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# Medium is a Weapon: Bias in Crisis Situations

## **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes the ways in which the media can be abused to foster the most extreme political propaganda using the example of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After having propagated social values such as unity, harmony, brotherhood and anti-fascist heritage, in the late 1980s Serbian and Croatian media came under control of nationalists who manipulated them into propagating hatred, nationalism and xenophobia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, such practice followed the outbreak of the Bosnian war and resulted in several media outlets which took the same course of action. Some media outlets will fully endorse McLuhan's idea of technical intermediaries as modern weapons and even go one step further in their warlike messages than the political parties that formed them. The most striking examples are Bosnian-based TV Pale, Croatian daily newspaper Vjesnik and Serbian newspaper Politika (especially the Echoes and Reactions newspaper section). With their actions such media will confirm that the most dangerous form of media bias is precisely propaganda bias as defined by Denis McQuail. Its destructive power is illustrated on the example of the bloody Yugoslav break-up fueled by their spreading of misinformation.*

**Key words:** media, weapons, war, propaganda, bias.

## Medium is a Weapon: Bias in Crisis Situations

When declaring that weapons are a form of media in his famous work *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan hints that the media could someday become deadlier than weapons. He observes that the electric age is characterised by conflicts in which images and icons are used as weapons, which is why “backward countries” succeeded in adapting to the race in arming with images. Indeed, “they understand and are used to verbal propaganda and persuasion”<sup>142</sup>. His understanding of the society and the dominant media has proved to be particularly correct in the case of ex-Yugoslav countries. Those countries, united in brotherhood for several decades, at the end of 1980s converted their media (almost all state-owned) into machine guns spewing propagandist images, icons and messages. Gordana Vilović remarks that “at that moment the media, by themselves and with help of politicians, resorted to and reinforced a brand-new rhetoric which hit the target more effectively than any weapon”<sup>143</sup>.

Unfortunately, reality presented by the mass media has never been considered by media theorists as a reflection of that same reality and the media have never been expected to present the truth in terms of the philosophical and religious concept of truth. The journalistic cognition and the presentation of reality are limited by the subject of media research as well as by the time and space available for the presentation of the acquired information. The truth of the mass media is “a practical or functional form of truth”<sup>144</sup>, which means that the journalistic cognition is limited to the information essential for the normal performance of everyday activities. That information is generally characterised by a lower level of abstraction, that is, it is a very simple causal way of representing reality, which is generally much more nuanced and complex. However, even though the truth presented in the mass media undergoes selection processes, including the choice of event to be reported on, the hierarchisation of events in media reporting and the abridgment, simplification and pigeonholing of information – that doesn’t mean that that information should not be strictly verified for, at least, the factual truth.

Both Kovach and Rosenstiel, as well as McChesney, Kurtić, Baker-Woods and other authors consider the truth to be the fundamental principle to which the mass media should aspire while complying with several operational criteria of the truthfulness of information. Kovach and Rosenstiel believe that the fundamental obligation of the journalistic profession is “obligation to the truth”<sup>145</sup>, and McChesney explains that “journalism must have a convincing method for separating the truth from lies or at least preventing liars from being irresponsible and causing catastrophes, notably wars, economic crises and social conflicts”<sup>146</sup>. Najil Kurtić writes that the demand for true information

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142 Marshal McLuhan, *Razumijevanje medija (Understanding Media)*, Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, Zagreb 2008, p. 302.

143 Gordana Vilović, *Govor mržnje (Hate Speech)*, *Političke analize*, 2 (6/2011), pp. 68-70., <https://hrcak.srce.hr/175715>

144 Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel, *Elementi novinarstva (The Elements of Journalism)*, Cid, Podgorica 2006, p. 53.

145 B. Kovach, T. Rosenstiel, *Elementi novinarstva*, p. 18.

146 Robert W. McChesney, *Digitalna isključenost. Kako kapitalizam okreće internet protiv demokracije (Digital Disconnect: How capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy)*, Multimedijski Inštitut i Fakultet za medije i komunikaciju, Zagreb 2004, p. 10.

“stems from the role it plays in the resolution of uncertain life situations faced by ordinary people every day”<sup>147</sup>, while Baker-Woods et al. offer a set of criteria the true information has to meet: “objectivity, balance, completeness and accuracy”<sup>148</sup>.

Nevertheless, the media are faced with numerous challenges in the search for true information. Political pressure, advertisers’ pressure, economic dependency, censorship and self-censorship, own ideological principles, prejudices and beliefs, but also the very nature of the journalistic profession characterised by an accelerated rhythm and limited time for collecting and presenting information.

Denis McQuail distinguishes four typical categories of bias: ideological bias, unwitting bias, partisan bias and propaganda bias<sup>149</sup>. Unwitting bias is benign because it arises in the process of news creation – filtering out of events based on their news value, editorial decisions, abridgments, adjusting to journalistic forms. Ideological bias is a consequence of a worldview that is dominant in a society and consequently in the media. It is often hidden and can be detected only by a deeper analysis of employed terms (e.g. the attitude of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society towards refugees and migrants manifested in designating them using terms typical for describing natural disasters – refugee “tsunami”, “migration wave”). Partisanal bias is open advocacy of one side, most often in political relations. Finally, the most destructive type of bias is propaganda bias, which manifests itself in the intention to promote certain interpretations of social reality at the expense of differing interpretations, even though the aim is to disguise that intent. “The recipients are to deduce the only possible synthesis from intentionally chosen facts and ways in which they are connected and presented in the story and are encouraged to make general conclusions on the basis of individual cases following the convention: if one person belongs to their kind, then all of them do”<sup>150</sup>. Different types of bias often overlap in the media. When Yugoslavia still existed and nobody could foresee its disintegration, partisan bias, and to some extent ideological bias, were common. Kemal Kurspahić, who was editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Oslobođenje* in the 1990s, writes that “directors and editors-in-chief of the leading Bosnian media outlets – the Sarajevo Radio-Television and the daily newspaper *Oslobođenje* – who were appointed by the Party, were required to strictly adhere to the Party’s principles”<sup>151</sup>. He continues by saying that, from the 1940s until the first half of the 1980s, “Bosnian media outlets were under the strictest Party control”. This means that “there was a requirement to maintain ethnic symmetry in condemning and criticising all alleged violations aimed at undermining brotherhood and unity”<sup>152</sup>. Similar working conditions are described by Tomislav

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Communication, Zagreb 2014, p. 113.

147 Najil Kurtić, *Kod novinarstva (The Journalistic Code of Ethics)*, MediaPlan institut, Sarajevo 2006, p. 81.

148 G. Baker-Woods, J. E. Dodd, K. Ford, K. Keller, J. Plumley, P. G. Smeyak and K. Walsh-Childers, *Mass Media Writing: An introduction*. Scottsdale, Arizona 1997, p. 73-74.

149 According to N. Kurtić, *Kod novinarstva*, pp. 97-98.

150 Ibid., p. 98.

151 Kemal Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu imiru (Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace)*, Media centar, Sarajevo 2003, p. 97.

152 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu imiru*, p. 98.

Jakić, former deputy editor of the news programme on the Zagreb Television, who explains that he was himself asked several times to join the Party, but successfully avoided it. He explains that, even though he never became a member, everybody was aware of the bias that had to be maintained: “I must say that the norm according to which those considered as political opponents or even rivals were not given any coverage in the daily news was quite common at the time in the Yugoslav media and was not anything new to me”<sup>153</sup>. Even though refusing to become a Party member “did not prove to be a handicap in any important aspect of the journalistic profession” he says “I progressed slightly slower than the colleagues who were in the Party, only slightly slower, but enough to make me aware that I wasn’t equal to them”<sup>154</sup>. Even though the existence of open, partisan bias is evident in that period, it failed to turn into warmongering, hate speech and discrimination. It was rather a partisan and ideological bias whose main goal was to preserve the political and social system. What occurred in the media afterwards, in the 1980s, can be classified as serious political propaganda, often accompanied by misrepresentation, lies and fabrication.

## **Media Before the War – Media in the War – the War in the Media**

### **Croatian Media: Between *Vjesnik* and *Feral Tribune***

Due to the fact that the media system cannot be analysed outside of the social and political context, it is important to emphasise that changes in the media at the beginning of the 1990s were brought about by new tendencies in the politics of remembering and explaining the past. Tamara Banjeglav writes that after the Croatian Democratic Union came to power, Franjo Tuđman “tried to implement the reconciliation of all Croats” and “such efforts brought from oblivion the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustasha movement, the side of history which had up to that point, in the official commemorations of events from World War II in the SFRY, been suppressed and forbidden”<sup>155</sup>. Naturally, the crucial role in the change of politics of memory and imposing interpretations of history was played by the media as the owners of the symbolic capital – the meaning. They delegated topics for public discussion, often imposing their own interpretations. “The collective amnesia”, as these actions taken by the government at the beginning of the 1990s are labelled by Tamara Banjeglav, included, in addition to the abuse of the media in the creation of a new political discourse, the renaming of streets, the desecration of anti-fascist monuments evoking Yugoslavia, the changes of dates of state holidays as well as commemorations and gatherings at “new” remembrance sites from the period of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) (e.g. Bleiburg). In an effort to reserve space in the media for the promotion of its own vision of the past and the future, the government subjected

153 Tomislav Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države 1943 – 2012 (I Did Not Howl with the Wolves: Revived Memories of One Time and Two Countries 1943 – 2012)*, Gariwo, Sarajevo 2013, p. 59.

154 T. Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države*, p. 72.

155 Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav and Nataša Govedarica, *Re:vizija prošlosti – Politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine (Re:vision of the Past. The Politics of Memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia since 1990)*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sarajevo 2012, p. 95.

the media to a series of repressive measures, which can be summarised in five main categories: *Economic measures*. The media outlets that did not bow to the dictatorship of the government regime were subjected to great economic pressures. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, wrote in the 1990s that “the government’s Agency for Reconstruction and Development has the power to appoint a management board to a company in the privatisation process, which decides on all important issues, with or without employees’ consent”<sup>156</sup>. “The Ministry of Culture and Education imposed a tax amounting to 50% of total revenue” to the magazines that did not support the government, such as *Feral Tribune* and *Hrvatski tjednik*, which had up to that point been levied only to pornographic magazines. In contrast, the newspapers supporting the government that had outstanding debt to the Ministry were relieved of debt payments.

*Judicial proceedings*. Tadeusz Mazowiecki expressed concern that the government could misapply Article 30 of the Public Information Act according to which “publishing houses are responsible for any damage inflicted on the basis of the articles”<sup>157</sup>. The Special Rapporteur concludes that the problem lies in the fact that in two hundred proceedings conducted at that moment at courts in Croatia media outlets were required to pay enormous sums of money. He concludes that, fortunately, “courts proposed more moderate sums”. However, the constant threat of legal prosecution could have, according to Mazowiecki, contributed to an atmosphere of fear and, consequently, to self-censorship of journalists. The journalists of the Croatian Radio-Television (*HTV*), in a statement released after they were accused by the then president of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović, of leading a campaign against the state, openly admitted to censoring their reports. They wrote: “Alija Izetbegović gave three long interviews to our studio and we censored him only once when he declared that he supported a confederation with Croatia and other countries, including even Serbia’, it was declared in an official statement by the HTV”<sup>158</sup>.

*Monopolies*. Unfortunately, during that period in Croatia the Croatian Radio-Television had the right to the national frequency and transmitters as well as to *Tisak*, a distribution chain “which controls most points of sale”<sup>159</sup>. “This fact had a critical impact on the fate of the weekly newspaper *Danas*: as its editorial policy was the most critical of the government compared with those of other media outlets, *Tisak* simply stopped selling it”<sup>160</sup>.

*Firing journalists of Serbian nationality is an example of pressure put on the media mentioned by both Mazowiecki and Jakić*. Both authors write about the labelling of journalists who were courageous enough to confront the government. They were instantly accused of being the enemies of the state, Yugo-nostalgic or anti-Croatian. Jakić was himself labelled the same way. He writes that there is a document from that period “titled ‘List of redundant employees available for other posts’”.

156 Tadeusz Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995. (Reports: 1992-1995)*, Tuzla University. Tuzla 2007, p. 414.

157 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995*.

158 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 155.

159 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 415.

160 Ibid.

Even though the document was supposed to include an explanation clarifying why a journalist was declared redundant, Jakić claims that there was no explanation related to any person on the list. “The television staff was simply being cleared out based on nationality, in other words, non-Croatian staff members were being removed (Croats who were declared unsuitable and disobedient will later on meet the same fate, as I personally experienced, but that was the beginning)”<sup>161</sup>. Jakić also names journalists who were sanctioned only because of their nationality: Boris Mutić was brought back from Barcelona, where he was reporting on the Olympic Games, and Boro Vučković was not able to accompany Tuđman on a trip to America because he was believed to be Serbian.<sup>162</sup>

*Strictly controlled use of terminology.* Mazowiecki writes that in Croatia “it is not unusual for government members to pressure media outlets into using a specific terminology”<sup>163</sup>, while Jakić states that one day, while still working for the Croatian Radio-Television, he found on his desk a list of new rules to be obeyed by all employees. In order to understand the seriousness of the situation it is important to list some of those rules: “Do not use the terms ‘chetniks’ and ‘extremists’, but exclusively ‘Serbian terrorists’”, or “refer to the Yugoslav National Army exclusively as the Serbian communist army”<sup>164</sup>.

Among the media outlets that failed to adhere to the ethical and moral principles of the profession Tomislav Jakić includes *Večernji list*, *Vjesnik*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, but also the Croatian Radio-Television where he himself worked while it was still called the Zagreb Television. These media outlets were also denounced in the Reports by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on Human Rights in Yugoslavia. He also mentions the weekly newspapers *Hrvatski vjesnik* and *Danas*, and Gordana Vilović adds the monthly publications *Narod*, *Hrvatsko slovo* and *Tomislav* to that group.<sup>165</sup>

Tomislav Jakić cites the names of journalists who were at first endorsing multiculturalism, inter-ethnic cooperation and unity through the media, but quickly became warmongers. The author refers to Hrvoje Hitrec as “the leading figure of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)”<sup>166</sup>, and Hitrec was for a period of time the director of the Croatian Radio-Television. Jakić also mentions Željko Žutelija, a journalist from *Slobodna Dalmacija*, who on 28 February 1991 wrote an article condemning Jakić’s television programme “Knin – Without Comment” in which Jakić presented recorded statements by the citizens of Knin (Serbs and Croats) without any journalistic commentary. He believed that the programme would be somewhat more objective if it presented the statements of ordinary people, whatever their nature, without any patronizing journalistic commentaries, which at that time tended to be opinionated. The programme was a sign of bravery

161 T. Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države*, p. 254.

162 Ibid., pp. 235-236.

163 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 416.

164 T. Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države*, p. 254.

165 G. Vilović, *Govor mržnje*, p. 68.

166 T. Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države*, p. 37.

at the time, even though, according to journalistic rules, it should not be regarded that way. Even more interesting is what the author did after the broadcast. He asked the cameramen to go to Knin on the day of the broadcast, where they visited a local coffee shop owned by the citizens of Serbian nationality and recorded their comments about the programme. The extent to which the Croatian Radio-Television was influenced by the growing sentiment of nationalism and xenophobia is best reflected in the comments of the citizens of Serbian nationality about the programme (they did not know that journalists were present in the coffee shop that day). One of them stated: “Very surprising. How come they (the Croatian Radio-Television) aired that”, and another one said: “I can’t believe they showed that”<sup>167</sup>. According to Jakić, among the journalists complicit in the dishonourable attempt to dehumanise and demonise Serbs, Bosniaks (at that time Muslims), but also Jews and all Croats ready to defy nationalism, were also the television presenters Hloverka Novak-Srzić and Dubravko Merlić, the radio journalists Mladen Lacković and Muharem Kulenović as well as Obrad Kosovac, Krešimir Fijačko from *Vjesnik*, Josip Jović from *Slobodna Dalmacija*, Branka Šeparović from the Croatian Radio-Television and others, while Kurspahić also mentions Smiljko Šagolj, who was even an editor at the Sarajevo Television while Yugoslavia still existed. The Special Rapporteur Tadeusz Mazowiecki writes about these outlets stating that “they also acted manipulatively in the case of the armed conflict between the armed forces of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) in BiH. After the HVO *de facto* created the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia (HZHB) in BiH, certain media outlets started routinely using that term. Even nowadays, after the creation of the new Federation BiH, the media under the control of the Croatian state continue using the term ‘Herzeg-Bosnia’”<sup>168</sup>. This shows that hate was not exhausted in the conflict with Serbia and non-Croatian citizens in Croatia, who also considered the country to be their homeland. After interfering with the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the media outlets supporting the HDZ spent a long time trying to find a way to cover Bosnia without upsetting Tuđman. Kemal Kurspahić, the editor-in-chief of *Oslobođenje* during the war, writes that the reporting of the Croatian media prone to warmongering propaganda was subject to “double ethical and professional standards”. That is why “while ‘Republika Srpska’ and the ‘Serbian army’ were frequently designated as self-proclaimed and self-appointed, their ideological counterparts ‘the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia’ and its military wing HVO were treated with the outmost respect and regard.”<sup>169</sup>. As the most striking example of how these media outlets reached rock bottom Kurspahić cites a false piece of information reported by *Vjesnik*. The Mostar-based correspondent of *Vjesnik*, Mario Marušić, wrote that “thirty-five Croats were hung in front of a Catholic church”<sup>170</sup>. The aim of this text, writes Kurspahić, was to “create maximum outrage: a claim that

167 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

168 T. Mazowiecki, *Izvjestaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 417.

169 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 149.

170 The same case is discussed in the book *Forging War*: “The Croatian News Agency (Hina) reports from Bosnia even more tendentiously than it reports on the war in its own country. *Večernji list*, on 8 August 1993, published a Hina report that says: ‘The Croatian soldiers who escaped from Zenica report that thirty-five Croats were hung at the square in front of a Catholic church for refusing to wear the uniforms of the Muslim army’. The report goes on to say that

35 Croats were hung, specifically in front of a Catholic church, was created with the aim to give an impression that it was a question of ethnic and religious persecution of Croatian Catholics<sup>171</sup>. A journalist from *Oslobođenje* was taken to a concentration camp during a HVO attack in Mostar. His name was Mugdim Karabeg and he was, according to Kurspahić, sixty-three years old at the time. He was told by the Croatian soldiers entering his apartment in Mostar: “You, journalist, you have been writin’ your whole life against the Ustashe and now they have come for you! Get up, you dirty *balija!* Out to the courtyard!”<sup>172</sup> After having been taken to the Dretelj camp this journalist ended up in a refugee camp in Croatia, and later settled down in Chicago.

Mazowiecki cites similar examples from *Hrvatski vjesnik*, explaining that terms employed by that media outlet to stereotype the whole collectives became common in that period (the term Serbs was used to designate the armed forces, so that crimes were considered a responsibility of all Serbs). An extreme example is a fabricated interview with Bogdan Bogdanović published on 12 April 1994 by the weekly *Danas*<sup>173</sup>.

Fortunately, the media scene in the Republic of Croatia in the 1990s was not only populated with media outlets propagating hate, xenophobia and warmongering propaganda. Tadeusz Mazowiecki writes in his Reports that there was “an impressive number of local radio-stations, more than fifty of them, a great number of which aired views and opinions critical of the government”<sup>174</sup>. Apart from these radio stations, one should not forget *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, and later also *Feral Tribune*, as papers that successfully resisted the nationalist and warmongering narrative. Mazowiecki adds *Novi list* from Rijeka to that group, while Kurspahić mentions the magazines *Erasmus* and *Nacional*, founded a bit later. In addition, it is also important to mention the broadcaster *Omladinska televizija (OTV)* which, according to the Special Rapporteur “stood out due to its openness and the presentation of minority views”. Tomislav Jakić also mentions the magazine *Start(t) nove generacije* (later known as *Star (Zvijezda) nove generacije*), founded by the journalist Zvonimir Krstulović, but quickly shut down owing to a lack of funding. In addition to having financial difficulties, the magazine “was nowhere to be seen at Zagreb news-stands” and it was advertised only by “*Feral Tribune*, which had a cult status at the time”<sup>175</sup>. Jakić also cites *Radio 101* and gives a special mention in his book to journalists who deserve recognition due to their professionalism and objectivity: Ines Šaškor, Mladen Mali, Ankica Barbir Mladinović, Jelena Lovrić, Enis Zebić as well as Dubravko Merlić

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the Croats in the Zenica district were issued personal identification cards with ‘Turkish names and surnames’, which they had to pay 100 to 500 German marks. Each Serb or Croat who wanted to leave Zenica had to pay to the ‘Muslim army’ 900 German marks per person. The first part of the report was published in *Vjesnik* the following day. The report was not confirmed by any informative or international source; the investigation carried out by the UNPROFOR failed to establish any evidence of the claims presented in the report “ (Mark, Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata; Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini /Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina/ Medija centar, Belgrade, 1995., p. 160).*

171 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 150.

172 Ibid., p. 150.

173 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995*, p. 418.

174 Ibid., p. 412.

175 T. Jakić, *Nisam zavijao s vukovima: Sjećanja otrgnuta zaboravu na jedno vrijeme i dvije države*, p., 248.



and Damir Matković, who presented the show *Slikom na sliku* on the Croatian Television. It is also important to add the correspondents of *Feral Tribune* – Predrag Lucić, Viktor Ivančić, Boris Dežulović, Miljenko Jergović, Heni Erceg and others.

### **Media as the intermediary of Milošević's killing sprees**

In Serbia, like in Croatia, the change in the ideological patterns of media discourse originated from the outside, from the political and social spheres. The culture of remembrance, defined by Todor Kuljić as “a collective term employed to designate the overall, non-scholarly use of the past”<sup>176</sup> was (mis)used with an aim of eliminating positive emotions, memories and associations related to the era of Yugoslavia and communist ideas. According to Nataša Govedarica “it was important to change history to such an extent that the previous myth of brotherhood and unity could cede place to a new myth of a fatal and eternal historical conflict between the Yugoslav peoples”<sup>177</sup>. The usual renaming of streets, commemorative gatherings, the introduction and/or elimination of important dates and the destruction and construction of monuments were all intended for this purpose, along with the power of the media. In his book *Olako obećana brzina*, Dragiša Pavlović writes that things started to change after the eighth plenary session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (CC LCS).<sup>178</sup> After that session “the Radio Television Belgrade and *Politika*, in most of its editions, almost daily scooped severe political defamations directed at individuals at the meetings of basic party organisations and municipal committees organised to discuss the Information from the eighth session of the CC LCS, as well as unfounded suspicions and slanders, and featured them prominently. They were even proud to have transitioned to that seemingly democratic, but in reality, warmongering *ad hominem* system”<sup>179</sup>.

Propaganda bias, at the time displayed by many Serbian media outlets, was conditioned by a series of pressures put by the government on their owners, directors, editors, and, consequently journalist themselves. The Special Rapporteur Tadeusz Mazowiecki specifically emphasised the fact that the Serbian Radio-Television was a “propaganda tool of the ruling SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia)”<sup>180</sup>. The mechanisms for restricting media freedoms included the following:

176 Todor Kuljić, *Kultura sećanja: teorijska objašnjenja upotrebe prošlosti (Culture of Remembrance: Theoretical Explanations for the Use of the Past)*, Čigoja Štampa, Beograd 2006, p. 12.

177 Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav, and Nataša Govedarica, *Re:vizija prošlosti – Politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine*, p. 173.

178 The eighth session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia was held on 23 and 24 September 1987. At the session, the Central Committee chairman, Slobodan Milošević, removed Dragiša Pavlović, head of the Belgrade party organisation, from membership on the Committee because of the phrase “easily promised speed” Pavlović used, although this was not the real reason for his removal. This session set the scene for the final split between Slobodan Milošević and Ivan Stambolić and is generally considered as a prelude to the bloodshed that ensued in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. For more information, see Dragiša Pavlović, *Olako obećana brzina (Easily Promised Speed)*.

179 Dragiša M. Pavlović, *Olako obećana brzina*, Globus, Zagreb, 1988, p.37.

180 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 420.

*Monopolies.* Unfortunately, the Serbian Radio-Television exercised a monopoly in relation to *TV Politika* and *Studio B*, because its programme was broadcasted on three channels throughout the country as well as in the neighbouring Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like in Croatia, the government held a monopoly over crucial information sources in the country. The situation was similar in radio broadcasting, since radio stations such as “*Radio B92, Radio Indeks, Radio Politika* and *Radio Studio B* did not have the same influence on the public opinion as the state-owned Serbian Radio-Television, for the same reason”<sup>181</sup>. Kurspahić writes that the absolute monopoly of the regime can be illustrated by data presented in an article written by Slobodan Antonić from the Belgrade Institute for Political Studies “which show that, in mid-October 1990, the TV Belgrade evening news were watched by 2.5 million people in Serbia and 800,000 people in Vojvodina, which is almost 70 percent of adult population in the Republic, while 30 percent of adults never read newspapers and 26 percent read it only occasionally”<sup>182</sup>.

*Layoffs.* Similarly to the situation in Croatia in the time of Tuđman, in Serbia under Milošević many journalists were forced out of work because of their nationality. Mazowiecki writes that “the Serbian government, on 5 July 1990, forbid Priština Radio-Television to broadcast a program in the Albanian language”, which caused “approximately 1,300 journalists and technical staff members to lose their jobs”<sup>183</sup>. Soon after that, the only daily newspaper in Albanian, *Rilindja*, was shut down. Consequently, the sources of information for the people of Kosovo were narrowed to Serbian media outlets, which were translated into Albanian. In May 1994 the Government “removed 1,054 journalists from the Serbian Radio-Television and about 300 from Novi Sad from their positions and suspended them”<sup>184</sup>, reducing their salaries, according to Mazowiecki, by 20 to 40 percent. Kurspahić writes that Ivan Stojanović “was forced to resign as the director of *Politika*, which opened the way for Minović to take over both functions – director and editor”<sup>185</sup>.

*Physical attacks on journalists and media outlets.* Journalists were being forbidden from entering their workplace or even told to collect their personal belongings and leave, while verbal attacks and insults were not uncommon. The Special Rapporteur claims that in Montenegro “threats and insults via the telephone became a part of the everyday life for the journalists of the opposition, as well as bombings or armed assaults on office premises, and “the local offices of *Oslobođenje* and the Sarajevo Radio-Television in Belgrade and Novi Sad were taken over and confiscated by unknown persons on 16 May and 24 June 1994, allegedly ‘to serve the needs of the media od Republika Srpska of BiH’”, while “the authorities did not do anything to put a stop to those illicit actions”<sup>186</sup>. Along with journalists from Serbia, foreign correspondents were also driven out of Serbia after the NATO

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181 Ibid., p. 421.

182 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 63.

183 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 421.

184 Ibid., p. 424.

185 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 41.

186 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 425.

attack. Stjepan Malović writes that some journalists were arrested, and their expensive equipment confiscated.<sup>187</sup>

*Economic measures.* The opposition papers, such as *Borba*, had to “pay for newsprint 50% more than the pro-government media outlets”<sup>188</sup>, which follows the same model of disciplining the media as the one employed by the Croatian government.

*Employment of new terminology.* Mazowiecki writes that the media in Serbia and Montenegro started equating all Croats with “Ustashe”, and Bosniaks (then Muslims) with “mujaheddin” or “Islamic fundamentalists”. He further clarifies that “referring to Bosnian institutions as ‘the Muslim army’ and ‘the Muslim presidency’ in the media serves the purpose of creating a climate of an interreligious and interethnic conflict”<sup>189</sup> while “BiH is always called ‘the former BiH’ and official titles are used for unrecognised entities, such as ‘Republika Krajina’ or ‘Republika Srpska’”<sup>190</sup>. Based on an analysis of the papers *Politika* and *Borba*, Svetlana Slapšak concludes that the media mostly adopted “the old terminology, with minor changes”<sup>191</sup>. According to Slapšak, the nationalist discourse was introduced gradually, but after the war “the classic communist terminology”<sup>192</sup> was again in use. The author notes several techniques for creating the nationalist discourse in Serbia: the equating of the collective (the people) with the individual, the identification of an ethnic group with another, more privileged ethnic group (identification with the Jews), the historization of politics, especially of significant battles and defeats (emphasising the long-standing existence of Serbia, the Serbs, the barbarism of other peoples, etc.), populism, the use of new terms to designate citizens: they are no longer “workers” or “self-managers”, but “individuals merged with the collective gathered around the hearth”. The term “the people” is increasingly replaced by a slightly archaic term “*živalj*”<sup>193</sup>. Mark Thompson, in his book *Forging War* (1995), describes the newly-adopted media terminology in Serbia in the following way: “the language of the media discarded the dying socialist terminology, replacing it with the language of demagoguery and acrobatic irrationality, rhetorical questions and outcries, destiny and missions: ‘the heavenly people’ facing its fate; unlimited self-pity, coupled with terrible accusations unsupported by any proof or investigation; stirring of conspiracies, paranoia and shameless calls for violence”<sup>194</sup>. For this author that language was undoubtedly “a language of war, used when any war in Yugoslavia was still inconceivable”<sup>195</sup>.

187 Stjepan Malović, *Mediji u ratu ili rat medija? (Media in War or Media at War)*, *Politička misao*, 36 (2/1999), pp. 103-113.

188 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 412.

189 Ibid., p. 425.

190 Ibid., p. 426.

191 Svetlana Slapšak, in Svetlana Slapšak et al., *Rat je počeo na Maksimiru: Govor mržnje u medijima (Analiza pisanja „Politike“ i „Borbe“ 1987-1991.)*, *War Started in Maksimir: Hate Speech in the Media (Content Analyses of Politika and Borba Newspapers 1987-1991)*, Medija centar, Beograd 1997, p. 24.

192 S. Slapšak, in S. Slapšak et al., *Rat je počeo na Maksimiru: Govor mržnje u medijima (Analiza pisanja „Politike“ i „borbe“)*, p. 25.

193 Ibid., p. 31.

194 M. Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 56.

195 Ibid.

Apart from television and radio, the newspapers with the largest circulation, *Political*, *Ekspres politika* and *Večernje novosti* (and later *Borba*), were also under government control. The daily newspaper *Politika*, in the section *Echoes and Reactions*, went to the extreme. That section, according to Mazowiecki, advocated hate and intolerance. Pavlović explains that “readers’ letters, generally a marginal aspect of political life, when turned into a systematic and well-lead campaign, aimed at provoking desired mass reactions by stirring up emotions and passions, then they gain significance and may become part of the mainstream or even the drivers of social and political mechanisms”<sup>196</sup>. The weeklies *Duga* and *Pogledi* also promoted nationalist views.

The ideological patterns of the Serbian media started to change already in 1986, when *Večernji list* published parts of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. “The Memorandum once and for all set the tone (at the same time self-pitying, morbid and revengeful) of the nationalist discourse and it is largely regarded as a detailed draft of the plans for expansion towards Croatia and Bosnia, which will be declared openly in 1991 and 1992”.

After the Belgrade Radio-Television broadcasted Milošević’s address to the Kosovo Serbs, when he pronounced the famous phrase “No one is allowed to beat you”, what followed was what Kurspahić, Svetlana Slapšak and other authors will refer to as “the birth of a leader” “Mitević made an effort to ensure that the event on Kosovo Polje got special treatment on the Belgrade Television. Milošević did not come to Kosovo Polje on 24 April 1987 only to meet with the political leadership of the province. He was met with a crowd of about 15,000 angry Serbs and Montenegrins, who wanted an opportunity to talk to the president of the Party about their endangerment”<sup>197</sup>. Dušan Mitević, who worked at the Belgrade Radio-Television at the time, afterwards described his own role in the creation of the national leader. Milošević was by that time already supported by Ratomir Vico, director of the Belgrade Radio-Television, Živorad Minović, editor of *Politika*, and Slobodan Jovanović, editor of *Ekspres Politika*. The Serbian media first started launching attacks on Kosovo, its political leadership and citizens. For example, a tragic event in the Paraćin barracks, when a psychically unstable Albanian soldier fired successive shots at several soldiers (it is important to emphasise that they were of different nationalities). was exploited for the propagation of nationalism<sup>198</sup>. “When *Politika* published the first reports on the killings in the barracks, I was appalled by the layout of the paper and the vengeful tone of the reports. An impression was created that that was a nationalist-motivated crime, even though Keljmeni was diagnosed as mentally disturbed. He did not choose his victims, he shot at anyone he came across”<sup>199</sup>. This media campaign against the Kosovo Albanians was only an overture to the falsification of the past and the fabrication of events in the media, continuing until the date when Slobodan Milošević held a speech at Gazimestan to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the battle against the Ottoman Empire, with the ground already set for his media glorification. Mark Thompson lists some of the titles published by *Politika* in that period: “Serbian

196 Dragiša M. Pavlović, *Olako obećana brzina*, Globus, Zagreb 1988, p. 182.

197 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 38.

198 For more information on the event, go to: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1667013> (23 April 2020).

199 Đukić, according to: K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 4.

Children Taken as Hostages’, ‘Serbian Nation under Attack’, ‘Voice Against Ustashe’, ‘We Are Not Fascists, We Are Ustashe’, ‘Same Methods Were Used at the Beginning of 1941’, ‘Resist Ustasha Terror by All Means’ ‘Genocide Cannot Happen Again’, ‘Ustashe are Destroying Yugoslavia and Shifting the Responsibility on the Serbs’, ‘Special Forces Speak Albanian’...”<sup>200</sup>.

According to Mazowiecki, the media outlets trying to advocate anti-nationalism were the weekly programme *VIN* on *TV Studio B*, the program *Doba razuma (Age of Reason)* broadcasted by the radio stations *B92*, *Radio Indeks* and *Radio Studio B*, and the weeklies *Vreme* and *Monitor* (Podgorica). Kemal Kurspahić names the journalists of *Vreme* who tried to oppose the nationalist propaganda: Jug Grizelj, Jurij Gustinčić, Dragiša Bošković, Stojan Cerović, renowned former *NIN* journalists – Zoran Jeličić, Milan Milošević and Miloš Vasić as well as Dragoljub Žarković from *Borba*.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina – aggression on the state and the media**

Like other Yugoslav states, Bosnia and Herzegovina associated its politics of memory in the Yugoslav period with the common state, the national liberation movement, the Partisans and the anti-fascist struggle. Darko Karačić<sup>201</sup> writes that before, during and after the war, there was a very dynamic politics of memory of Yugoslavia and the Partisan struggle, which is best reflected in the relationship towards monuments erected in their honour. Many of those monuments are destroyed, some museums have been converted for a different use and some have been renovated. “Those are the reasons why people in different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina have differing memories of World War II and why there is no official state policy regarding that memory”<sup>202</sup>. The media climate before the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina was more favourable than that in the neighbouring states. Kemal Kurspahić, who will in 1988 become editor-in-chief of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian newspaper *Oslobođenje*, writes that in that period the media landscape saw a short-lived “Bosnian spring”. The media outlets that were until then under strict Party control turned critical towards the reporting on the infamous *Agrokomerc* scandal. The author claims that “even by merely reporting on what the highest-ranking officials said about each other in those meetings, the Sarajevo Radio-Television, *Oslobođenje* and other media outlets in the republic were publicly exposing the wrongdoings of the people in power...”. The magazine *Dani* and the youth papers *Naši dani* and *Valter* also took part in the reporting. Kurspahić continues by explaining that the Bosnian media outlets succeeded in their efforts to have an act passed allowing the appointment of the editorial boards exclusively by journalists and not by Party leaders. The *Yutel* television, whose reporters were Goran Milić, Dragan Babić, Aleksandar Tijanić and others, moved from Belgrade to the Sarajevo Radio-Television, while Roy Gutman, winner of the Pulitzer prize for reporting on death camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to Kurspahić, “reported on 1 May 1991 in the New York daily *Newsday*

200 M. Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 70-71.

201 Darko Karačić in: D. Karačić, T. Banjevlav and N. Govedarica, *Re: vizija prošlosti – Politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine*.

202 Ibid., p. 45.

that ‘in most of the republics, especially in the two largest ones, Serbia and Croatia, the press accepted the nationalistic views of political leaders, building up ethnic tensions that are pushing the country to the brink of collapse, if not self-destruction.’ However, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a different world”<sup>203</sup>. Unfortunately, publications from the neighbouring republics were at that time also available in Bosnia, and, in addition to the Sarajevo Television, the citizens could watch the Belgrade Television and the Zagreb Television. Kurspahić explains that, right after the first multiparty elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina the national parties tried to impose a new law that would enable them control over the appointment of directors and editors of media outlets. This time again, journalists succeeded in winning their freedom. “Finally, on 3 October 1991, the Constitutional Court defended the rights of journalists, concluding that the proposed law was not in line with the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina”<sup>204</sup>. Nenad Pejić, editor-in-chief at the Sarajevo Radio-Television in the pre-war period (until the end of April), wrote in his book *Turn Off the TV and Open Your Eyes* that the value of that medium form was unsurpassed “because of the fact that the Sarajevo Television twice resisted the authorities’ control – once it defied the League of Communists, and the other time the national parties”<sup>205</sup>. It was in this period that the *Yutel* television was freely broadcasting in Sarajevo, while it was not welcome in any other republic. Fahira Fejzić-Čengić said that this television station was “objective in a Yugoslav way”<sup>206</sup>, in other words, that it was neutral towards “two national extremes, which, for the Bosnian-Herzegovinian public meant that its job had no useful effect”<sup>207</sup>. She judged that form of neutrality at the time when the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina was in the making and when eleven transmitters of that television station transmitted the programme of the Serbian Radio-Television, whose propagandist tendencies were discussed, to be “a major professional test”<sup>208</sup>. She explains further that “the anaesthetic function of *Yutel* was especially evident on the critical day at the beginning of the aggression on Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2 May 1992, when the editor Ljerka Draženović proclaimed in the daily news of Senad Hadžifejzović: ‘The army will not hurt an ant’”<sup>209</sup>. The army Draženović referred to was the Yugoslavian National Army, which did kill people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Croatia. Nevertheless, Kurspahić emphasised that the former journalists of *Yutel* claimed that they had truly believed in their television’s mission. If we accept that they had an anaesthetic effect on the Bosnian-Herzegovinian public, we have to take into consideration the fact that, up to that point, they had lived in a Yugoslavia where the YNA was not a criminal army, but a national army.

203 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 107.

204 Ibid., p. 110.

205 Nenad Pejić, *Isključi TV i otvori oči (Turn Off the TV and Open Your Eyes)*, Media centar i Radio Slobodna Evropa, Sarajevo 2013, p. 7.

206 Fahira Fejzić-Čengić, *Medijska kultura u Bosni i Hercegovini (Media Culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina)*, Connec-tum, Sarajevo 2009, p. 126.

207 F. Fejzić-Čengić, *Medijska kultura u Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 126.

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid., p. 127.

Before the start of the aggression “the Serbian forces – aided by the Yugoslav National Army – stole a transmitter located on the mountain of Kozara near Banjaluka”<sup>210</sup>, disabling the reception of Sarajevo Radio-Television signals in that area. The Special Rapporteur Mazowiecki also mentions that event, explaining that “before April 1992 this television station broadcasted the programme on three channels, and now it only has one, which covers a smaller, more limited area, including Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica and more recently, Mostar”<sup>211</sup>. Fejzić-Čengić wrote that not even before the war did many citizens in western Herzegovina pay subscription for the Sarajevo Radio-Television. Even after its transmitters were put up, one near Livno and another one on the mountain of Biokovo, “when the Sarajevo Radio-television was visible in that area, the citizens still did not pay the subscription”<sup>212</sup>. On the other hand, in some municipalities of the now smaller BiH entity, the newspaper *Oslobođenje* was not available at all. Fejzić-Čengić mentions the counties Lopare, Ugljevik and Bijeljina.<sup>213</sup> The author believes that even the Sarajevo Radio-Television to some extent made the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina passive in relation to the upcoming aggression, stating that “even after two months from the start of the aggression this television station failed to name the Yugoslav National Army as the aggressor on Sarajevo and the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina”<sup>214</sup>.

When a peace rally in Sarajevo was interrupted by sniper shots killing two students, it became clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina was under attack. According to Kurspahić and Mazowiecki, the Sarajevo Radio-Television, with its name changed to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Radio-Television, was leaning towards the leading Democratic Action Party, but “even in those circumstances it did not propagate ethnic hate and stereotypes”<sup>215</sup>. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (or in the part under control of the BiH army), in addition to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Radio-Television, there was also the privately-owned Hayat Radio-Television. Both Mazowiecki and Kurspahić mention that there was a wide range of radio stations in Bosnia during the war. In addition to *Oslobođenje*, also published were the daily *Večernje Novosti* and the weeklies *BH Dani* and *Slobodna Bosna*. There was also the ONASA press agency. All these outlets were under constant threat of shelling, while “armed attacks on the media premises”, according to Mazowiecki, were “an important element in the strategy of the Serbian forces”<sup>216</sup>. Unfortunately, some media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina fostered nationalist propaganda. Mazowiecki and Kurspahić mention the Tuzla-based paper *Zmaj od Bosne* and the Sarajevo weekly *Ljiljan*. Mazowiecki also mentions that “on 5 February 1994, following the massacre at the Markale market, Radio Hayat aired a call to all Muslims to take revenge on Serbs and Croats in Sarajevo”<sup>217</sup>.

210 Ibid., p. 112.

211 T. Mazowiecki, *Izvjestaji: 1992-1995.*, str. 404.

212 M. Nuhić, according to: F. Fejzić-Čengić, *Medijska kultura u Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 107.

213 Ibid.

214 M. Thompson according to: F. Fejzić Čengić, *Medijska kultura u Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 129.

215 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 118.

216 T. Mazowiecki, *Izvjestaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 406.

217 Ibid., p. 407.

Nenad Pejić, who focused his analysis on the Sarajevo Radio-Television, believes that pressure the Bosnian-Herzegovinian media were exposed to pressures from various sides. First, political parties controlled journalists. “Political parties, especially those that were nationally oriented, would in no time find journalists to inform them about what was happening on the television”, he writes.<sup>218</sup> “Constant public attacks, extortions and threats aimed at the editorial staff, journalists and management of the Sarajevo Radio-Television” were, according to Pejić, another form of pressure, which ended after the journalists decided to go public. “During broadcasts it was often funny to listen to a series of allegations regarding the Sarajevo Television being at the same time anti-Serbian, anti-Croatian and anti-Muslim”<sup>219</sup>. Economic pressures on the Sarajevo Radio-Television were applied by calls that the parties like the SDS made to dissuade citizens from paying the subscription. “The subscription percentage in BiH was 40% – the television was not identified with any ethnic group” explains Pejić<sup>220</sup>. The last form of pressures mentioned by the author are those that came from other television stations, which ceased to broadcast their programmes for the Sarajevo Radio-Television, from citizens who, according to Pejić, were less and less television viewers and “increasingly became only Croats, Muslims and Serbs”<sup>221</sup>.

The state in the media landscape controlled by the Karadžić forces was mostly uniform – it was characterised by warmongering, with outbursts of open xenophobia and hate towards Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs who opposed the nationalist rhetoric. Kurspahić writes that many journalists and editors left the Sarajevo Radio-Television, but also that many journalists joined the newly-formed the Pale Radio-Television (*Kanal S*), founded by the Karadžić leadership. The Pale Radio-Television will become the most appalling example of propaganda, nationalism, xenophobia and fabricated information. This disgraceful work was most notably performed by former journalists of the Sarajevo Radio-Television – Risto Đogo, Ilija Guzina and Dragan Božanić. “The Pale Television was always faster than Karadžić’s very own headquarters to automatically deny any responsibility of the Serbian forces for the crimes committed in Sarajevo”, writes Kurspahić.<sup>222</sup> This period in Pale also saw the establishment of the Serbian Journalistic Information Agency (SRNA). According to Mazowiecki, SRNA “is evidently doing its best to create confusion regarding the real situation on that territory”. He writes that “they even gave the name ‘*Oslobođenje*’ (Liberation) to the newspapers founded in the part of Sarajevo that was *de facto* under control of Bosnian Serbs, which were termed ‘*Srpsko oslobođenje*’ (Serbian Liberation)”<sup>223</sup>.

As regards the media in the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina controlled by the Croatian Defence Council, Mazowiecki explains that those were mainly media outlets from the neighbouring Croatia. In other words, the formation of media outlets in that area was also “secretly or publicly supported by

218 N. Pejić, *Isključiti TV i otvoriti oči*, p. 100.

219 Ibid., p. 102.

220 Ibid.

221 Ibid.

222 K. Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19:30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i miru*, p. 121.

223 T. Mazowiecki, *Izveštaji: 1992-1995.*, p. 409.



the Republic of Croatia”<sup>224</sup>. These media outlets, continues the author, “propagated discrimination, hate and, as a result, the violation of human rights”<sup>225</sup>. In his work *Forging war* Thompson describes how the local Čapljina radio played an important role in the preparation of physical attacks on the Bosniak population.

“On 13 June 1993, the Croatian mayor of Čapljina made a radio announcement that the lives and safety of local Muslims ‘cannot be guaranteed anymore’. The reports show that after the announcement normal life was no longer possible for Muslims: it was dangerous for them to go out on the street and they could only buy food with the help of their Croatian neighbours, friends or spouses. Muslim families became targets of masked thieves’ night raids, their possessions were destroyed, and the police of Čapljina was not assuring sufficient protection. The role of the local radio was closely coordinated with the police and military action of the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the non-Croatians from Herzeg-Bosnia and central Bosnia in 1993 and early 1994, controlled by the Croatians”.<sup>226</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that the Serbian and Croatian media at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s were an organized propaganda machine. Their weapons were words, often false and exaggerated, as well as photographs, which they frequently misused. The media and media technology, in that period primarily television and print, facilitated the transmission of propagandist messages. If other media had existed then, they would have been used in a similar way. In Vietnam, the Americans used flyers, Hitler used the radio, Milošević and Tuđman used television. Their technical structure, that is, form, served as a weapon – a mass media gun/machine gun/cannon. Words were the ammunition, bullets. Without journalist who consciously transformed their words into laser paths for bullets fired at their former neighbours, the propaganda weapons would have been just another technical intermediary. United, the journalists and the media, constituted a deplorable image of a cruel criminal at the end of the 20th century.

Many authors have stated that the bloodshed in the ex-Yugoslav countries was preceded by a media war. It is openly denoted as such by Malović<sup>227</sup>, Slapšak et al.<sup>228</sup> and Thompson<sup>229</sup>. According to Malović, the western media could not handle the Serbian ones. Why? “(...) those are mass media, and not a propagandist machinery”<sup>230</sup>. The author emphasises that the western media adhered by ethical and professional principles in their reporting, giving even criminals an opportunity to express their opinions. On the opposite end were the Serbian media outlets, which invented, manipulated, fabricated and intervened in information in a systematic, planned and coordinated manner. The same

224 Ibid., p. 410.

225 Ibid., p. 410.

226 M. Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*, p. 273-274.

227 S. Malović, *Mediji u ratu ili rat medija?*

228 S. Slapšak et al., *Rat je počeo na Maksimiru: Govor mržnje u medijima (Analiza pisanja „Politike“ i „Borbe“ 1987-1991.)*.

229 M. Thompson, *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*.

230 S. Malović, *Mediji u ratu ili rat medija?*, p.104.

can be said for the Croatian media from the same period, but also for a few previously mentioned media outlets from Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those under control of the then army of the Republika Srpska. “Therefore, the media in the war transformed into a war of the media, a particularly unfair war between a strong propaganda machine and the democratic media, which were not prepared enough to neutralize the ten-year, unrelenting and steady work of Milošević’s propaganda, which was systemically creating an image of the world according to Sloba”<sup>231</sup>.

## Conclusion

As the history of the media has shown, authorities will always use the media technologies available to them to remain in power. However, the media have always tried, or should be trying, to resist that. Even though we are aware that the media truth is not the same as the philosophical or religious truth, aspiration towards the truth is clearly the fundamental principle of journalistic reporting. Various theoreticians have offered their own interpretations of the importance of truth as the fundamental principle of the journalistic profession, primarily because the mass media information has a significant influence on the way people make choices in everyday life and understand reality. The importance of this principle becomes evident in crisis.

The image of reality in the media is certainly incomplete and often oversimplified, but for many people, those lacking other sources of information or having very few, the media create a frame through which they observe events.

The media content is produced under different forms of pressures – including economic and political pressures, which inevitably leads to bias. The most extreme and most destructive form of bias, according to McQuail, is propaganda bias – the one to which the media in Croatia and Serbia succumbed at the end of the 1980s. Even though it may be unrealistic to talk about complete media freedom and independence, the examples from the ex-Yugoslav countries are extreme and show what can happen when the media turn into weapons.

A comprehensive media propaganda has always been accompanied by other social changes. Particularly important for this period is a new politics of memory, which is reflected in the authorities’ stance towards the Yugoslav past. This stance results in changing street names, desecrating or completely destroying the Partisan monuments, changing the character of commemorations and commemorating the dates and events from the Yugoslavian past for a long time considered to be taboo.

After the Croatian Democratic Union came to power in Croatia, the Croatian media were subjected to various forms of pressure. First, economic sanctions were imposed to the media outlets that did not support the government’s politics and they were often, along with their journalists, legally prosecuted. State-owned enterprises – the Croatian Radio-Television (HTV) and *Tisak* – had a

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231 Ibid., p. 105.

complete monopoly in Croatia. Non-Croatian journalists were removed from their positions under the excuse of being redundant and so were the journalists of Croatian nationality who opposed the dictate of the government. Among the media outlets who went the farthest in warmongering propaganda are *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Vjesnik*, *HTV*, *Hrvatski vjesnik* and *Danas*. However, there were also many media outlets that fully complied with professional rules in their reporting, even though they had smaller reach and influence than the previously mentioned ones due to economic and political pressures. These include *Feral Tribune*, Rijeka-based *Novi list*, *OTV*, *Nacional* and *Erasmus*.

The state of the media in Serbia at the end of 1980s was similar to that in Croatia. Many authors (Jakić, Slapšak, Kurspahić, Pavlović) are of the opinion that it was precisely the Serbian media that paved the way for Croatian nationalist journalism. Pressures on journalists and the media mounted after the eighth session of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, when Slobodan Milošević made a grand entrance into politics in Serbia. The monopolistic power was evident in the fact that the Serbian Radio-Television had a wider reach than other television and radio broadcasters and that Milošević appointed his men to leading editorial positions in the most circulated paper *Politika*. The repressive measures were not exhausted by taking over key media positions: they were continued with the layoffs of non-Serbian journalists, but also Serbs who were not obedient enough, culminating in physical attacks and threats aimed at journalists and media outlets that were out of line. When implementing economic measures to discipline the media, the Milošević's regime used a similar methodology as the Tuđman's, levying enormously high taxes on the media he did not manage to politically conquer. The propaganda arrangements were completed by introducing appropriate warmongering terminology into reporting on the neighbouring countries.

In addition to the Belgrade Radio-Television and the newspaper *Politika*, the Milošević's regime soon took control over the papers *Ekspres politika*, *Večernje Novosti*, and later also *Borba*. Nevertheless, there were many independent media outlets trying to work objectively and professionally, including the magazine *Vreme*, radio stations *Radio B92*, *Radio Indeks*, *Radio Studio B* and others.

Bosnian and Herzegovinian media outlets were in a relaxed mood before the aggression started and journalists managed to ward off pressures from national parties in the 1990s. However, due to the fact that the media from other countries were accessible in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the atmosphere started to change. A large number of journalists from the Sarajevo Radio-Television left to work for the newly-formed Pale Television in Pale. Apart from that, before, and especially during the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian forces, aided by the Yugoslav National Army, took several transmitters of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Radio-Television, so that citizens living in territories under control of the Karadžić's forces could only follow the media from Serbia and the Pale Television. This television station was the most infamous example of the dissemination of war propaganda, the fabrication of information and the inhumane treatment of aggression victims, including civilians, women and children. The journalist Risto Đogo was especially notorious because

of his inappropriate jokes about murder and rape victims, and he was joined in that by the journalists Ilija Gužina and Dragan Božanić. In the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the power of the Croatian Defence Council the only available media were those from Croatia. Despite such circumstances, a large number of media outlets in Bosnia and Hercegovina (electronic and print) managed to uphold professional standards, the notable examples being the newspaper *Oslobođenje* as well as the dailies *BH Dani* and *Slobodna Bosna*. Unfortunately, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Radio-Television gradually leaned towards the ruling Democratic Action Party, but it did not broadcast warmongering messages, unlike the media outlets such as the Hayat Radio-Television as well as the Sarajevo weekly *Ljiljan* and the Tuzla-based daily paper *Zmaj od Bosne*.

The listed media outlets that contributed to the state of inter-ethnic hate and fear of the other, while also encouraging crime, are a clear example of how the media can easily be exploited for propaganda and transformed into propaganda war weapons. However, the media upholding professional principles show that the media can also have a noble role of communicating professionally created information. Those media were guided by a fundamental journalistic principle, the only principle that justifies their existence and work – the truth. It is up to the (inhumane) humans to decide in which way to use the technical intermediaries. The only thing that is certain is that the truth that was sacrificed before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and whose sacrifice affected the brutality of the wars, can nowadays, when those wars are far behind us, but not the discourse leading to them, bring about a consolidation of the politics of memory, reconciliation, and, one can only hope, a better and happier common future.

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## Medij je oružje: pristranost u situacijama krize

### Sažetak

*Na primjeru medija država nekadašnje Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije. u radu analiziramo način na koji se mediji mogu zloupotrijebiti u svrhu najstrašnije političke propagande. Iz položaja posrednika bratstva i jedinstva, sloge, antifašističkog naslijeđa, ponosa i prkosa narodnooslobodilačke borbe i pokreta, mediji su u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj krajem 80-ih godina došli u vlast nacionalista koji će ih preobraziti u posrednike mržnje, nacionalizma i ksenofobije. U Bosni i Hercegovini mediji su izbjegli propagandno djelovanje do početka agresije na Bosnu i Hercegovinu nakon čega će i u ovoj državi u ratu postojati nekoliko medija koji propagiraju netoleranciju. Pojedini će mediji u potpunosti potvrditi McLuhanovu ideju tehničkih posrednika kao suvremenog oružja, te će u ratnohuškačkim porukama otići korak dalje od političkih stranaka koje su ih oformile. Najupečatljiviji takvi primjeri su TV Pale iz Bosne i Hercegovine, dnevni list Vjesnik iz Hrvatske, te list Politika (posebno rubrika Odjeci i reagovanja) iz Srbije. Svojim će djelovanjem ovakvi mediji potvrditi da je najopasniji oblik medijske pristranosti upravo propagandna pristranost kako je definira Denis McQuail, a njezina se destruktivna moć pokazala u strahotama ratova koji su u ovim državama uslijedili.*

**Ključne riječi:** mediji, oružje, rat, propaganda, pristranost.



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