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Mine Your Own Business:[1] The Functions of Metaphor in Serbian Anti-Lithium Mining Discourse

Introduction

In recent Serbian history, few topics have sparked as much controversy and so deeply divided Serbian society as the prospect of lithium mining in Western Serbia, planned by the Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto. The vast lithium deposits discovered in 2004[2] in the valley of river Jadar in Western Serbia, a densely populated and very rich agricultural area known

[1] "Mine Your Own Business: The Dark Side of Environmentalism" is the title of a 2006 documentary film directed and produced by Phelim McAleer and Ann McElhinney, reporting on environmentalists' opposition to the Roșia Montană gold mining project in Romania.

[2] It was Professor Jelena Obradović from the Faculty of Mining and Geology, University of Belgrade who identified the lithium-bearing mineral jadarite in the Jadar valley in the 1980s. Professor Obradović's assistant informed Rio Tinto of the discovery and the company began geological research of Serbia's lithium deposits in 2004 (*Analyzing lithium extraction methods*, 2024).

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for its highly fertile land and significant reserves of underground drinkable water, are now claimed to be large enough to cover as much as 90% of Europe's current lithium needs[3] and help the EU secure lithium for its green transition, thus reducing its dependence on Chinese imports.

In 2004, Rio Tinto was issued its first permit by the Serbian Ministry of Mining and Energy to conduct geological research in the Jadar Valley area; as many as 13 years later, Serbia signed a memorandum of understanding with Rio Tinto, making the Jadar project a priority in its national strategy for the sustainable use of natural sources and commodities. The first protests against the project were organized locally in 2020 by environmentalists and residents of the area, who, backed by some experts,[4] expressed their discontent with plans to build a lithium mine, pointing out the huge environmental risks, such as pollution of water sources and threats to public health. This was followed by the first in the series of protests against Rio Tinto, held in Belgrade on 11 September 2021, where thousands of protesters called for an end to the planned lithium mining project. The protests soon spread to all the key cities in Serbia, accompanied by blockades of the major roads and highways, which ultimately forced the Government to suspend the project in 2022. However, in July 2024, now backed by the EU and especially by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the Serbian Government restored Rio Tinto's license to extract lithium, which caused another round of protests, culminating on 11 August 2024, when tens of thousands of protesters hit the streets in Belgrade demonstrating against the rebooting of the controversial deal with Rio Tinto to open what would be the largest lithium mine ever set up on agricultural and populated land. To understand the controversies surrounding lithium mining in Serbia, it is important to take account of the country's sociopolitical context. President Aleksandar Vučić and the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) have been in power for more than a decade. The SNS, described as a right-wing, catch-all, populist party,[5] holds the majority of seats in parliament. President Vučić has long been accused by the opposition of democratic backsliding, increasing autocratic tendencies, and blocking any critical opinion and debate on important public issues. Against this backdrop, the lack of transparency surrounding the legal and environmental impacts

[3] This claim was made by Rio Tinto's former chairman, Simon Thompson (Paul, 2022).
[4] See *Jadar project timeline* (2024).
[5] See Spasojević (2024).

of the Jadar project has caused great dissatisfaction among environmental activists and the main opposition parties, both of which are critical of Rio Tinto's corporate policy and President Vučić's stabilocratic regime.

Today, Serbian public opinion is divided over the issue of lithium mining: the local population in the valley of the river Jadar and a large number of other Serbian citizens (around 60% of the total population, according to a recent opinion survey[6]) strongly oppose the project, believing it poses a significant environmental threat and will only benefit business. The rest of the population, led by the Government and President Vučić, firmly believe that the project is a major development opportunity for Serbia and a path to economic prosperity. Consequently, the lithium-mining project has sparked intense debate, which has received extensive and regular coverage in both traditional and social media (*Jadar project timeline*, 2024).

From the perspective of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2013; Musolff, 2016), a suitable framework for combining and analysing both cognitive and discursive facets of relevant social issues, in this paper we examine how the topic of lithium mining and extraction is metaphorically conceptualized in the Serbian political and media discourse. According to CMA (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2013; Musolff, 2016), the choice of a specific metaphor is ideological since by changing the metaphor we use we may change the way we think and feel about a specific aspect of social or political reality. Therefore, the main goal of the critical analysis of metaphors is to identify the purpose of a particular metaphor in political discourse "because when we wish to explain why certain language choices were made in preference to others, we need to identify the purpose for which they are selected" (Charteris-Black, 2013, p. 495). Here, we particularly focus on the ways anti-lithium activists and politicians use metaphor in the argumentation of their viewpoints. Analysing a dataset of articles collected from various electronic news media outlets, our research objective is to investigate the functions of two metaphors manifested in the anti-lithium discourse, namely the WAR and COLONIALISM metaphors, and how they help shape attitudes against this highly controversial environmental and political issue in Serbia. We will argue that various functions can be served by metaphorical structuring via the WAR or COLONIALISM metaphors of the lithium mining

[6] The survey results were published in *New Serbian Political Thought*, an influential journal specializing in political science. See "Istraživanja javnog mnjenja Srbija" (2024).

and extraction process and the parties that endorse it: a persuasive function, to convince the various audiences of the seriousness of the issue and mobilize the public against the Jadar lithium-mining project of Rio Tinto; an affective one, to create a sense of urgency in the public and deepen their emotional reaction to the project; and an evaluative one, to provide a negative judgment of opponents and belittle their arguments.

Metaphor and environmental issues

It should come as no surprise that metaphors are readily deployed in discourses dealing with controversial issues which raise environmental concern, such as climate change, deforestation, forest fires, lithium mining, etc., since metaphor has now long been known to be a powerful instrument for impacting people's thinking and feelings. As Atanasova and Koteyko (2017b) note, topics such as climate change have become "a mobilizing idea" rather than "a physical phenomenon" and have evolved into "politicized scientific issues attracting abundant media coverage" (p. 71), while scholars are increasingly focusing on the cognitive and discursive aspects of the metaphorical representation of these issues.

Studies dealing with the metaphorical structuring of environmental issues can be divided into two groups: those that explore the use of conventional metaphors, i.e., that "structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 140), and those that are less conventional and are described as imaginative and creative. In studies that focus on journalistic discourse and the figurative representation of environmental issues contained therein, scholars have endeavoured to uncover the most common metaphors and the functions they then reveal. Thus, climate change and climate crisis have been depicted by means of WAR (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017a, 2017b; Augé, 2023; Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023), HEALTH/ILLNESS (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017b; Augé, 2022; Nerlich & Jaspal, 2012), JOURNEY (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017b), CONTAINER, whether it is HOME (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023) or BODY (Augé, 2023), RELIGION (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017a; Augé, 2023), etc., with all these metaphors exhibiting a pronounced argumentative power. For example, the WAR metaphor serves to underscore the risk and gravity of

climate change, consequently – as corroborated by Flusberg et al. (2017), who tested research participants' perception of metaphors – better communicating people's effort and determination 'to fight' this environmental problem than the RACE metaphor. Studies have also shown that the same metaphor can support different arguments: for example, RELIGION may either promote scepticism about the way scientists deal with climate issues or reveal a positive attitude towards the depiction of scientists as *prophets* able to interpret signs (see Augé, 2022).

Some studies, on the other hand, focus more on scientific discourse and the metaphors used to represent a particular environmental problem, e.g., CARBON FOOTPRINT (Nerlich & Hellsten, 2014) to describe the extent of carbon pollution, GREENHOUSE EFFECT (Augé, 2022) to depict global warming, TIPPING POINT (van der Hel et al., 2018) to conceptualize drastic and irreversible climate change, etc. These metaphors exhibit different pragmatic and discursive functions, showing how meaning can vary depending on the stance adopted or the context in which a specific metaphor is used. Thus, GREENHOUSE EFFECT can portray a concept that either refers to the disruption of the environment, viewing people as DESTROYERS, or describes the greenhouse effect as a natural process in which the role of humans is denied, hence the depiction of people as BUILDERS or even CONTENT, deprived of any active role in this process (Augé, 2022).

Less conventional or novel metaphors all provide a framework for reasoning about specific environmental problems. These include the BATHTUB metaphor, which depicts the atmosphere; LIFE SUPPORT, referring to planet Earth, also viewed as MOTHER EARTH; BLANKET, which describes greenhouse gasses as a *heat-trapping blanket*; the DEBT metaphor, which compares the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere with accumulated financial problems (see Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023); or the MONSTER metaphor, which is used in wildfire discourse (Matlock et al., 2017). Although such metaphors are more cognitively demanding, they can be very useful when conceptualizing newer abstract concepts, such as sustainability (see Mur-Dueñas, 2025), where different pathways leading to it are viewed via the novel RUNWAY metaphor (see Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023, p. 538).

This selective overview shows that environmental discourse is heavily permeated by metaphors. The aforementioned studies confirm the power of metaphor to provide a particular framework for perspectives on social issues, but they also suggest that metaphors "enable as well as constrain the ways

we think about policy issues, especially with regard to largely abstract, complex and seemingly intractable problems" (Shaw & Nerlich, 2015, p. 35), such as lithium mining and extraction, the topic of our study.

Functions of metaphor in discourse

Metaphors can have different functions in discourse, depending on "the role, identities and goals of addressers and addresses, their mutual relationships, and the relevant co-text and context, broadly conceived (i.e., including situational, social, political, historical and cultural aspects)" (Semino, 2008, p. 31). Hence three main sets of functions of metaphors in discourse can be distinguished: representational, when metaphors are used "to persuade, reason, evaluate, explain, theorize, offer new conceptualizations of reality"; interpersonal, which focuses on the use of metaphor to convey humour and express attitudes and feelings; and textual, when metaphors are used to ensure textual coherence (Semino, 2008, pp. 31–32). On a more specific note, previous studies have addressed different metaphor functions relative to the identified metaphors and the roles they perform in a given discourse and genre: explanatory or simplifying (Boginskaya, 2020; Deignan, 2017; Đurović & Silaški, 2024; Littlemore, 2016; Mattiello, 2019a, 2019b; Silaški, 2024; Silaški & Đurović, 2024); entertaining (e.g., Breeze, 2017; Deignan, 2017); persuasive (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2018; Deignan, 2017; Đurović & Silaški, 2024; Mattiello, 2019a; Semino et al., 2013; Silaški, 2024; Silaški & Đurović, 2024); pedagogical (e.g., Deignan, 2017); categorization (e.g., Navarro i Ferrando, 2021); emotive or affective (e.g., Flusberg et al., 2018; Goatly, 2024; Musolff, 2021); evaluative (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2013; Musolff, 2016; Silaški & Đurović, 2010); ideological (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2013; Musolff, 2003); argumentative (e.g., Augé, 2023; van Poppel, 2018), etc. Individual metaphors that are used within a specific context tend to serve multiple functions concurrently, with potential overlap.

The WAR metaphor, which can be applied to "any domain of experience that involves difficulties, danger, effort and uncertain outcomes" (Semino, 2008, p. 100), has proven to be a 'forceful weapon' in political and media discourse, and various abstract phenomena, such as disease, business and economics, immigration, climate crisis, etc., may be understood in terms of WAR (e.g., Augé, 2023; Hart, 2010; Koller, 2004; Martin et al., 2024;

Musolff, 2024; Navarro i Ferrando, 2021; Silaški & Đurović, 2022, 2024; etc.). The pervasiveness of the WAR metaphor in political and media discourse could be related to the well-defined salient knowledge structure of war, with neat mappings between the source and the target that rest on a rather simplified but effective logic of dividing people/nations into allies and foes (see Flusberg et al., 2018, p. 4). This metaphor is therefore very effective in communicating strong emotions such as fear or anxiety, which can trigger change in beliefs and behaviour in terms of undertaking specific measures to address a certain social issue. The pervasiveness of the WAR metaphor is also largely due to its cultural relevance, i.e., the fact that a particular linguistic community has shared knowledge of war, either by having direct experience of participating in a war, or indirect experience with this phenomenon via education or exposure to the media (see Flusberg et al., 2018, p. 4; see also Silaški & Đurović, 2022).

The concept of colonialism, on the other hand, has recently become linked to climate change and "is invoked as a metaphor for expansionism" in reference to "occupying atmospheric space, seizing resources such as land and minerals" (Bhambra & Newell, 2023, p. 180) and other injustices. Centring on notions such as conquest, aggression and control over territories – all of which are akin to warfare, more specifically resource warfare – the COLONIALISM metaphor overlaps with that of WAR.

These two metaphors and their functions will be demonstrated to be of vital importance for the structuring of a highly contested and controversial societal issue such as lithium mining and extraction in the Jadar valley in Western Serbia.

Data and method

Since in this study we focus solely on anti-lithium mining discourse, the choice of media sources for data collection was motivated by whether such media regularly and extensively publish texts featuring the Rio Tinto Company and its controversial mining policy in Western Serbia and criticize the EU's and the Serbian Government's endorsement of critical resource mining and exploitation in the Jadar valley. The data for the analysis (Table 1) were therefore collected from news articles (see the Appendix) published in various pro-oppo-

sition media that claim to be independent or are popularly perceived to be free of Government or corporate influence and interests: two news portals (*N1* and *NovaS*), one daily newspaper (*Danas*), and two weeklies (*Vreme* and *Radar*). Data collection was in the period June to September 2024, when it became more than evident that the Serbian political elite, particularly President Aleksandar Vučić, were attempting to revive the Jadar valley lithium mining and extraction project with Rio Tinto after having suspended it two years before.

Table 1. An overview of the data.

Media sources	No. of texts	No. of words
N1	14	11,601
NovaS	10	5,357
Danas	10	6,324
Vreme	6	4,815
Radar	6	12,347
TOTAL	46	40,444

The articles were manually analysed for linguistic metaphors belonging to the source domains of WAR and COLONIALISM. Our method for identifying linguistic metaphors was modelled on the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). According to the MIP, a lexical unit is considered to be used metaphorically if its contextual meaning contrasts with a more physical and concrete basic meaning and the former meaning can be understood by comparison with the latter (see Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 3). However, our method did not assume a dictionary-based analysis of each lexical unit; instead, it focused on words and multiword expressions (see Semino, 2008, p. 12) used metaphorically in a specific context in an authentic data set. This is consistent with a discourse-oriented approach to metaphor analysis which posits that "metaphoricity depends on the evolving discourse context, and that we can only understand metaphor in discourse by examining how it works in the flow of talk (or text)" (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 71).

Our small-scale study is qualitative and focuses on how the WAR and COLONIALISM metaphors contribute to the conceptualization of a socially and politically important issue. Our aim is not to offer a corpus-based analysis of the respective metaphors, nor is it to establish absolute or relative frequencies of metaphorical expressions or metaphor density in the dataset.

Analysis and discussion

The WAR *metaphor*

WAR is frequently deployed as a default source domain to structure any adversarial relationship. The need to highlight various threats to society posed by the target problem (in this case, the process of lithium mining and extraction in Western Serbia), as well as to disclose the intentions of the proponents of a process that is viewed as detrimental, seems to necessitate the use of the stereotypical WAR metaphor by anti-lithium discourse producers to make their arguments more persuasive. This stems from constructing the relationship between pro- and anti-lithium parties as *a battle* between these two clearly different conflicting sides, and by likening Rio Tinto, the EU, and top Serbian political officials to ENEMIES and OCCUPIERS that have to be defeated (examples 1–6).

1) Ekološki ustanak: „Narod Srbije ima pred sobom vrlo moćnog neprijatelja, oličenog u zloglasnoj kompaniji i vladajućem režimu i najmoćnijim svetskim silama. Vrhovna komanda Ekološkog ustanka u borbi protiv Rio Tinta nalazi se u Gornjim Nedeljicama."[7] (*N1*, 7 July 2024)
[Ecological Uprising: "The people of Serbia are facing a very powerful enemy, embodied in the infamous company and the ruling regime and the most powerful global forces. The supreme command of Ecological Uprising in the battle against Rio Tinto is in Gornje Nedeljice."]

2) „Ne dozvoljavamo korporativnu okupaciju naše najplodnije zemlje i mi ćemo je zaštititi svim sredstvima kojima raspolažemo", ističe se u pismu (eksperata iz Srbije o Rio Tintu). (*NovaS*, 21 June 2024)
["We do not allow corporate occupation of our most fertile land and we will protect it by any means available to us", as emphasized in the letter (of Serbian experts about Rio Tinto).]

3) Lider Ekološkog ustanka Aleksandar Jovanović Ćuta govori o „seljačkoj buni". (*Vreme*, 3 August 2024)
[The leader of Ecological Uprising, Aleksandar Jovanović Ćuta, speaks about the "peasant rebellion."]

[7] Gornje Nedeljice is a village in the Jadar valley and the proposed site for a controversial lithium mine.

4) „Donošenjem nove Uredbe o projektu Jadar, Vlada Srbije proglasila je stanje neposredne ratne opasnosti i poručila građanima da se spreme za samoodbranu." (*Danas*, 16 Jul 2024)
["By adopting a new Decree on the Jadar project, the Government of Serbia declared a state of imminent threat of war and told citizens to prepare for self-defence."]

5) „Borba je tek počela i trajaće veoma dugo." (*Radar*, 23 Aug 2024)
["The battle has just begun and will last a very long time."]

6) Kako se navodi u saopštenju, za Ekološki ustanak, ova uredba upravo znači „objavu rata svom narodu". „Zato pozivamo sve građane i slobodne ljude da se, na poziv ljudi iz Gornjih Nedeljica, spreme za opštu mobilizaciju! Da svi kao jedan branimo život u dolini Jadra." (*Danas*, 16 Jul 2024)
[As stated in the release, to Ecological Uprising this regulation represents "a declaration of war against its own population". "Therefore, we call on all citizens and free people to prepare for general mobilization when invited by the people from Gornje Nedeljice! Let us all stand together to defend life in the Jadar valley."]

The WAR metaphor exhibits a conspicuous persuasive function that serves the purpose of calling for a collective combative approach in the confrontation with the opponents, viewed as ENEMIES, since the target is the whole of Serbia. This is reinforced by other correspondences, such as equating the Serbian government's decision to revive the Jadar project with *a state of imminent threat of war*, *a declaration of war* against its own population, or Rio Tinto's corporate policy in Serbia with an *occupation*. The future course of action of anti-lithium activists and politicians is depicted as *self-defence*, *general mobilization*, *peasant rebellion*, with the aim of *protecting life* in not only the Jadar valley but all of Serbia. The extremely bellicose nature of the metaphorically used expressions helps anti-lithium discourse producers grab the public's attention, sensitize them to the threat, and mobilize them to take action by participating in protests and anti-lithium mining campaigns, thus challenging political decision-makers and their choices. The WAR metaphor thus does not represent "a random selection of conceptual elements from the general WAR domain, but rather a particular set of presuppositions that are chosen for specific argumentative purposes" (Musolff, 2016, p. 31). By presenting their entire engagement as *the battle they must not lose* since the future of Serbia is at stake, anti-lithium discourse producers emphasize the necessity and duration of the efforts invested, and the justification for them. Closely intertwined with the persuasive function of the WAR metaphor is its evaluative dimension. The lexical instances of the WAR metaphor (*enemy*, *corporate occupation*, *war against one's own people*) thus serve to characterize the behaviour, intentions

and decisions of Rio Tinto, the EU and the Serbian regime as unethical, morally wrong and socially reprehensible. The evaluative function of the WAR metaphor helps anti-lithium discourse producers to urge the general public to reject the ethical standards of the pro-lithium side and ally themselves with citizens who are against lithium mining in the Jadar valley.

The WAR metaphor seems to be particularly impactful when it draws on analogies that have historical resonance (examples 7–9). Such use of the WAR metaphor uncovers its affective function. Namely, anti-lithium activists and politicians employ vivid images associated with war, which helps them trigger a sense of urgency in the public and stir up affective response by "transferring the emotions aroused by the historical memory" (Charteris-Black, 2018, p. 254), appealing to national pride, roots and identity.

7) „U Cerskoj bici 1914. okupatori su bili Austrougari, 2024. godine okupator je Rio Tinto – odbranu Jadra dugujemo precima!" (*NovaS*, 10 Jul 2024)
["In the Battle of Cer in 1914, the occupiers were Austro-Hungarians; in 2024, the occupier is Rio Tinto – we owe the defence of Jadar to our ancestors!"]

8) Marijana Petković iz Udruženja *Ne damo Jadar* izjavila je za N1 da za njih današnja odluka Vlade o projektu Jadar znači „sve što je značilo našim prađedovima 1914. uoči same Cerske bitke." Na pitanje šta znači današnja odluka Vlade, kaže da „znači da je ova Vlada upravo kapitulirala. (…) samo čekamo da nam Nemci donesu ultimatum." (*N1*, 16 Jul 2024)
[Marijana Petković from the *We Won't Give Up Jadar* Association told N1 that, for them, today's Government decision on the Jadar project means "everything it meant to our great-grandfathers in 1914, on the eve of the Battle of Cer." When asked what today's Government decision means, she said "it means that this Government has just capitulated. (…) we are just waiting for the Germans to issue an ultimatum."]

9) Od Cerske bitke 110 godina – ali se za dolinu Jadra ovih dana vodi još jedna (headline) (*N1*, 17 Aug 2024)
[110 years since the Battle of Cer – but these days another battle is being fought for the Jadar valley]

By drawing an analogy between the Jadar valley (the site where Rio Tinto wants to set up a lithium mine) and the place where the famous Battle of Cer[8] took place in August 1914 between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in the First World War, anti-lithium discourse producers portray Rio Tinto as the OCCU-

[8] Cer is a mountain that overlooks the Jadar valley. The victory of the Serbian Army over the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Battle of Cer was the first Allied victory over the Central Powers in the First World War.

PIER and equate the company with the Austro-Hungarian troops against whom the Serbian army fought. However, whereas their ancestors won the Battle of Cer together with the allies, the revival of the Jadar project by the Serbian Government is seen as *capitulation* ('kapitulacija'). This will ensue when Germans, embodied by their Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has been actively involved in the Rio Tinto campaign and has publicly displayed support for the mining project in Serbia, issue an *ultimatum* ('ultimatum'). This is how the anti-lithium discourse producers metaphorically view the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Serbia and the EU on critical mineral resources – as the same kind of pressure that their ancestors were subjected to in the run-up to the Battle of Cer. These historical 'reminders' by means of the WAR metaphor are not only part of the collective memory of past experiences that have a distinct affective function – to stir up the public's feelings towards the Jadar project. They also serve as metaphorical lenses through which contemporary events and contentious issues are shaped and understood. Such metaphors are affect-laden and are employed by the anti-lithium side to help audiences connect emotionally with historical narratives in order to intensify their negative emotional reaction to the lithium mining project.

The COLONIALISM metaphor

The use of the COLONIALISM metaphor seems to be motivated by how anti-lithium activists and politicians perceive 1) the way Rio Tinto conducts its business, as demonstrated by that fact that some of its past practices have caused irreparable damage to the environment, cultural heritage, health, and the lives of local populations; 2) the support that the lithium mining project in Western Serbia has received from the EU, which sees it as an opportunity to reduce its car industry's dependence on imports of lithium-ion batteries from China while avoiding the potential environmental impact of lithium mining within its own borders, a concern particularly relevant to Germany, given its own vast lithium deposits; 3) the approval of the lithium mining project by President Vučić and the Serbian ruling party, who claim that Serbia would reap enormous financial benefits by allegedly being a key player in powering the EU's so-called green energy transition. By depicting lithium as *white gold* or *the 21st-century oil*, Serbia's top politicians foreground the economic lure and strategic value of this critical resource, while backgrounding the serious negative environmental, sociological and health impacts of lithium mining. In an attempt to counterbalance this view, anti-lithium

discourse producers use the expression 'litijumska groznica' (*lithium rush*), akin to *gold rush*, whose function is to accentuate the feeling of fear among both the local population and the general public that their living conditions would radically change for the worse, reminiscent of the plight of indigenous communities in the Americas in the 19th century. Such a depiction of lithium mining leads to the use of the judgmental COLONIALISM metaphor, which is based on the schema of one party (the colonizer) taking full or partial political control over another country (the colonized), occupying it and exploiting it economically. Thus, anti-lithium discourse producers utilize the metaphor of COLONIALISM as a convenient conceptual lens to describe aspects of domination, control, and conquest related to the seizure and exploitation of natural resources. In such confrontational rhetoric, both Rio Tinto and the EU are negatively evaluated as COLONIZERS, while Serbia is conceptualised as a COLONY and is frequently equated with former African colonies exploited for their natural resources. This is mainly due to the policies, which are perceived as submissive and humiliating, of Serbia's leaders towards the EU (examples 10–15). Hence, this metaphor displays a pronounced evaluative function.

10) „Vizija Srbija nije afrička kolonija koju svi eksploatišu, nego moderna nezavisna evropska država", zaključio je Manojlović. (*NovaS*, 10 Jul 2024)
["A vision of Serbia is not to be an African colony that everyone exploits, but a modern and independent European state", concluded Manojlović.]

11) Golubović: Srbija postala daleka kolonija Evrope, Šolcov dolazak – poniženje (headline) (*N1*, 26 Jul 2024)
[Golubović: Serbia has become a distant colony of Europe, Scholz's arrival – humiliation]

12) „Imati koloniju u srcu Evrope, tu u zadnjem dvorištu sve sa rudnicima i jeftinom radnom snagom, pa to nije moglo ni u vreme procvata kolonijalizma." (*NovaS*, 27 Jul 2024)
["To have a colony in the heart of Europe, right in its backyard, complete with mines and cheap labour – that would have been unimaginable even at the height of colonialism."]

13) Počela je [Evropa] i sama da se ponaša kao kolonijalna imperija. (*Vreme*, 26 Jul 2024)
[Even Europe itself has started to behave like a colonial empire.]

14) „SNS kolonijalna uprava ne odustaje od toga da pokloni najplodniju zemlju u Srbiji najozloglašenijoj rudarskoj kompaniji na svetu." (*Danas*, 31 Jul 2024)
["The SNS colonial administration refuses to give up on giving away the most fertile land in Serbia to the most notorious mining company in the world."]

15) Ponoš: Vlast Aleksandra Vučića je slugeranjski režim na usluzi multinacionalnim kompanijama (headline) (*NovaS*, 11 Jul 2024)
[Ponoš: The government of Aleksandar Vučić is a servile regime at the service of multinational companies]

According to our data, Serbia is viewed as *Congo* ('Kongo'), *Katanga* (a province in Congo, a former Belgian colony), *a colony in the heart of Europe* ('kolonija u srcu Evrope'), etc. The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) is portrayed as *colonial administration* ('kolonijalna uprava'), President Vučić and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz as *colonial governors* ('kolonijalni upravnici'), while the EU is seen as *a colonial empire* ('kolonijalna imperija'). These expressions serve to morally discredit those perceived as opponents and to emphasize the negative ethical characteristics of 'them'. The evaluative function of the COLONIALISM metaphor particularly comes to the fore when used to interpret the Serbian political elite's support for the Jadar mining project.

16) Kokanović: Naša vlast potpisala kapitulaciju, prodaju Srbiju (headline) (*Danas*, 19 Jul 2024)
[Kokanović: Our government has signed a capitulation; they are selling Serbia]

17) Predsednik Narodnog pokreta Srbije (NPS) Miroslav Aleksić izjavio je danas da vlast rasprodaje strancima teritoriju Srbije i polako je pretvara u koloniju. (*N1*, 21 Sept 2024)
[The president of the People's Movement of Serbia, Miroslav Aleksić, said today that the government was selling out Serbian territory to foreigners, slowly turning it into a colony.]

18) „I njima i njemu trenutno odgovara sadašnja situacija u kojoj se on pokazao kao upotrebljiv kolonijalni upravnik." (*NovaS*, 27 Jul 2024)
["Both they [the EU] and he [Aleksandar Vučić] are currently benefiting from the present situation, in which he has shown to be a useful colonial administrator."]

Top Serbian politicians' policies and decisions are viewed by anti-lithium discourse producers as exclusively profit- and benefit-oriented. This is manifested by equating the entire country and the people living in it with a COMMODITY (described by the lexemes 'prodati/'rasprodati'/*sell/sell out* [examples 16, 17]) which is at the disposal of the ruling political elite, who are free to decide whether to sell it or not. In such a narrative, President Vučić takes the role of the SELLER, the EU is the BUYER, and Serbia is the COMMODITY which the BUYER can acquire.[9] The money element is implicit through the benefits that Serbia would receive in

[9] One of the key slogans of the anti-lithium protesters is 'Srbija nije na prodaju' (*Serbia is not for sale*).

such a 'trade'. The characterization of President Vučić as a submissive servant willing to deliver promises to Rio Tinto, Germany and the EU [example 18] combines the COLONIALISM and TRADE source domains, so that Rio Tinto and the EU are simultaneously portrayed as the BUYER and the COLONIZER, whereas Serbia is viewed both as a COMMODITY and a COLONY.

The COLONIALISM metaphor has negative affective connotations. By using lexical instances of COLONIALISM to talk and think about the pro-lithium side (*exploit*, *distant colony of Europe*, *colonial governor*, *colonial empire*), the producers of anti-lithium discourse tend to evoke emotional tones of anger, disgust, but also fear and panic, stemming from the equation of Serbia's potential plight and its economic benefits from lithium mining with those of former African colonies. The captivating images of the emotionally charged COLONIALISM metaphor, similarly to those of WAR, again serve to capture the audience's attention and motivate them to react. The affective function of the COLONIALISM metaphor thus interacts with both the evaluative function of this metaphor, i.e., negative judgment regarding the pro-lithium proponents, and its persuasive function, manifested in the way it prompts the public to express their opposition to Rio Tinto's Jadar lithium mining project and to direct future action.

Conclusion

The study seeks to address the three functions of the WAR and COLONIALISM metaphors – persuasive, affective, and evaluative – and how the respective metaphors, based on the dynamic nature of their functions, i.e., their interweaving with and mirroring of each other, contribute to conveying the negative attitude of activists, politicians and public figures towards the prospect of lithium mining and extraction in Western Serbia. In an attempt to alert various audiences to the devastating effects of resource mining on the environment and public health, the anti-lithium discourse producers rely on the persuasive function of the WAR metaphor to emphasize the aspect of existential threat and the need to 'fight back'. This is evident in the depiction of the opposite actors as ENEMIES and OCCUPIERS, which accentuates the confrontational and antagonistic nature of the relationship between the pro- and anti-lithium sides. Since the WAR metaphor rests on the logic that there is either a victory or

a defeat, it seems that the underlying motivation for the cognitive and lexical choices of the anti-lithium discourse producers is "to establish common ground" with the audience "by referring to familiar domains of personal experience" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 90), thus mobilizing them against Rio Tinto's Jadar lithium-mining project. To achieve their persuasive ends, the producers of anti-lithium discourse tend to rely on the evaluative function of the WAR metaphor to convey negative judgments about the pro-lithium advocates. The use of the WAR metaphor also highlights that the discourse producers present the topic of lithium mining and its main proponents as a challenge to Serbian cultural identity. The lexical choices containing analogies to historical events have a high affective potency: the main motivation for recalling the society's heroic past, with the First World War Battle of Cer as its key symbol, seems to be to deepen the public's emotional reaction to the Rio Tinto project and to activate a shared emotional experience which could help reinforce a sense of unity, solidarity, optimism and engagement with a highly contentious issue. This historical narrative appears to resonate deeply with the feeling that, similar to the ancestors who defied the Austro-Hungarian Empire, their descendants now see themselves defying another powerful intruder, namely the giant multinational corporation Rio Tinto, which is seeking to exploit Serbia's resources. Therefore, the fight against lithium mining is perceived not only as protection of the environment, but also as a continuation of the historical struggle for the protection of the homeland. The reference to Serbian heroic battles and past victories thus ties in with resistance and deeply rooted feelings of national unity.

The evaluative function of the COLONIALISM metaphor seems to have emerged from the need of the anti-lithium discourse producers to delegitimize the moral values of, primarily, the Serbian political leaders, and to qualify their policies and decisions regarding lithium mining as inconsistent, detrimental and, above all, non-transparent and non-public. This function interacts with the affective function of the given metaphor, which helps anti-lithium discourse producers trigger strong emotional reactions in the public that affect how they reason about the issue of lithium mining in Western Serbia and its advocates. The COLONIALISM metaphor, together with that of WAR, thus serves as an apt cognitive vehicle to justify other goals, namely, to convince the public to take action (the persuasive function) in order to prevent and possibly stop policies implemented under the guise of future economic prosperity without considering the harmful

effects on nature and people that this 'prosperity' leaves behind. Moreover, use of the COLONIALISM metaphor seems to highlight how the green energy transition that is advocated by the EU, especially Germany, and is also one of the cornerstones of Rio Tinto's corporate policy, tends to slide into green "climate colonialism" (Bhambra & Newell, 2023) and invoke highly questionable ideologies. Overall, both metaphors – WAR and COLONIALISM – exhibit persuasive, affective and evaluative functions which are a product of the individual metaphors as well as of their interplay.

Further research opportunities lie in examining and comparing metaphorical depiction of lithium mining where both pro- and anti-lithium attitudes are represented. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the metaphorical structuring of this highly challenging issue, particularly when viewed through the prism of the functions of metaphors on which discourse producers rely to present their viewpoints.

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APPENDIX

Links to news article in the dataset

- https://n1info.rs/vesti/ekoloski-ustanak-pozivamo-sve-gradjane-da-zajedno-proteramo-rio-tinto-za-sva-vremena/ (NA, *N1*, 7 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/srdjan-milivojevic-vlast-nece-da-zivi-ovde-na-kraju-ce-reci-nas-posao-je-gotov-srbije-vise-nema/ (NA, *N1*, 8 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/ako-ne-odbranimo-gornje-nedeljice-nismo-zasluzili-da-zivimo-u-ovoj-zemlji-cuta-o-litijumu/ (Miona Živić, *N1*, 9 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/jovanovic-cuta-cela-srbija-ce-da-brani-gornje-nedeljice-ili-ce-biti-ljudi-koji-nas-hrane-ili-ce-biti-rudnika/ (S.K.Ž., *N1*, 9 Jul 2024)

- https://n1info.rs/vesti/nestorovic-o-projektu-jadar-ne-mogu-nam-bolje-zeleti-strani-ambasadori-od-nasih-akademika/ (NA, *N1*, 9 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/petkovic-o-uredbi-o-projektu-jadar-litijum-nigde-ne-moze-da-se-kopa-zato-prebacuju-kod-nas-da-budemo-ogled/ (NA, *N1*, 16 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/jovanovic-cuta-vlada-objavila-rat-svom-narodu-donosenjem-nove-uredbe-o-projektu-jadar/ (NA, *N1*, 16 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/golubovic-srbija-postala-daleka-kolonija-evrope-solcov-dolazak-ponizenje/ (NA, *N1*, 26 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/nemacka-spasava-svoju-ekonomiju-preko-nasih-ledja-popov-o-iskopavanju-litijuma-u-srbiji/ (M.Ž., *N1*, 27 Jul 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/od-cerske-bitke-110-godina-ali-se-za-dolinu-jadra-ovih-godina-vodi-jos-jedna/ (P.V.P., *N1*, 17 Aug 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/ucesnici-cerskog-marsa-stigli-u-tekeris-na-celu-transparent-stop-rio-tintu/ (NA, *N1*, 18 Aug 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/nebojsa-petkovic-vucicu-odgovaracete-srbiju-ste-pretvorili-u-logor-za-strane-kompanije/ (NA, *N1*, 25 Aug 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/cuta-o-listi-takozvanih-ekoloskih-terorista-bicu-i-ekoloski-taliban/ (NA, *N1*, 2 Sep 2024)
- https://n1info.rs/vesti/aleksic-vlast-rasprodaje-strancima-teritoriju-srbije-i-pretvara-nas-u-koloniju/ (NA, *N1*, 21 Sep 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/savo-manojlovic-posle-najave-otvaranja-rio-tinto-rudnika-litijum-koji-vucic-obecava-je-cena-koju-placa-da-medjunarodna-zajednica-zmuri-na-kradju-izbora/ (Andrija Lazarević, *NovaS*, 16 Jun 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/litijum-je-vucicu-alibi-za-izbornu-kradju-sudbina-srbije-kao-evropske-deponije-je-zapecacena-milivojevic-o-najavi-otvaranja-rio-tinto-rudnika-u-jadru/ (NA, *NovaS*, 16 Jun 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/vucic-zacrtao-rudnik-rio-tinta-za-2028-gradjani-spremaju-zestok-odgovor-preko-stranaca-smo-saznali-kome-nas-je-prodao-nek-ocekuje-veliki-vidovdanski-protest/ (Andrija Lazarević, *NovaS*, 17 Jun 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/srdjan-milivojevic-projekat-rio-tinto-unistava-nasu-buducnost-dsce-biti-deo-fronta-za-odbranu-srbije/ (NA, *NovaS*, 19 Jun 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/pismo-vise-od-40-eksperata-iz-srbije-o-rio-tintu-mi-u-srbiji-nismo-pion-na-evropskoj-periferiji-koji-treba-da-bude-zrtvovan/ (Andrija Lazarević, *NovaS*, 21 Jun 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/u-cerskoj-bici-1914-okupatori-su-bili-austrougari-2024-godine-okupator-je-rio-tinto-odbranu-jadra-dugujemo-precima/ (NA, *NovaS*, 10 Jul 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/savo-manojlovic-najveca-sansa-srbije-su-mladi-ljudi-a-ne-litijum/ (NA, *NovaS*, 10 Jul 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/ponos-vlast-aleksandra-vucica-je-slugeranjski-rezim-na-usluzi-multinacionalnim-kompanijama/ (NA, *NovaS*, 11 Jul 2024)

- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/intervju-zdravko-ponos-vucic-rio-tinto-litijum-eu/ (Jelena Jelovac, *NovaS*, 27 Jul 2024)
- https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/vujovic-vucic-vise-nije-relevantan-politicki-igrac-u-dijalogu-o-kosovu/ (NA, *NovaS*, 17 Aug 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/ekoloski-ustanak-rio-tinto-borba/ (NA, *Danas*, 7 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/dijalog/licni-stavovi/litijum-belo-zlato-za-grobnicu-srbije/ (Tijana Perić Diligenski, *Danas*, 13 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/ekoloski-ustanak-jadar-vlada/ (NA, *Danas*, 16 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vladeta-jankovic-olaf-solc/ (M.R.M., *Danas*, 19 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/kokanovic-nasa-vlast-potpisala-kapitulaciju-prodaju-srbiju/ (NA, *Danas*, 19 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/protest-protiv-rio-tinta-u-valjevu-ako-odbranimo-grad-odbranicemo-i-drzavu/ (NA, *Danas*, 22 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/bodo-veber-intervju-litijum/ (Snežana Čongradin, *Danas*, 23 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/svet/becki-prese-o-litijumu-u-srbiji/ (NA, *Danas*, 24 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/poceo-skup-protiv-rudarenja-u-arandjelovcu/ (Z.S. Mišić, *Danas*, 29 Jul 2024)
- https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/protest-protiv-rio-tinta-i-rudnika-litijuma-u-novom-sadu-sns-kolonijalna-uprava-ne-odustaje-od-toga-da-pokloni-najplodniju-zemlju/ (A.L., *Danas*, 31 Jul 2024)
- https://vreme.com/ekonomija/rio-tinto-vlast-je-usmerila-snage-protiv-naroda/ (Jelena Đukić-Pejić, *Vreme,* 26 Jun 2024)
- https://vreme.com/vesti/litijumski-sporazumi-lansirna-rampa-za-kvantni-skok-srbije-u-buducnost/ (A.I., *Vreme*, 19 Jul 2024)
- https://vreme.com/razno/kopanje-litijuma-ekonomski-napredak-ili-ekoloska-propast/ (I.M., *Vreme*, 26 Jul 2024)
- https://vreme.com/vesti/popovic-litijum-ima-ogroman-politicki-i-mobilizatorski-potencijal/ (N.S., Vreme, 3 Aug 2024)
- https://vreme.com/vesti/opozicija-stali-smo-u-odbranu-gradjana-s-jasnim-zahtevom-zaustaviti-projekat-jadar/ (B.B., *Vreme*, 10 Sep 2024)
- https://vreme.com/vesti/samo-litijum-opoziciju-ujedinjuje-vanredni-izbori-su-trenutno-besmisleni/ (B.B., 23 Sep 2024)
- https://radar.nova.rs/radar-kolaz/evropa-srbiju-tretira-kao-koloniju-asteroidnu-koloniju/ (Lazar Džamić, *Vreme,* 26 Jul 2024)
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Zajmij się swoimi sprawami. Funkcje metafory w serbskim dyskursie przeciw wydobyciu litu

W artykule zbadano z perspektywy krytycznej analizy metafory, w jaki sposób temat wydobycia i eksploatacji litu jest metaforycznie konceptualizowany w serbskim dyskursie politycznym i medialnym, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem tego, jak przeciwnicy wydobycia litu – aktywiści i politycy – wykorzystują metafory w argumentacji na rzecz swoich poglądów. Na podstawie zbioru danych zebranych z różnych elektronicznych mediów informacyjnych w okresie od czerwca do września 2024 roku chcemy zbadać funkcję dwóch metafor obecnych w dyskursie antylitowym, tj. WOJNA i KOLONIALIZM, oraz sposób, jak przyczyniają się one do kształtowania postaw sprzeciwu wobec wydobycia i eksploatacji litu przez firmę Rio Tinto w dolinie rzeki Jadar w zachodniej Serbii. Nasza analiza pokazuje, że te dwie metafory pełnią trzy główne funkcje: perswazyjną – mającą na celu przekonanie różnych grup odbiorców o powadze problemu oraz zmobilizowanie społeczeństwa do sprzeciwu wobec projektu wydobycia litu w regionie Jadar; afektywną – służącą wywołaniu poczucia pilności oraz pogłębieniu emocjonalnej reakcji opinii publicznej na ten projekt; oraz ewaluatywną – pozwalającą na formułowanie negatywnych ocen wobec przeciwników i deprecjonowanie ich argumentów. Trzecia funkcja staje się szczególnie widoczna, gdy przeciwnicy wydobycia litu – zarówno aktywiści, jak i politycy – posługują się ideologicznie nacechowaną metaforą KOLONIALIZMU. Artykuł podkreśla niezastąpioną rolę metafory w kształtowaniu sposobu rozumowania na temat kwestii kontrowersyjnych i spornych.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs przeciw wydobyciu litu; metafora WOJNY; metafora KOLONIALIZMU; funkcje metafor; język serbski

Mine your own business: The functions of metaphor in the Serbian anti-lithium mining discourse

From the perspective of Critical Metaphor Analysis, the paper examines how the topic of lithium mining and extraction is metaphorically conceptualized in the Serbian political and media discourse, particularly focusing on the ways anti-lithium activists and politicians use metaphor in the argumentation of their viewpoints. Based on a dataset collected from various electronic news media in the period June–September 2024, we aim to investigate the functions of the two metaphors manifested in the anti-lithium discourse, i.e., WAR and COLONIALISM, and how they help shape attitudes against Rio Tinto's lithium mining and extraction in the Jadar river valley in Western Serbia. Our analysis shows that these two metaphors exhibit three main functions: the persuasive one, to convince the various audiences of the seriousness of the issue and mobilize the public against the Jadar lithium-mining project; the affective one, to create a sense of urgency in the public and deepen their emotional reaction to the project; and the evaluative one, to provide a negative judgment of opponents and belittle their arguments. The third function becomes particularly evident when anti-lithium activists and politicians use the ideologically charged COLONIALISM metaphor. The paper highlights the irreplaceable role of metaphor in structuring reasoning about controversial and contentious issues.

Keywords: anti-lithium mining discourse; WAR metaphor; COLONIALISM metaphor; functions of metaphors; Serbian language

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