war had actually never happened: "[T]his is not war, any more than 10,000 tons of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than a direct transmission by the CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war" (Baudrillard, "The Gulf War" 61). Baudrillard's reasoning lies in the assumption that a war requires two opposing sides in a conflict, which is something that essentially did not occur in the Gulf,

> because the two adversaries did not even confront each other face to face, the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, and the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance. They never saw each other: when the Americans finally appeared behind their curtain of bombs, the Iraqi had already disappeared behind their curtain of smoke . . . the fact that the Americans never saw Iraqis is compensated by the fact that Iraqis never fought them. (62; 82)

What Baudrillard criticized in that essay is not the actual war (he was not denying it had indeed occurred) but, rather, the media's virtual/hyperreal representation of war. Clearly, the proclaimed aim of such coverage of the war was to present the public with seemingly ob-

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[2] See: "Gulf War Illness and the Health of Persian Gulf War Veterans: Scientific Findings and Recommendations."

[3] The New World Order is an idea formed by President George H. W. Bush in 1991. The main objective of the NWO was a world united in its mission to halt aggression and secure world peace: "Until now, the world we've known has been a world divided – a world of barbed wire and concrete block, conflict and cold war. Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. In the words of Winston Churchill, a 'world order' in which 'the principles of justice and fair play . . . protect the weak against the strong . . .' A world where the United Nations, freed from cold war stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations" ("After the War").

jective and impartial real-time information about the war by offering them a false sense of direct involvement and interaction. In other words, the CNN coverage was not a representation of the war but, rather, a mere simulation based on a spectacle. In his "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities" (1983), Baudrillard already pointed at a cultural phenomenon—that masses do not require information and meaning but, rather, a spectacle: "[N]o effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence. What they reject is the 'dialectic' of meaning" ("In the Shadow" 10). Similarly, it was exactly the spectacle that the masses were served with the non-stop media coverage of the Persian Gulf War.

The turn of the millennium brought about another revolution. Since the appearance of Google in 1998, the world has had the opportunity to search for information more quickly and easily than ever. Advancements in computer technology, Internet access, and various new platforms like *Skype*, *Facebook,* and *YouTube* forever transformed the way humans communicate and interact. This also affected the way of reporting about war, and the way the public consumed those reports, making the reports all the more pervasive. The United States government (and military) fiercely tried to use the same Persian Gulf formula for securing public support of the pending Iraq invasion in 2003, but this time with little success. This is because by 2003, the world learned the truth about the war in the Gulf, and people were reluctant to believe anything served by the government and facilitated by mainstream media. With the emergence of the Internet, war blogs seemingly became an alternative media that the public turned to for trustworthy, unbiased, and uncensored information. However, the

analysis of Colby Buzzell's blog and memoir will soon indicate that such an alternative media function of war blogs was quite short-lived.

2.   War Blogs and Military Blogs

Web logs, better known as blogs, appeared on the Internet by the end of the twentieth century, and the first war blogs appeared just days after the 9/11 attacks. The main objective of war blogs was to comment on "political and diplomatic circumstances surrounding the attacks" (Reynolds 60), their "chief attraction [being] that they offer[ed] perspectives overlooked in most U.S. news reports" (qtd. in Reynolds 61). In 2003, a journalist commented that war blogs enabled a "parse overview for news junkies who wanted information from all sides, and a personal insight that bypassed the sanitizing Cousineart of big-media news editing" (Levy). The number of war blogs exploded during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and soon even the mainstream media journalists became avid readers of war blogs. It is thus no wonder that the London *Times* dubbed the conflict in Iraq "the first www.war" (qtd. in Reynolds 61).

Additionally, when the war in Iraq started in 2003, American soldiers were supported by a massive infrastructure. Their military bases were like little towns in which the troops had phone centers, Internet cafés, gyms, shops, fruit juice stands, tailor shops, movie theaters, Xboxes, and PlayStations at their disposal.[4] On top of that, the infrastructure also included Internet access; therefore, e-mails, social media, and *YouTube* were soon flooded with comments, images, and videos from the battlefield from the soldier's perspective, which sparked a large interest among the readership. In their article "Believing the Blogs of War?" Johnson and Kaye provide three major reasons why

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[4] See: Colby Buzzell's memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (147–54), in which the author describes all the amenities that American soldiers had at their disposal.

military blogs gained not just popularity but also credibility during the Iraq War. The first reason was that blogs were written by soldiers whom readers found more informed and credible than the traditional media. Next, they saw them as more subjective and honest, and finally, the readers liked the fact that blogs were interactive, allowing them to post comments (317). All these purposes seemed to resolve the problem Baudrillard had with mass media—that there is no exchange of information and meaning: "the very concept of medium . . . it no longer acts as a *medium*, as an autonomous system administered by the code. . . . the code becomes the only agency that speaks, that exchanges itself and reproduces . . . it is no longer people who exchange; the system of exchange value reproduces itself through them" ("Requiem" 284–45). Blogs, on the other hand, were seen as personal with the ability to create meaning among one another through posts, comments, and responses.

It is then no wonder that the website milblogging.com (2005–2016) counted over 3,000 milblogs from over fifty countries for the duration of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and since 2005, there have been annual conferences regarding military blogs (Milblog Conference) with the aim of bringing together military bloggers and their avid readership. Also, the first anthology of military blogs, *Blog War: Reports from the Front Line of Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan*, was published in 2006 by Matthew Burden, a former US Army major and the founder of one of the most popular military blogs. In the introduction to the anthology, Burden states that there are three types of conflict reporting—war reporters, official reports from the Ministry of Defense, and soldiers' testimonies, pointing out that the last method has historically been the most susceptible to censorship. He praises the power of the military blog that gave an "unfiltered [and instant] approach to the War on Terror" to "anyone with an internet access and interest" because the "military population has access to the same

means of communication as the media" (4). Since 2007, there has even been a special literary award category (Lulu Blooker Prize) for books published from blogs.[5]

In sum, the above-mentioned arguments indicate that, in the twenty-first century, war and military blogs have become the primary and preferred source of information about the war because the public believed that the mainstream media were once again controlled by the military. In fact, the media continued to write positively about the War on Terror up to the point that Martin Bell, a veteran and a journalist, discussed "the death of news" (221). In his opinion, the media "promoted the government's efforts with reports crossing the line from being detached observers to acting as if they were government representatives" (Bell 223). In the opinion of many, "journalists abandon[ed] the notion of neutrality and cover[ed] the war in terms of good guys/bad guys and good versus evil" (qtd. In Johnson and Kaye 316–17). Unlike the mainstream media, military blogs offered a valuable alternative.

3. *CBFTW*: "Becoming the Media"

Colby Buzzell was twenty-six years old when he joined the Army in 2003 to find some anchor in life and move away from alcohol, drugs, and petty crimes. He was deployed to Iraq the same year and started journaling, partly as therapy and partly to pass the time. When several computers arrived at his base in Mosul, the author decided to start a military blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which soon became widely popular up to the point that the author came under surveillance and was pressured into shutting it down. In 2005, he turned his blog into a memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* and was praised for his "un-

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[5] Colby Buzzell was the first recipient of the award for his book *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*.

filtered, often ferocious expression of . . . [a] boots-on-the-ground view of the Iraq war" ("Ex-GI's Memoir"). The book is a collage of diary and blog entries, enriched with excerpts from official CNN reports, fan mail, quotes from his favorite books and songs, the U.S. Constitution, and complete transcripts of military oaths, official military speeches, and numerous official guidelines for soldiers when addressing the media. All of this served as his method of questioning and subverting mainstream media and discrediting official government and military reports.

The first part of the memoir reflects on Buzzell's mentioned reasons to join the army, which are, ironically, not at all connected to patriotism, a sense of duty, or belonging to generations of servicemen in his family. His reasons are far more pragmatic in the sense that he wants to move away from his parents' house at all costs. It is interesting and important to note how Buzzell was influenced and shaped by American popular culture that immortalized soldiers and sacralized war to the point that he believed that his reasons for enlisting were an anomaly in the system, only to learn that the majority of enlisted persons decided to join for the very same reasons—financial security and housing independence. In addition, the influence of American popular culture seems to have shaped his expectations about the war and the army. Just weeks before deployment, his battalion met their new commander, who appeared on the stage with a Tomahawk in his hand (they were the Tomahawk Battalion). Buzzell admits that, as he was listening to the commander saying "Men, this is not a peacekeeping mission. We will not be handing out bread, we will be handing out lead," he imagined the scene as "something out of *Patton*" (Buzzell, *My War* 57) with an American flag unfolding in the background. Furthermore, the commander's speech denies the fact that the American public does not support the invasion because, in his opinion, real Americans love to wage wars (57). Next to this, Buzzell confirms how

his generation grew up on Hollywood war movies such as "*Apocalypse Now, Full Metal Jacket, Platoon, Hamburger Hill, Patton, The Dirty Dozen, Black Hawk Down, In the Army Now*" and that many of them probably joined the Army "because they watched these movies one too many times" (73). To them, these are "classic war flicks" (73) that clearly no longer bear any anti-war message but are rather consumed during leisure time before deployment. Stacy Peebles, in her study *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier's Experience in Iraq*, observes this phenomenon and states that "instead of reflecting somberly on the carnage at hand, . . . [they] thrill to the violent and sexy spectacle of fighters like them violating social and moral taboos" (24).

During another battalion meeting, the soldiers were instructed on how they should deal with the media, in particular, what they *must* say if the reporters ask them about the mission:

- We are here to help Iraq restore its independence.
- We will work to eliminate the enemy that continues to hinder the progress for the Iraqi people.
- Our efforts support the continuing fight in the Global War on Terrorism.
- We will remain in Iraq until our mission is complete.

(Buzzell 60)

Clearly, the media were not directly to blame for censorship and the lack of criticism since, just like in the earlier Gulf conflict, the censorship came precisely from the ranks of the military leadership. Also, Buzzell was informed that embedded reporters would be with them in Iraq, with the aim of providing an accurate account of events. However, Buzzell remembers "how the embedded reporters reported the twenty-one days to Baghdad, and it was pretty sickening how they covered it. The media reported the war the same way they would have if it was the fucking Super Bowl of the century. Good vs. evil. America vs. Iraq. Us vs. Them. Right vs. Wrong" (Buzzell 59). Apart from

this, the author recalls how reporting about the war resembled a postmodern spectacle in which reporters were "all pumped up and excited like [they were] actually playing in the fucking game" before the report was interrupted by a "Britney Spears Pepsi commercial" and cell phone advertisements (60). It seems that the mainstream media still held onto the Persian Gulf War scenario regarding reports on the Iraq invasion, in which the line between reality and entertainment virtually disappeared. The public became a part of the "society of the spectacle,"[6] in which viewers, or better to say consumers, had only the illusion of being informed, whereas it was them who were actually consumed by hypermediation and hyperreality. As early as 1967, Guy Debord observed that life is an "accumulation of spectacles" and that reality resides in a "*pseudoworld* that can only be looked at" but not retrieved (4), which, in the digital age, surely became the new reality, or, as Baudrillard calls it, "hyperreality."

This is exactly what Buzzell wishes to challenge with his blog, however, but not at first. He admits that he learned about the opportunity to blog in a *Times* article and thought that posting "a little diary stuff, maybe some rants, links to some cool shit, thoughts, experiences, garbage, crap, whatever" (Buzzell, *My War* 107) might be a fine way to pass the time. His first post appeared on June 22, 2004, and the seeming anonymity of the Internet made him believe that "with the Internet and the blog format, it looked like I could write whatever I wanted to, post it, and people I didn't know at all would be able to read what I wrote . . . and I would remain totally invisible and nameless" (110). The *Times* article also informed him that "self-published blogs were becoming an alternative to the media" and mentioned the fact that soldiers were already blogging about the war (113), which made him wonder how the military would allow that. He soon learned

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[6] A term coined by Guy Debord in his 1967 study *Society of the Spectacle*.

that most of the blogs were shut down, except for the ones "saying a bunch of brainwashed rhetoric . . . that everyone could read on "the official U.S. Army recruiting website" (114). Despite being aware of possible and probable censorship, Buzzell continued to blog about his daily routine, his favorite books, songs, poems, and musings about the war up until the ambush in Mosul in August 2004.

This incident challenged Buzzell to write more openly in his blog. In fact, he remembers that before deployment, the Army—together with all the equipment—provided a list of approved responses to the questions the media might ask them, specifically stating what they could and what they *could not* discuss with the media, such as the number of troops and the information about operations, locations, casualties, and Rules of Engagement. These restrictions seemed logical since the information might have jeopardized soldiers' security and endangered the mission. However, Buzzell is enraged when he reads the CNN report on the fighting he participated in:

> MOSUL CLASHES LEAVE 12 DEAD
>
> Clashes between police and insurgents in the northern city of Mosul left 12 Iraqis dead and 26 wounded, hospital and police sources said Wednesday.
>
> Rifle and rocket-propelled-grenade fire as well as explosions were heard in the streets of the city.
>
> The provincial governor imposed a curfew that began at 3 p.m. local time (7 a.m. EDT), and two hours later, provincial forces, police and Iraqi National Guard took control, according to Hazem Gelawi, head of the governor's press office in Nineveh province. Gelawi said the city is stable and expect the curfew to be lifted Thursday. (Buzzell 248)

The next day, Buzzell posts a lengthy account of his experience in the fighting on his blog, in which he details what actually happened as he himself took part in a grueling four-hour exchange of fire with the in-

surgents.[7] He reports hearing and feeling "the bullets whiz literally inches" (250) from his head and saying that he has never experienced fear like that: "I cannot put into words how scared I was" (251). His vehicle was repeatedly attacked with RPGs, and they had to leave the "kill zone" to reload:

> We rolled back to the area where we'd just dodged death, and we were taking fire from all over. I fired and fired and fired and fired and fired. At EVERYTHING. I was just 360-ing the .50-cal and shooting at everything. We were taking fire from all over, and every single one of us had our guns blazing. . . . This gunfight had been going on for 4 ½ hours when the INGs [Iraqi National Guard] showed up to the party (about fucking time) in their ING pick-up trucks, all jam packed with ING soldiers in uniform armed with AK-47s. (252–56)

After the fight, he learns that two of his platoon members were injured and in critical condition, and reveals in his blog that he does not believe that the "CNN's report of only 12 dead is accurate" (260). This post was soon removed from his blog, and the full, thirteen-page-long transcript can now only be found in his memoir. The next blog entry quotes "Task Force Tomahawk Press Release," stating that "multinational forces served in a supporting role, providing additional support where and when the Iraqi leaders involved in the attacks requested it. No multinational forces were killed" (261). This report, though more detailed, provides incomplete information by not mentioning that they have severely injured soldiers, and blatantly lies about the supporting role of "multinational forces, who were, in fact, only Americans."[8]

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[7] See: cbftw.blogspot.com/2004/08/men-in-black.html.

Note that the post has been removed from the page; however, the readers' responses shed some light on the experience.

[8] On many occasions, Buzzell detected how the language of war has been appropriated in order to confuse or ease the public. Namely, euphemisms became a part of both the military and media discourse to the point that the original meaning is obscured or entirely incomprehensible to the average consumer of mass media. The purpose of

The next day, Buzzell learns that there is only little press infor-
mation regarding the ambush and fight in Mosul and wonders "what
else goes on here in Iraq that never gets reported to the people back
home" (263). However, to his surprise, Buzzell's entry becomes viral
as he starts to receive emails from all over the world (from civilians as
well as soldiers). Mostly, they thank him for shedding light on the ex-
perience of what it is like to be in a combat zone, as well as for
providing comfort to parents whose sons are serving in Iraq. Several
days later, Buzzell also learns that parts of his blog have been included
in the *News Tribune*, the local Tacoma, Washington newspaper, and
realizes that his "weblog will soon be the next casualty of war" (273).
Soon enough, the Pentagon discovers the article and informs com-
manders in Iraq. Buzzell was not punished in any way for blogging; in
fact, many soldiers, including the commander, were avid readers of his
blog because he was a good writer (275). The commander allowed
him to continue writing if his platoon sergeant approved it beforehand
and emphasized "that he didn't want to censor [him] and that [he] still
had the freedom of speech thing, as long as [he] wasn't doing anything
that would endanger the mission" (275–76). On several more occa-
sions, Buzzell's commanders made it very clear that, even as a soldier,
he had the right to the First Amendment, but that he could not go on
any more missions or even leave the base "until further notice" (285).

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such language was to propagate and support the certain image (picture or simulacrum)
of war, rather than to objectively report on it:

> One day we went on a vehicle patrol through one of the city's main
> arteries, the Tampa route. Vehicle patrols were still known as
> "movement to contact" tasks. The army used to call them "search
> and destroy" tasks, but as we are now a kinder, gentler army, now
> we call them "movement to contact." . . . Just as we can no longer
> call the enemy an enemy. Instead we call them "anti-Iraqi forces. . . .
> Movement to contact is when we would go trolling around the
> streets of Mosul in our Stryker vehicles to see if we could lure some
> terrorists or insurgents to take the bait and attack us" (Buzzell 168).

In other words, he was disabled from writing about the things that truly interested the public under the pretense that his blog might jeopardize operational security. By this time, Buzzell's blog had become quite popular and other non-profit journalists sided with him, claiming that his confinement had little to do with operational security and all to do with "American politics and how the war is seen by a public that is getting increasingly shaky about the overall venture" (291).

The visibility and popularity of his blog posed a real threat so that the authorities might shut it down, and he did not want to waste his "chain of command's time by having them review all [his] writing for 'OPSEC' concerns prior to [him] posting it on the World Wide Web" (300). Therefore, he decided to log off on August 22, 2004, after three months and a total of twenty blog entries.

4. Conclusion: From Alternative Media to the Spectacle

Personal war testimonies, especially those written by soldiers in the midst of war, have always been susceptible to censorship. The reasons for such a treatment are, in fact, understandable since there is always a danger that crucial information might come into the possession of the enemy. However, there are other reasons for such erasures that directly deal with the desired perception of the war in the public eye and consciousness. In the history of the U.S., unfavorable images, reports, and testimonies (especially about the war in Vietnam), fueled anti-war demonstrations and anger towards both the military and the government. Since then, the American military has devised a tactic to provide the media with information about the war, which became a spectacle and a propaganda-fest devoid of any reality. At the turn of the millennium, and with the rise of the Internet, the public gained access to more than just a sanitized version of war reposts. It was the military blogs in particular that seemingly provided a more accurate, detailed, first-hand, and immediate war coverage at first. Early studies reported

that military blogs seemed to have restored the public belief in the democratic process and gave voice to the marginalized. They profiled as alternative media that apparently could not be censored by reporters, editors, or the military and political elite, which was unimaginable during earlier wars.

With those ideas in mind, Colby Buzzell started his blog *CBFTW* during his deployment in Iraq in 2004, and it became one of the prime examples of soldiers on active duty who tried to dispute, challenge, and subvert the mainstream media's coverage of the war. Through his cynical, candid, and unfiltered accounts, he managed to fill in the gaps and downright reveal the shortcomings of official media and military reports regarding specific battles in Mosul. What is more, his writing provided reassurance and comfort to many parents whose sons served in Iraq during that time. However, as Buzzell's blog became viral in a matter of days, and got publicity in the media, it consequently disturbed the highest ranks of the American military—the Pentagon. Despite the fact that his blog did not jeopardize operational security, it did contradict official statements about the war, and the destiny of such accounts was clear—they were to be removed from the Internet. As of 2007, the Pentagon issued "a regulation that attempts to control material before it is posted on the Internet, requiring personnel to consult with superiors and security officers prior to Internet activity" (Peebles 44), which happened to Buzzell three years earlier.

However, since the Internet is "a medium that even the strongest government could not control" (Peebles 44), the officials took the "if you cannot beat them, join them" stance. Thus, "what once had the hint of sassy independence or even underground rebellion has gone mainstream" (Dao) in a sense that the biggest Internet site, milblogging.com, was overtaken by military.com in 2006, and the following year, President George W. Bush met with the milblogging community. Unsurprisingly, "the blogs represented at the meeting are generally

pro-Bush and pro-military, and the ensuing reports were highly sympathetic to the president" (Abramowitz). One can then argue that the vigor of these alternative media was as short-lived as Colby Buzzell's blog. The independent, unfiltered, and riveting accounts of the war present in the first military blogs have become co-opted by the very institution they once desired to challenge and dispute. The fact that they have been transformed into yet another spectacle is supported by the fact that the 2023 milblog conference was held in Las Vegas under the name Military Influencer Conference ("MIC") with a list of celebrities attending and lucrative cash prizes included. The conference that in 2005 was envisioned as a meeting between bloggers and their readers, ultimately metamorphosed into an all-American product—showbusiness.

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"Give Us Our Daily *Dread*":
Dystopian Traces in the COVID-19 Media Discourse on the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters

Abstract

Even before the war in Ukraine delivered the final blow to contemporary semblances of freedom, safety, and democracy in the Western civilized world, the COVID-19 pandemic has since the early 2020 reminded society at large that dystopias, despite being highly imaginative and often futuristic, are never mere fantasy. In fact, repressive social, political, linguistic, media, and other forms of discourse found in fictional dystopias are deeply grounded in reality. In the face of the pronounced individualization, one of the postulates of modern society, individual freedom, has been unmasked as an intensely fragile concept during the pandemic. Introduction of "the new normal"—restriction of movement, suddenly illegal physical contact, police hours, ostracization of the (potentially) infected, peer pressure—underpinned by a constant and intimidating media rhetoric, has disclosed within an allegedly free society the notable inner workings of a repressive dystopia. Beyond the preventative and safety measures devised to curb the virus spreading, the typical dystopian inequality, political hypocrisy, and fear-mongering can be discerned, disseminated mainly through media. In tracing the social, political, and media discourses of Orwell's classical dystopia *1984*, the aim of this paper is to exhibit the ways in which the COVID-19 media discourse on the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters connects contemporary Croatia with a typical dystopian society.

1. Introduction

In her paper "Communicating Covid-19 Pandemic: Media Coverage of the Headquarters and the Use of Persuasion Strategies in Croatia," Marijana Grbeša explores how four key figures of the Headquarters of Civil Protection of the Republic of Croatia were portrayed by the Croatian mainstream media during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. These key figures are Vili Beroš (the Croatian Minister of Health), Davor Božinović (Croatian Minister of the Interior), Krunoslav Capak (Head of the Croatian Institute for Public Health), and Alemka Markotić (Head of the "Fran Mihaljević" Clinic for Infective Diseases in Zagreb) (Grbeša 57). Grbeša argues that the predominantly positive media portrayal of the said four Civil Protection representatives and their use of "pandemic-related strategies of persuasion to achieve public compliance" ensured that the Croatian population followed their rigorous instructions without reproach usually reserved for politicians (57). The present chapter uses Grbeša's analysis of the media rhetoric and the said four prominent figures' "persuasive strategies" (57) as a starting point to explore the similarities between discourses used by both the Croatian media and the Civil Protection representatives and discourses employed by canonical dystopian regimes. Specifically, Grbeša finds that the Headquarters used "fear appeals, military metaphors and insistence on the messages of togetherness" (57) as well as that the Croatian media praised the Civil Protection representatives, all of which strengthened their influence and authority over people. This paper argues that the intimidating rhetoric used by the Headquarters and their exaltation by the Croatian media platforms are comparable to manipulation tactics that are often employed in fictional dystopias such as *1984* by George Orwell.

It is important to note that this chapter refrains from any suggestion that the pandemic was a worldwide "hoax" or a conspiracy theory (Booth) and that the key representatives of Civil Protection deliberately deceived the Croatian population in all aspects in order to oppress it, as is the case with leader figures in canonical dystopias. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe striking similarities between the oppressive discourses used by fictional dystopian regimes and the fear-mongering proclamations that surrounded restrictive physical measures imposed by the Civil Protection members on the Croatian population during the 2020 pandemic. These parallels stem from the fact that both of these discourses represent the biopolitical investment of life, as first proposed by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1976) (139). Proclaiming the aim of protecting the life and health of the general public in contemporary societies and employing methods of careful monitoring and control, the biopolitical approach to governing life is often misused by fictional dystopian regimes since it can easily cross the barrier from the utopian aim of protection to outright oppression. This is especially true in crisis situations and health scares since dystopian regimes exploit times of uncertainty to impose new rules and restrictions and to force the population into submission, which they perpetuate even after the imminent danger has passed.[1] In support of this view, Daniele Lorenzini emphasizes that the aim of biopolitics is to exert its influence over large numbers of people and at all times:

> [T]he biological processes characterizing the life of human beings as a species became a crucial issue for political decision-

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[1] For instance, Aldous Huxley's World State was established in the aftermath of the global crisis culminating in the Nine Years' War (41). Orwell's Oceania in *1984* keeps its citizens subdued by reminding them of "the ravages of the atomic war of the nineteen-fifties" (197), while Margaret Atwood's Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* was established as a result of the global infertility crisis.

> making, a new "problem" to be addressed by governments – and
> this, not only in "exceptional" circumstances (such as that of an
> epidemic), but in "normal" circumstances as well. . . . We are no
> longer governed only, nor even primarily, as political subjects of
> law, but also as living beings who, collectively, form a global
> mass – a "population." (41)

The main tool that is often employed by biopolitics for such extensive
control is fear. In the case of COVID-19, "the fear of the coronavirus
reduce[d] our social lives to the preoccupation with bare life, which in
turn legitimize[d] the emergency measures undertaken by govern-
ments" (Agamben qtd. in Prozorov 64).[2] The main aim of this paper,
therefore, is to analyze how the Civil Protection representatives and
their media portrayals contributed to creating a pandemic Panopticon
that approximated contemporary Croatian society to typical dystopian
regimes by using strategies of restriction, surveillance, intimidation,
and peer pressure, all enabled and exacerbated by the media.

2. The Pandemic Panopticon

In one of his first texts in which he discusses biopolitics, *Discipline and
Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault ties the notion of biopower and its
practices to Jeremy Bentham's concept of Panopticon. Described as a
prison building of such an architectural design that puts prisoners un-
der constant surveillance due to the obscure position of the guard(s),
Panopticon represents a perfect metaphor for contemporary societies
(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200). Without the prisoners really
knowing when they are being watched or not, they assume that they

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[2] Giorgio Agamben would be the most logical choice for a recent secondary source, as
he notes in his book *Where We Are Now? The Epidemic as Politics* (2021): "Once terror-
ism ceased to exist as a cause for measures of exception, the invention of an epidemic
offers the ideal pretext for widening them beyond all known limits" (13). Yet, this
article refrains from directly engaging with Agamben for his at times "exaggerated and
conspiratorial" (Prozorov 63) attitude to the COVID-19 pandemic.

are under constant surveillance and start to restrict their own behavior; thus, the power exacted over them is not necessarily material or physical in nature but, rather, psychological. Foucault saw such an internalization of rules and auto-censorship of the prisoners' behavior as governing principles of many contemporary social institutions (205). Consequently, he characterized armies, schools, and hospitals, among others, as institutions under severe restriction and monitoring of movement, instilled self-restriction, and peer pressure, just like prisons. As M. Keith Booker summarizes Foucault's argument, the latter claimed that "the difference between life inside a prison and outside is not so great as might first appear" (81). The said "carceral nature" of society (Booker 79) was especially prominent during the pandemic. As Foucault notes, "[w]henever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used" (*Discipline and Punish* 205), and the pandemic lockdown was a time when large numbers of people had to quickly adopt behaviors in response to new rules.

Overnight, a series of decisions on restrictions was introduced (Krnić "Priopćenje za medije"), curbing the liberties of the population in a way unprecedented in the modern world. Similar to the entire world, the Croatian population was subjected to harsh physical restrictions. As soon as the lockdown was announced on March 19, 2020, all public institutions, shops, and entertainment areas were closed down, with schools and higher education institutions being relegated to virtual classrooms, and only emergency services, pharmacies, and grocery stores being allowed to work ("Croatia – COVID-19"). Additionally, the grocery stores and pharmacies were "under strict disease control measures and shorter . . . [working] hours" (Lazić et al. 44). All others were confined to working from home, and citizens were warned not to leave their homes except for emergencies. The re-

striction that most resembled dystopian scenarios from books and TV screens, however, was the severe curbing of social contact.[3] Except for the "persons from the same household" ("Recommendations and Instructions"), people were prohibited from socializing with, engaging in physical gestures, and even standing in proximity to other people due to the danger of spreading the disease. Detailed protocols for entering stores and public institutions were rapidly introduced, prohibiting citizens from entering public buildings without face masks and hand disinfection, obligating them to fulfill visitors' records upon entering any public service, and the like ("Recommendations and Instructions").

Furthermore, to ensure compliance of the population regarding the prohibition of spending time in public places, police hours or curfews were introduced, banning people from leaving their homes during the night and outside of regular working hours. In order to make the citizens conform to these restrictions, police patrols were employed to cruise the streets and prevent social gatherings as well as guard inter-city and international roads. All of a sudden, a simple activity such as walking down the street with a friend or family member was potentially a punishable act and constituted a threat to national health and security, according to the Civil Protection proclamations. As such, Grbeša quotes Davor Božinović: "He warned that 'Croatian police is going to monitor how people comply with the measures; if they don't[,] they (the police) are going to react' and 'I saw people walking in pairs this morning. This should not be happening. Keep

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[3] Naturally, this approach follows the established system response to medical crises, which Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish* (189–90) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (35–37), but the system's, at times, overemphasized harshness will be discussed in detail in subsection "3.3. Hypocrisy and Doublespeak" through examples such as the funeral of the Zagreb City mayor, in which none of the social distancing measures were adhered to.

the distance or [the] police will punish you' (*Index*, 21 March 2020)"
(71). This easily evokes Margaret Atwood's highly-policed state of
Gilead, in which women's movements are similarly restricted and in
which physical proximity on the street is a warrant for trouble:
"[W]hen we met, outside on the street, we were careful to exchange
nothing more than the ordinary greetings. Nobody wanted to be re-
ported, for disloyalty" (Atwood 278–79).

   During the COVID-19 lockdown in Croatia, not only public
spaces were subjected to police scrutiny but also private homes. The
main restrictions and rules related to people's private homes had to do
with social gatherings and the practice of self-isolation. During the
lockdown, between March and May, house gatherings with more than
five people were prohibited, and fines were issued to those who en-
gaged in them (Krnić "Proglašen kraj epidemije"). Police raids were
undertaken on "suspicious" locations where large social gatherings
could be possible, including restaurants, nightclubs, but also private
homes ("Policija rastjerala desetak veseljaka"). This evokes Orwell's
description of the police-state into which Oceania suddenly turned,
with "the police patrol snooping into people's windows" (Orwell,
1984 4). Those infected with COVID-19 were obliged to inform their
primary healthcare providers, and police patrols also visited those reg-
istered in their private homes to verify that they were adhering to the
rules of self-isolation. In the case of transgression and violation of the
"new rules," fines and punishments were administered. While it is log-
ical that the police and Civil Protection representatives, who informed
the population of the newly imposed measures and prohibitions,
wanted to prevent the disease from spreading, it is possible to observe
similarities between their *modus operandi* and fictional dystopian re-
gimes' repression of social contact. Namely, people were asked to re-
port their family members and others for not complying with the rules

of self-isolation and movement restrictions. In other words, people were encouraged to "snitch" the "uncompliant" to the government officials (Weiner qtd. in Grbeša 60). The encouragement of peer pressure is highly reminiscent of Orwell's *1984* and its use of "the family as a tool" of political power, whereby "[f]amily members are effectively turned against one another, with children being encouraged to inform on their parents and spouses encouraged to spy on one another" (Booker 75).

Moreover, traces of fictional canonical dystopias' precedence of the communal over the individual could also be noted. This is because during the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals and the family in particular lost the power against the system: mothers were not allowed to be with their underage and, in some instances, even new-born children in hospitals, husbands were not allowed to be with their wives during childbirth ("Šok za rodilje"), and terminally ill people were prevented from being visited by their relatives (Perinić Lewis and Rajić Šikanjić 28). It was as if those same ill people, whether infected with COVID-19 or any other illness, had become the property of the state; in case they needed to seek medical assistance, they were taken to a hospital and isolated from the rest of the population and their loved ones. The unprecedented demands on doctors and medical workers meant that the family members received scarce or no information on the patient's status (Perinić Lewis and Rajić Šikanjić 28), and they would either recover and return home or be administered by the state with no input by their family members, in the case of patient demise. All this resulted in strong feelings of helplessness, fear, and uncertainty, which were exacerbated by the publicly available and regularly disseminated data on the number of COVID-19-infected and deceased people, available in daily news reports (Nakić).

In fact, just like in canonical dystopian literature, the media assumed the central position in restricting and controlling people's behavior. Due to restrictions and concomitant lack of social and physical contact, people were forced to turn to media outlets as their only source of information about governmental prohibitions, prevention measures, and health instructions. This added another level to the digital Panopticon due to constant media streaming and the barrage of deaths, possible ways of spreading the virus, and infection symptoms, which increased the already high levels of anxiety and fear among the population. For this reason, the media and their role during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic can be directly linked to *1984* and its telescreen, a TV-like technological device installed in every citizen's house to control their behavior and shape their consciousness due to a constant stream of interpellating content from the government:

> An oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. (Orwell, *1984* 4)

While the citizens of Oceania are unable to switch their telescreens off, there was no physical barrier that prevented the Croatian citizens from doing so. Nevertheless, what precluded the population from 'switching off' the constant media streams on pandemic developments was the same: the need to be regularly informed about the changing rules of behavior to avoid getting infected and being punished by government officials. As Booker explains in the case of *1984*, since telescreens function as spying devices, Orwell's citizens "modify their behavior . . . assuming themselves to be under surveillance at all time" (79) because the rules imposed by the regime are ever-changing. The same could be said in relation to restrictions and rules imposed by the Croatian government and disseminated by the Civil Protection repre-

sentatives in the media. It was necessary for individuals to constantly inform themselves because the regulations could change from day to day, from hour to hour. It is for this reason that the representatives' claim "The next two weeks are crucial" ("Capak: Sljedeća dva tjedna su ključna") became famous because it kept the citizens in constant wait of the new rules and turns of events.

The fear, uncertainty, and restrictions were the initial reasons which made the Croatian population willing to "sacrifice our personal freedom and uncritically obey the orders issued by Vili Beroš, Alemka Markotić and Krunoslav Capak" (Grbeša 59). According to Foucault, the Panopticon and, in turn, prison-like contemporary societies force individuals to restrain and oppress themselves and their peers. He deems that the individual "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 202–203). As Capak reminded the Croatian population in 2020, they had to internalize the Headquarters' orders and follow them even without blatant surveillance: "We will not be there to monitor the people, but we will make sure that they adhere to the health measures we prescribed. If people disregard them, we can revoke them and close the markets at any time" ("Capak objasnio"). The biopolitical strategies carefully employed by the media and especially by Beroš, Markotić, Božinović, and Capak as the Civil Protection heads ensured the docility of the population by perpetuating these widespread feelings of fear and uncertainty despite official proclamations on wanting to calm and protect the population as their only goals. The purpose of the next few paragraphs will thus be to analyze the media reports on these four Civil Protection representatives, their

rhetorical strategies, and the similarities between these two and dystopian media discourse.

3. Dystopian Traces in the COVID-19 Media Discourse on the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters

In canonical dystopias such as *1984*, the media have a key role in shaping the population's consciousness and directing their behavior. Next to the "ever-present surveillance," Booker sees the telescreens in *1984* as the main interpellating force in this canonical dystopia (80). His claim is in line with Althusser's view of interpellation as a set of practices that shape individuals' consciousness in accordance with the ruling ideology (Althusser 190–91). The said telescreens constantly emit propaganda and media reports that either heavily praise the leader, Big Brother, for his competence in leading the people of Oceania or report on enemies, whether external or internal, and the consequent need to introduce even more strict rules among the population to protect it. These two discourses can thus be divided into two categories: exaltation and intimidation, which are to be analyzed in the next subsections. Incidentally, they correspond to what Grbeša terms as "the flattering media image of the key [pandemic] communicators" (58) and their "fear appeals" (70), which we observed during the 2020 pandemic in Croatia.

3.1. The Exaltation of the Leader(s)

Although the Croatian media usually portray politicians in a negative light, the image they painted in the first couple of months of the 2020 pandemic was "exceptionally favourable" for the said four figures (Grbeša 66). Considering the unprecedented health crisis the modern world faced at the time, it seems natural that the nation turned to those in charge for information, assurance, and leadership. That said,

the sudden sway from media denunciations of politicians and distrust in their leadership skills to the unreserved exaltation of the "fantastic four" (Horvat qtd. in Grbeša 62) can be compared to the sudden change of sentiment the protagonist of *1984* feels for his leader, encouraged by the exposure to media. Orwell thus describes Winston Smith's inner state as follows: "At those moments his secret loathing of Big Brother changed into adoration, and Big Brother seemed to tower up, *an invincible, fearless protector*, standing like a rock against [enemy forces]" (Orwell, *1984* 17; my emphasis). Granted, the enemy forces in the times of pandemic were the coronavirus and all those who in any way strayed from the rules imposed by the government and endangered the life of the population, but the role of protector and the swaying of the individual(s) sentiment in favor of the ruler are the same. The epithets that the media reports attributed to Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović, Alemka Markotić, and Krunoslav Capak often approximate an almost religious "devotion and loyalty" (Booker 72) reserved for Orwell's Big Brother. In line with that, Alemka Markotić was praised as "the woman who brought peace to the Croatian people" in times of such uncertainty, "whose day lasts longer than 24 hours," and who is above all "a woman of faith" who strives to "live her faith every day" ("Prof. Alemka Markotić: Životna priča žene koja je smirila Hrvatsku"). Grbeša also notes that the Civil Protection representatives' "'heroism' was constructed around people's admiration for the members of the team, especially for Vili Beroš," since he was "often glorified as the 'savior'" (74). This almost religious sentiment evokes the praise of "My Saviour!", which a woman directs at Big Brother during a media stream called Two Minute Hate (Orwell, *1984* 18).

The framing of the Civil Protection representatives as superheroes was directly linked to children, with media displaying the chil-

dren's drawings of them "as superheroes" (Grbeša 74; see also "Dječak iz Nuštra…"). Once again, this is reminiscent of the role of children as instruments of regime propaganda in *1984*, whereby children become an "extension" of the regime (Booker 75) by adopting the behaviors imposed by the leaders or by reporting those who refuse to act by governmental orders.

Moreover, the four Civil Protection representatives were "praised for their competence, clarity, and sobriety" (Grbeša 74). All of them were on the receiving end of media praise, but special attention was given to the then newly appointed Minister of Health, Vili Beroš.[4] In a similar manner in which Big Brother is saluted for his infallibility, knowledge, wisdom, virtue, inspiration, and leadership (Orwell *1984* 74), the persona of Vili Beroš was apotheosized. He was termed "the hero of the nation" and "the best thing that . . . happen[ed] to Croatia amidst the COVID-19 pandemic" (Pintar). The media simultaneously lauded Beroš for his personal and political achievements, assuring the population that he had a key role in protecting all our lives and health, just as Big Brother protected the citizens of Oceania.

3.2. (Homeland) War Language

Apart from the exaltations of the leader, the most frequent tune that the citizens of Oceania are exposed to through telescreens is the "strident military music" (9), with its alleged purpose of boosting the nation's spirit regarding their brave soldiers in faraway countries. However, the war music that constantly fills the living spaces of citizens of Oceania spurs sentiments of hate and distrust among people, as if

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[4] Beroš assumed the function of the Croatian Minister of Health on January 31, 2020 (Hrvatska liječnička komora), and the COVID-19 lockdown started on March 19, 2020.

their everyday life were a constant battle and they had to destroy the enemy or live in fear that the enemy will destroy them. This reminds the citizens of Oceania that Big Brother is their great leader and that they need him to protect them; otherwise, they would perish as a country and as individuals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, war metaphors were used globally, as witnessed by the Director-General of WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's statement "We are at war with a virus that threatens to tear us apart" (qtd. in Chappell). However, metaphors had a special role among the Croatian people. On the one hand, the "language of war" (Grbeša 61) was used to remind the Croatian people of their own resilience during the Homeland War and their loyalty to their leaders, who had led them to victory. As Grbeša quotes Davor Božinović, the Minister of the Interior, who reminded the citizens of Croatia of the Homeland War: "Like 29 years ago . . . I would like to thank the police, civil protection services, army, and of course, health workers" (72). He lauded the services for being efficient first responders during both the war and the pandemic. Thereby, terms such as "mobilization," "battle with coronavirus," "soldier," and "first line of defense" (Grbeša 72) were all used to remind the Croatian population of the hard times they had already been to and boost their morale against the enemy.

On the other hand, such language was a constant reminder that the Croatian population was at war with the virus. This suggested that people had to remain vigilant and ready to listen to the Civil Protection representatives' rigorous instructions if they wished to survive, scaring people into obedience and inciting more unease and uncertainty. As such, Minister Beroš noted: "If people . . . [refuse to] trust me, as the Minister of Health, if they . . . [refuse to] trust doctors, scientists, or institutions, they must trust the horrendous death tolls, which

show the nature of the disease we are at *war* with" (qtd. in Grund). Similarly, when it came to their vaccination appeals in 2021, Markotić infamously warned: "We will either get vaccinated or we will have *zimmer frei*, online classes for children, older people locked up, and we will fill hospitals and cemeteries once again" ("Važna novost o nošenju maski"). Their statements and warnings were to be taken as *de facto* laws, even if the safety measures and infringements changed from day to day. In support of this, the reports praised the work of doctors, nurses, and other medical staff in an attempt to calm the people's anxiety and convince them of the efficacy of the healthcare systems. At the same time, scenes such as the preparation of beds in Arena Zagreb, Croatia's largest concert hall, were shown to people to scare them into obedience (Krnić "Arena Zagreb").

Fig. 1. Hospital Beds Prepared in Croatia's Largest Concert Hall; Krnić, Ivana. "Arena Zagreb uskoro prima prve pacijente: Doznajemo koga će ondje prebacivati iz Dubrave." *Jutarnji list*, 25 Nov. 2020, jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/arena-zagreb-uskoro-prima-prve-pacijente-doznajemo-koga-ce-ondje-prebacivati-iz-dubrave-15033285#&gid=1&pid=6. Photograph by Ronald Goršić/Cropix. Reproduced by permission of Ronald Goršić and Cropix.

This dual function of the war rhetoric used by the Civil Protection figures approximates yet another dystopian strategy and that is doublespeak, which will be delineated and exemplified in the next subsection.

3.3. Hypocrisy and Doublespeak

Many rhetorical strategies and statements in fictional dystopias are often aimed at outright deceiving the population or asking them to participate in the act of deceiving themselves by accepting double standards. Orwell's two dystopian texts term this strategy in two different ways. In *Animal Farm* (2013), it is "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (107). In *1984*, this governmental strategy is called "*doublethink*" (9) and it has the following role: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it" (Orwell 37). Numerous media reports and the Civil Protection representatives' statements and rules issued during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic were incongruent and paradoxical, asking the Croatian population to suspend belief and accept them.

The first example is the funeral of the former Zagreb City mayor, Milan Bandić. Since funerals are mass gatherings, according to the regulation issued by the Civil Protection Headquarters, the participation of a large number of people was forbidden (Perinić Lewis and Rajić Šikanjić 23). Many citizens buried their loved ones in private ceremonies without the support of their wider families and friends, exacerbated by the fear for their own and others' health. However, the media blatantly showed several hundreds of people who participated

at Milan Bandić's funeral ("Na pogrebu") on March 3, 2021, before, after, and *during* which date the said restriction of a severely limited number of participants was still in force. Although no repercussions and fines were issued to the participants, this did not stop the Civil Protection representatives from insisting that *all* citizens of the Republic of Croatia must follow the rules, from claiming they would be punished, and from demanding the adherence of the general population. According to Booker, this is a typical dystopian strategy: dissemination of "[b]latant absurdities – . . . [due to which] coldly calculated rational procedures turn out to be the ultimate form of irrationality" (71). The same happened with local elections in 2020, when, as the journalist Ivana Krnić notes:

> Just before the local elections in 2020, Croatia had allegedly got rid of the coronavirus epidemic. Although the pandemic was officially still in force, the Prime Minister and other officials declared their victory over the coronavirus and so the elections were held with next to none safety measures, loud music, celebration, and everything that was up until that point [and thereafter] strictly prohibited. ("25 najluđih stvari")

The next instance of hypocrisy and "doublethink" resembling the *modus operandi* of Orwell's Oceanian regime is the Civil Protection representative's constant use of "war metaphors and scare tactics" (Grbeša 60) while at the same time urging the population to remain calm and not panic. It is the same as the function of the telescreen in *1984*, through which the propaganda is constantly delivered to the citizens of Oceania. On the one hand, the aim is to keep them in a constant state of distrust and animosity in order to direct their hate toward their family members, closest neighbors, and faraway soldiers. On the other hand, the constant exposure to propaganda aims to scare people by reminding them of the need to be docile and follow Big Brother's lead, otherwise their life will be in danger. When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, the constant media coverage warned the Croa-

tian population against those who did not comply with the measures, claiming they would be caught and punished, thus exhibiting the typical dystopian role of "constant peer pressure that attaches a strong stigma to any deviation from the communal norm" (Booker 57). As mentioned above, people were encouraged "to scrutinize, shame and 'snitch' uncompliant neighbors" (Weiner qtd. Grbeša 60).

This leads to the final connection between the pandemic media discourse and dystopian rhetoric strategies, which Grbeša terms as "pandemic shaming" and "negative solidarity" by emphasizing the divide between us and them (73). This practice of denouncing those who refused to comply with the restrictions and warning them of possible consequences compares to "scapegoating," through which fictional dystopian "governments typically enforce their intolerance of difference through persecution of specified marginal groups" (Booker 11). In literary dystopias such as *Brave New World* and *1984*, all those who oppose the regime's ideology, propaganda, and rules of conduct are scapegoated and threatened to be eliminated from mainstream society. During the pandemic, those who refused to comply with the strict regulations were not only accused of endangering their own health and warned that they might be denied help if they contracted COVID-19 and needed medical assistance but also stigmatized as walking hazards and basically murderers. Grbeša quotes Alemka Markotić, who said: "'Breaking self-isolation is the same thing as having a gun and want[ing] to kill someone because you are irresponsible" (71). Markotić was also quoted saying, "Anyone who does not self-isolate is a bioterrorist" (qtd. in Krnić "25 najluđih stvari").

Later, toward the end of 2020 and during 2021, when the vaccination was introduced and workers were obliged to present a vaccination certificate or undergo a COVID-19 test every time they entered a public building, the scapegoats became those who refused to

vaccinate. Certain workers were under threats of losing their jobs and citizens were scared that they would be denied medical help if not vaccinated. Yet, the vaccination period revealed yet another instance of doublespeak and hypocrisy. While the vaccination was said to be "extremely sensitive and to be kept in a cool environment of −70 degrees Celsius" ("Anketa: Je li Capak na primjeren način"), the head of the Croatian Institute for Public Health, Krunoslav Capak, was photographed sitting and posing on a case containing the vaccine.

In turn, this exacerbated the Civil Protection representatives' fall from the grace bestowed on them by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Beroš, Božinović, Capak, and Markotić became "yesterday's national heroes" (Karlović Sabolić), and the media reestablished the negative narrative of the Croatian politicians and leading figures, which is a topic that warrants additional research in the context of dystopian media strategies and rhetoric to be embarked on sometime in the future.

4. Conclusion

In dystopian literature, media and the language of the media have a key role in establishing and maintaining the regime's rule. Since "the power of language . . . lies in its ability to carry out or perform changes in people's way of thinking or perceiving the world" (Matek and Pataki 359), fictional dystopian regimes often resort to propaganda disseminated by the media to maintain their position. They often manipulate the language and use specific rhetorical strategies either to change or perpetuate public opinion on certain issues, mainly to keep the population subdued and docile. Arising in times of crisis, fictional dystopian leaders—such as Orwell's Big Brother or Huxley's World Controllers—often gain people's trust and ensure their obedience by establishing themselves as knowledgeable, competent, and benevolent

protectors. Such an image is perpetuated by the media through constant exposure, praises, and slogans, perpetuating the attitude that the leader or leaders are there to guide and protect the population. Due to the fear of the unprecedented crisis that was the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the population was confined to their homes and forbidden from engaging in physical contact with anyone outside their households, the media outlets became the population's only source of information.

This chapter has compared a selection of the most persuasive statements by the four representatives of the Civil Protection of the Republic of Croatia during the 2020 pandemic lockdown—Vili Beroš, Alemka Markotić, Davor Božinović, and Krunoslav Capak—in the context of discourse and tactics used by the leaders of canonical dystopian texts such as George Orwell's *1984*. Building on the rhetoric which the Civil Protection representatives used to impose the lockdown restrictions and maintain adherence of the population, and which Marijana Grbeša discusses in her article "Communicating Covid-19 Pandemic: Media Coverage of the Headquarters and the Use of Persuasion Strategies in Croatia," this chapter has concluded that these strategies strongly correspond to and find examples in canonical dystopias *1984* and even *The Handmaid's Tale*. These strategies are the exultation of the Civil Protection representatives in the manner of Big Brother, the prohibition of social contact similar to that in Gilead (which targets only those who are not in the position of power), the instrumentalization of children and family members to shame and report "rebellious behavior," and paradoxical "doublespeak" in the form of boosting the spirit of the population while actively working to scare them through constant exposure to intimidating media discourse.

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