

*Viktorija Car**

Myths in Media Texts

How Media in Croatia Treats Veterans and Tycoons

Sažetak

Autorica u tekstu definira i objašnjava pripovjedne elemente u medijskim tekstovima te ističe mit kao njihov konstitutivni element. Polazeći od činjenice da se cjelokupna ljudska komunikacija temelji na pripovijedanju priča, autorica daje pregled narativne teorije u medijima. Iako se događaji sami nameću kao medijske priče, proces je i suprotan – mediji stvaraju priče od pojedinih događaja. Taj kružni proces medijizacije ovisan je, ali istovremeno i odgovoran za procese kontekstualizacije događaja i osoba.

Smještajući problematiku u hrvatski medijski kontekst, na primjerima mitoloških struktura konštenih u izvještavanju o braniteljima i tajkunima, autorica potvrđuje da su mitološke strukture važan element u medijskom oblikovanju i prezentiranju događaja. Pod utjecajem društvenih, političkih i ekonomskih prilika, mediji biraju kut iz kojeg će određen događaj ili osoba biti prezentirani javnosti.

Ključne riječi: mediji, medijski tekst, pripovjedni elementi, mitovi

* Autorica je magistrica znanosti i asistentica na Fakultetu političkih znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu

Introduction: Narratives, mythical structures and media in everyday life

The tradition of storytelling is basic and significant to people's lives and societies. What we do in our everyday communication is actually tell stories about events or people, about what we have seen or heard, felt or thought. We do not speak broken phrases, even though it has become a more and more acceptable way of communication via sms's, chats, e-mails... When we talk to someone else about what we did earlier today, when we teach our students or when we present our work – we tell a story. Jack Lule states that “storytelling will never be in crisis because it is an essential part of what makes us human”¹.

Stories were, and still are, the main format for conserving all types of knowledge, especially the history of the society, but also of daily events, public affairs, entertainment. Stories give sense and meaning and that is why all cultures make them. But, there is always a debate on the difference between actual events and stories about those events. That is why ‘objective’ history is largely seen as ‘subjective’ – “a failure to take into consideration the initial distinction between a physical event which simply occurs, and an event which has already received its historical status from the fact that it has been recounted in chronicles, in legendary stories, in memories etc.”².

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of movable type printing in the middle of the 15th century changed the way of storytelling: print text took the priority from spoken words. In the 17th century first newspaper opened a new page on the ‘storytelling market’, and at the beginning of the 20th century radio and television got involved too. Compared with historical and folk narratives and myths, narratives and mythical structures in media are different because of the institutional or industrial demands. They “have to be popular in heterogeneous societies amongst audiences with different and often conflicting social interests and experiences. So television narrative must be more open and multiple than the singular folk narrative with its comparatively tight closure”³.

¹ Lule, Jack: *Daily News, Eternal Stories. The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford Press, New York, 2001, pp. 4.

² Ricoeur, Paul: The narrative function, in: Thompson, John B. (ed.): Paul Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981, pp. 276.

³ Fiske, John: *Television culture*, Routledge, London, 1987, pp. 23.

Media is both structuring and structured. How we will understand media texts depends on the way they are presented but also it depends on our past experience. At the same time, these messages shape our future experience: depending on information we have read and heard or pictures we have seen on TV, we will understand or explain situations in our every day life. This circle shows how media mediates our life. From the semiotic⁴ point of view, any media text can be characterized as a *social text*; it frames reality. Media frames are generally seen as coherent packages of information containing “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events.”⁵

We shall agree that narrative forms reflect the dominant values of a society. Like these values, however, they are not fixed or uncontested. They change with time. What may seem ‘acceptable’, ‘normal’ and ‘conventional’ today may be clichéd, outmoded or unacceptable tomorrow.

For example, narratives used in political language about positioning Croatia in the EU context, changed substantially over time. During the war in Croatia (1990-1995) president Franjo Tuđman⁶ used to say that Croatia was a *bulwark of Europe*. He insisted on presenting Croatia as a country that “historically and geopolitically belongs to the Central-European and Mediterranean region and definitely not to the Balkans”⁷. He stated, “The Croatian goal is to enter the Central and Western European integrations, and definitely not the new Balkan integrations, as it is obvious that civilization, cultural and historical differences are too large.”⁸ In the rhetoric of the current Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, Croatia is *the bridge* between Europe and the Balkan countries: “Today we must pay attention to the possibilities that are standing in front of us. As I see it, the completeness of the European South, in the years before the end of this

⁴ *Semiotics* (a science which is also known as ‘semiology’) is the study of ‘signs’ and their use within society. It emerged from linguistics. It is an abstract and undeniably complex science, applicable to a whole range of disciplines (including media and communication studies). It concerns the way people generate meaning from a variety of sign systems available to them for communication purposes. Words, images and sounds are all regarded as ‘signs’ within semiotics, and as television makes use of all three types of signs, semiotics has a great contribution to make in our understanding of the medium. McQueen, David: *Television. A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998.

⁵ Gamson, William A., Modigliani, Andre: *The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action*, *Research in Political Sociology*, 1987; 3: 137-177; pp. 143.

⁶ First president of the Republic of Croatia.

⁷ “Ne pripadamo Balkanu” (*We don't belong to the Balkans*), daily newspaper “Večernji list”, April 12th 1996, p.2;

⁸ “Cilj je Europa” (*The goal is Europe*), daily newspaper “Večernji list”, April 12th 1996, p.2;

decade, brings unperceived advantages not only for citizens of South-East Europe but for Europe in total. These advantages will not be only economical because the European South serves as the bridge towards the European East.”⁹

Like history and anthropology, news narrates real events. Further more, news archives have become an important legacy (device) of history, a source of information to interpret or reinterpret. Journalists and editors are the authors of these news stories, albeit they will not agree with the view that they are story-tellers. They rather see themselves as transmitters of facts and information.

Once we move beyond seeing media news as a transparent representation of the world, we need to consider some of the ways in which media texts mediate the world. One such way is through the codes and conventions of the narrative. And again, in these texts we can find mythical structures that journalists use sometimes on purpose, or sometimes unconsciously. Myth¹⁰ is any story or narrative that aims to explain the origin of something¹¹; it is generic representation of ideal type. There is always West and East, the American Dream, EU prosperity, the Third World, the Other World, a hero, a victim, an enemy, a beautiful woman and a macho man.

⁹ Speech of Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader at the Plenary Session “Doprinosi europske južne dimenzije” (*Contribution of European South Dimension*), July 2006, <http://us.mvp.hr/Default.aspx?mh=176&mv=1036&id=1865>

¹⁰ The word ‘myth’ derives from the Greek *mythos* that means ‘word’, ‘speech’, ‘tale of the gods’. In the beginning stages of human cultures, myths functioned as genuine ‘narrative theories’ of the world. This is why all cultures have created them to explain their origins; Danesi, Marcel: *Understanding media semiotics*, Arnold, London, 2002.

¹¹ Roger Silverstone rather uses the word mythic. “The mythic includes myth, folk tale and ritual action and as such it is often suggested that it marks a stage in man’s cultural development between an albeit hypothetical state of nature and one, our own, where knowledge and experience have become more specialized, more scientific and technical. In this sense myth is transitional”; Silverstone, Roger: *The Message of Television: Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Culture*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1981, pp. 3.

Narrative theories

Narrative theories in general have been developed mostly during the 20th century. The French semiotician Roland Barthes (1915-80) showed, for the first time, the importance of studying media and popular culture in terms of how they generate meanings. Semiotic method, as Barthes argued in his 1957 masterpiece *Mythologies*¹², is fundamental because, unlike other approaches to media, it focuses almost exclusively on hidden meanings. He argues that no language use can be separated from structures of ideology and power.

Influential structuralist approaches to narrative included the Russian critic and folklorist Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) and French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908)¹³. They all often worked with myths, novels and folk tales to explore how narrative structures or shapes act with particular cultures. In the 1920s Propp examined hundreds of examples of one kind of Russian fairy tales to see whether they shared any structures. In his study, *Morphology of the Folktale*¹⁴, he concluded that although different tales may feature different characters, these characters fall into one of eight types of dramatic personae: *hero*, *villain*, *donor*, *dispatcher*, *false hero*, *helper*, and *princess* and her *father*. He also argued it was possible to group tales, characters, and actions into thirty-one functions¹⁵ which move the story along. Propp's theory of looking at the order of actions or events in a narrative is known as *syntagmatic analyses*.

Lévi-Strauss is known as a structuralist, and he was interested in how a myth and a story are related to one another¹⁶. He argued that the structure of all narratives depends on binary opposition, or a conflict between two qualities or terms (such as *good and evil*, *fairness* and *unfairness*). In every story there must be present that binary opposition e.g. a good guy and a bad guy, or a good father and a bad son, a princess and a witch... These opposite values make a conflict in a story. Lévi-Strauss' theory is known as *paradigmatic analyses*.

¹² Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*, Seuil, Paris, 1970.

¹³ On their work see more in: Branston, Gill, Stafford, Roy: *The Media Student's Book*, 4th edition, Routledge, London, 2006. Berger, Arthur Asa: *Media & Society: A Critical Perspective*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, 2003.

¹⁴ Propp, Vladimir: *Morphology of the Folktale*, first published in 1928, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1970.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Structural Anthropology*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1967.

A good definition of narrative is given by Edward Branigan who argues it is “a way of organizing spatial and temporal data into a cause-effect chain of events with a beginning, a middle and end that embodies a judgment about the nature of events”¹⁷. According to the narrative theory, every narrative can be split into two parts: the *story*, that is, ‘what happens to whom’, and the *discourse*, that is, ‘how the story is told’. To recognize television’s specificity, Sarah Kozloff adds a third layer - *schedule*, which is “how the story and discourse are affected by the text’s placement within the larger discourse of the station’s schedule”¹⁸.

To understand news narratives, all story-telling devices that are an integral part of their construction must be examined. It is important to understand the context in which journalists construct news stories, and how these stories relate to the culture of which they are both a reflection and a representation.

But yet, what does news really tell us about society? Even though modern societies believe they have no need of mythical heroes, and that they have replaced myths with scientific knowledge, technological advances, and objective reports of the real world, every day we bear witness to the fact that “the daily news is the primary vehicle for myth in our time”¹⁹.

It is enough to take a look at newspaper headlines and we shall soon recognize symbols, metaphors and mythical structures (e.g. *Cocktails of Insanity*, *Gas Supply Company – the Loser*, *An Old Man Grabbed the Thief*²⁰). Why is there a need for them? Silverstone writes that “the mythic dimension of culture contains traditional stories and actions whose source is the persistent need to deny chaos and create order (...) It acts as a bridge between the everyday and the transcendent, the known and the unknown, the sacred and the profane”²¹. Storytelling and myths are in human nature and we can not run away from them.

¹⁷ Branigan, Edward: *Narrative Comprehension and the Fiction Film*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 3.

¹⁸ Kozloff, Sarah: “Narrative theory and television” in: Allen, Robert C.: *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, Routledge, London, 1992, (pp. 67-100), pp. 69.

¹⁹ Lule, Jack: *Daily News, Eternal Stories. The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford Press, New York, 2001, pp. 19.

²⁰ Daily newspaper “Večernji list”: “Kokteli bezumlja”, April 13th 1996, p.49; “Plinara gubitaš”, April 15th 1996, p.8; “Starac šćepao lopova”, April 9th 1996, p.15;

²¹ Silverstone, Roger: *The Message of Television: Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Culture*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1981, pp. 70.

Jack Lule's seven master-myths in news

Seeing news as a story in which mythical structures are used to make it more interesting, more important, more sensational - doesn't mean that a specific myth is explicitly written in the text. While reading about the fireman who has saved three children from a house on fire, we don't have to read the exact sentence, "He is a hero" – but that is the message of the story itself. Myths in news are hidden in narratives and mythical structures. Sometimes they are obvious and it is easy to 'read' them and be aware of them. But sometimes, especially in television news where we have picture and sound beside the text, it is hard to recognize the myths which transmit hidden messages.

In his book *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*²² Jack Lule recognizes seven master myths that can be read in news no matter the medium and no matter the historical, political or social context of the country.

First is the myth of the **victim**. In journalistic practice we can often recognize how focusing on individuals is used to represent what is happening to many people. This 'formula' is often used while telling stories on socially mistreated groups and minorities, on traffic or factory accidents or other unpleasant events. Further more, the news often elevate victims and their loved ones into heroes. Lule stresses how "one of myth's important social roles is to reconcile people to the seeming randomness of human existence"²³. The question is whether these individuals are real victims or media victimizes them. The question of ethics and decency often must be considered. It is not rare that news tramples upon the privacy of victims in attempts to offer dramatic, sensational stories.

Every society, every historical epoch, even every small town has its **scapegoat**. In many examples it was a question of religion, gender, nationality or political affiliation, when such groups or individuals had to be expelled from the social scene (e.g. blacks, Jews, women, communists, homosexuals etc.). Sometimes news depicts the degradation of a scapegoat who has chosen to challenge the established order.

²² Lule, Jack: *Daily News, Eternal Stories. The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford Press, New York, 2001.

²³ *Ibid*, pp.53;

The **hero** is probably the most common myth we find in news. Values and ideals of the society are often dramatized and personified in stories of a hero. The hero is a model for society; he embodies crucial social values (e.g. courage, hard work, talent, persistence etc.). Furthermore, it is not rare that our mass-mediated societies have transformed heroes into celebrities. Even though Lule writes only on myth of a hero, it must be mentioned that it doesn't always have to be a man. There is also a myth of a heroine (especially on heroines in war time, in sports, in social or labor movements etc.).

Whenever we think about Mother Theresa the idea we get is a symbol of compassion, a living saint, and pure goodness. In such examples Lule finds a myth of the **good mother**. He argues "the human interest story and the good mother myth affirm the belief that individual action is important to social life"²⁴.

While some occupations are automatically seen as heroes in one country or society, in another they can be seen as **tricksters**. In democratic countries policemen are usually heroes, and so are rich businessmen. But in some post-communist countries there was a period when policemen were mostly labeled as tricksters, easily corrupted. Because of the very bad experience during the period of economic privatization, rich men were (and sometimes still are) labeled as (war or political) profiteers. It is true that investigative journalism sometimes brings out stories of real tricksters, but often media stereotypes play an important role in modern racism (e.g. presenting young black men as criminals, Roma people as thieves etc.).

Somebody said: "Every country has its East!" The same is for the **Other World**. It can be a paradisaic Other World (Heaven, West, North, wealth) or a darker Other World (Hell, East, South, poverty). Lule differentiates two models of journalism: (1) a new global and human journalism that valorizes aggressive, progressive news values that promote social justice and (2) a model of international news dictated by the actions and initiatives of U.S. foreign policy. Depending on these two models, the Other World can be defined.

The last, seventh master myth, according to Lule, is the **flood**. It concerns an unpleasant, unexpectedly large storm. In such stories everyone at the same place is in the same situation, usually no one is privileged and usually at least someone survives.

²⁴ Ibid, pp.119;

It is interesting how these myths are universal. We can read them in news in different countries, written in different languages; we recognize them in television pictures. Later in this paper, using examples of how media treats war veterans and tycoons in Croatia, I will try to elaborate which myths are hidden in news texts.

Croatian media context

While having the monopoly on the television market, European public service television mostly followed the principle of the 'inverted pyramid' in news structure, taken from newspaper journalism. Because of the influence of cable and satellite television in Europe, the advent of deregulation and increased competition in television during the 1980s and 1990s brought fundamental changes in the organization, production and output of television news. It was not only commercialization that affected TV news, but also 'dramatization', 'personalization', 'fictionalization' and 'tabloidization'. The narrative has come to dominate television news reports.

The difference between the Western European TV channels and their Eastern counterparts must be pointed out. What makes the post-communist countries different from western democracies is that before the 1990s television in these countries was in the hands of the communist party which used it as an instrument of political manipulation. When the wave of change started in Europe at the end of the 1980s, the processes of both political and economic transition were pervaded with changes in the structure of society. Those changes included almost all the constitutive elements of the system. The main characteristics of the communist societies were, among others, high ideologization of public life, highly controlled low level of activities within the civil sector and an undeveloped civil society. The state and the communist party controlled the media and the access to information; they filtered and modified information to suit the party's interests.

The Croatian media context has unique characteristics. Media in Croatia has undergone rapid social, political and economic transition over the last decade and a half. Changes include the transformation from one political (socialistic, communistic and totalitarian) and economic system

(planned economy) into another one which is defined as a liberal democracy with a market economy. In addition, the Homeland War that lasted from 1990 till 1995 further influenced media rhetoric. It imposed a special role on the *Hrvatska televizija* (HTV, *Croatian television*), the only television with national coverage at that time. HTV became a spokesman of official Croatian politics and it had a large responsibility in selecting and framing (packaging) the information that was broadcast. As a result, even a decade after the war ended, there is still a biased political rhetoric that can be read in Croatian media, as well as on television.

It is not only war, democratization and deideologization of society that induced the transformation of media. The impact of the free market, of globalism and transnationalism, as well as the digital technological revolution must be considered. The privatization process in Croatia started spontaneously and in an anarchic style. Unfortunately, there was no clear development strategy or plan. The media market in Croatia is very small²⁵ and it exploded resulting in numerous but undiversified media. Many new newsmagazines and weeklies survived less than a year. New local radio and TV channels were launched but their program schemes were very similar, oriented to the same mass audience, broadcasting cheap talk shows and soap operas. That is one of the main reasons why news presentation has changed. News as a genre which informs and educates has changed into infotainment. Everything is personalized, even politics. Sometimes it seems as if news on trivia from the President's private life is more important than news on the country's agriculture policy.

Today, even public service media accepts the model according to which they have to 'sell' the news to the audience. We were all told that a good story sells a product or service the best. That is why newscasts sometimes really look like a book of tales.

²⁵ The total population of Croatia is around 4,437,000.
http://www.croatia.hr/Hrvatski/O_Hrvatskoj/Informacije.aspx, page last seen on June 30, 2008.

Veterans and tycoons in Croatian media texts

As said before, media carry texts and affect the texts they carry. Depending on news selection (editors or 'gatekeepers' are those who select which news will be published or broadcast²⁶), presentation (professional standards of reporting are: truth, fairness, accuracy, balance, impartiality; how the news will be presented mostly depends on which sources are used²⁷) and its framing (the concept of framing dated from 1970s and it refers on an interpretative frame, a cognitive system in the journalist's conscious, that helps in the process of news selection and news coverage²⁸), news shape our identities, our attitudes toward social, national and other minorities, and our general view on the world around us. While telling a story of an event or a person, journalists use narratives, especially metaphors, which characterize the main actors of a story as mythical subjects. Myths or mythical structures in news are, as David McQueen states "chains of concepts"²⁹ which are accepted and recognized in a culture and which help to make sense of the world. Even though myths are universal, their specific forms are cultural constructions.

We shall agree media are especially responsible for how the general public view social groups. In media texts we can recognize certain types of people. We recognize them as we 'read' repeated elements in news, such as appearance and behavior. These elements carry meanings about character, relationships and about how we are meant to view and value the types.

Graeme Burton³⁰ distinguishes three levels at which this process occurs: (1) *Types* found in media are frequently recognizable without necessarily being stereotypes (e.g. businessmen); (2) *Stereotypes* are simplified representations of human appearance, character and beliefs. They become established through years of repetition in the media, as well as through assumptions in everyday conversation. They illustrate crucial power relations and attitudes towards categories of people in a particular society at a given time. These categories include nationality (e.g. the Scots,

²⁶ See more in: Watson, James: *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process*, first published in 1998, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, pp. 123-125.

²⁷ See more in: Malović, Stjepan: *Osnove novinarstva*, Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, Zagreb, 2005, pp. 11-46.

²⁸ Kunzlik, Michael, Zipfel, Astrid: *Uvod u publicističku znanost i komunikologiju*, Zaklada Friedrich Ebert, Zagreb, 1998, pp. 103.

²⁹ McQueen, David: *Television. A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998, pp. 261.

³⁰ Burton, Graeme: *More than meets the eye*, Arnold, London, 1990.

Roma people), ‘race’, gender (male or female), class (e.g. low-class), age (e.g. teenage, old people), sexuality (e.g. homosexual), occupations (e.g. policemen) and deviant groups (e.g. drug users); (3) *Archetypes* are also very deeply embedded in culture. They are the heroes, heroines and villains who epitomize the deepest beliefs, values and perhaps prejudices of a society. Superman is an archetype, just as all the heroes from mythology are archetypes³¹.

In researching how Croatian media have covered stories on Croatian soldiers / veterans and tycoons / businessmen, we can recognize all three of Burton’s levels, but in this paper we are focused especially on archetypes³².

During the Homeland War and short time after, during Franjo Tuđman’s rule, Croatian soldiers were presented as *heroes*. In all media they were treated like self-sacrificing, brave Croats ready to give their lives for the freedom and independence of the country. They have their symbols both animal and religious (brigade names were *Tigers, Pumas, Spiders, Wolves*; these animals were on the brigade’s emblems; most soldiers wore a Catholic rosary or a necklace with a Christian cross). During the war, prime-time newscasts on state television often finished with the sentence: “A salute/greetings to all Croatian soldiers, wherever they may be!” There were almost no exceptions in media treatment³³. Usually, “Croatian soldier and hero”³⁴ was written next to the name of a soldier. Soldiers’ honesty and courage were even blessed by Croatian priests and bishops³⁵.

But, soon after the war ended, problems began. For most veterans it was very hard to return to normal life, not only because many of them have post traumatic stress disorder (PTSP³⁶), but also because they haven’t got jobs, places to live or money for food. The Croatian government tried to help them via numerous employment programs, initiating and financing small business models for veterans, etc. But it wasn’t enough. Many

³¹ See more in: McLuhan, Marshall, Fiore, Quentin: *The medium is the message*, Bantam Books, New York, 1967.

³² Sources were dailies *Jutarnji list*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Večernji list* and *Vjesnik*, and weeklies *Feral Tribune*, *Globus* and *Nacional*.

³³ “Tigrovi sa zadaćom više” (*Tigers with an extra task*), “Večernji list”, April 13th 1996, p.49;

³⁴ “Nikad više pognute glave” (*Never again with the hanging down head*), “Večernji list”, April 10th 1996, p.7;

³⁵ “Hrvatska treba čestite vojnike” (*Croatia needs honest soldiers*), “Večernji list”, April 11th 1996, p.8;

³⁶ PTSP = abbreviation in Croatian stands for posttraumatski stresni poremećaj – posttraumatic stress disorder;

veterans depended on monthly subsidies from social security funds³⁷ and that was not sufficient. Because of many problems in catching up with a 'normal life' from the myth of heroes they turned into *victims* of a society which had no good solution for easing their way. Without exception, media took the veterans' side and treated them as war heroes who lost the battle with the country they had fought for³⁸.

And this is not the end of the mediated story of Croatian veterans, as later we could even read about them as *tricksters*³⁹. The fact is that many men and women who never fought in the war for Croatian independence, thanks to their relatives and friends on high positions in government or city councils, managed to get certificates as proof they were war invalids who had the right to get state subsidies of different kinds. Media labeled them as 'faked invalids'⁴⁰. Another example is when media discovered that some veterans who thanks to state subsidies bought expensive cars, and the suspicion was after they made use of their rights for buying duty-free cars, they sold these rights to other person⁴¹.

Unfortunately, it wasn't an easy task for the government to cope with all veterans' problems, and solving those problems has become one of the largest policy failures in Croatia. This social group has a huge rate of suicides⁴², they refuse to return the weapons they received during the war⁴³, they threaten to throw bombs in public places, etc. From the myth of heroes, after turning into the myth of victims, later to the myth of tricksters, they finally transformed into the myth of *enemies* of the society because they were a threat to their neighbors, children, citizens, etc. as they usually decided to commit suicide in a public space and because of acting very violent. The latest story happened in late March 2008 when Ivan Korade, Croatian retired general and Homeland War hero, killed 5

³⁷ In 1996 20.000 Croatian veterans got subsidies from 500 to 700 Kunas (65 to 95 Euros) what wasn't enough to cover even the minimum of monthly expenses (housing and food); „Krediti za zapošljavanje branitelja“ (*Loans for veterans' employment*) „Večernji list“, April 11th 1996, p.5;

³⁸ „Stalna brigada o stradalnicima“ (*Permanent care for those who suffered*), „Večernji list“, April 6th, 7th and 8th 1996, p.4;

³⁹ „Veterani imovinskog rata – inventura braniteljskih privilegija“ (Veterans of 'the property war' – veteran's privileges stock taking), weekly „Feral Tribune“, May 20th, 2000, p.20-21;

⁴⁰ „Razotkriti lažne invalide“ (*To uncover the fake invalids*), „Večernji list“, April 1st 1996, p.5;

⁴¹ „Domovinske limuzine“ (*Patriotic limousines*), weekly „Feral“, May 13th, 2000;

⁴² From summer 1995 till summer 2000, more than 500 veterans in Croatia committed suicide. In 1999 76.000 veterans asked for psycho-social help; „Vjesnik“, August 8th, 2000;

⁴³ „Branitelj šetao sa zoljom, a od bacanja s krova spasio ga psihijatar“ (*A veteran walked with bazooka, a psychiatrist saved him from jumping from the roof*), „Vjesnik“, October 9th, 2000;

people⁴⁴. It was ‘bloodcurdling massacre in Zagorje’⁴⁵. All the time of reporting on this incident media apostrophized his military rank of general. The connection between his Homeland war credits and his crime was overemphasized in media, again sending the message of a war hero that turned into an enemy⁴⁶.

This case study proves how political, social and economic context influence media presentation. In this example we see how one social group has been treated in media through four different myths.

The second case study is on tycoons. A tycoon is defined as “a wealthy and powerful industrialist, financier”⁴⁷, as a “very wealthy or powerful businessman”⁴⁸, “a person engaged in commercial or industrial business, especially an owner or executive”⁴⁹. Definitions don’t include any explanation or statement on how these people have become wealthy, or if they have got their property in a legal or illegal way. According to these definitions, tycoons in many countries are respected persons who became wealthy thanks to their knowledge, hard work or other capabilities.

But, in countries as Croatia is, because of its particular political history, because of the war and especially because of bad economic transition experiences, wealthy people are labeled as political criminals, thieves and war profiteers. Even in Croatian dictionaries, besides the meaning for a tycoon as “a wealthy businessman with large influence in politics and society”, we can find another meaning of “financial power-wielder who has become wealthy very quickly, without having the venture capital and without any work; newly fledged fat cat (or rich upstart)”⁵⁰. As Ivo Žanić argued, in transitional Croatian society this word has stabilized in its second meaning. The reasons for that are, first of all the speed with which tycoons have become wealthy, then the fact their success was achieved without money (without venture capital, without any kind of investments) and without any knowledge or work⁵¹. Personal and political

⁴⁴<http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/kronologija-osam-dana-potrage-za-generalom-koradom/381175.aspx>; seen on August 08th 2008.

⁴⁵ www.index.hr, April 3rd 2008.

⁴⁶ “Vlado Knok: Rat je Koradea pretvorio u zvijer” (*Vlado Knok: The war has turned Korade into the beast*), “Slobodna Dalmacija”, April 04th 2008.

⁴⁷ Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2001 (fourth edition), p.1548;

⁴⁸ <http://www.hyper-dictionary.com>; seen on July 12th 2008.

⁴⁹ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>; seen on July 12th 2008.

⁵⁰ Anić, Vladimir, (2003). *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog a jezika* (Croatian dictionary), Novi Liber, Zagreb.

⁵¹ Žanić, Ivo: Nove stvarnosti i njihovi nazivi. Kako i zašto nastaju rijeci i tko je za to ‘kriv’, *Politička misao*, 2004; 41(1): 74-91; pp. 76.

relations were doors to the world of business. Such business Josip Županov names “political capitalism”⁵². During the privatization process a large number of Croatian companies were sold to future tycoons for nothing. The new owners soon resold everything that could be transformed into quick money and numerous companies were destroyed and brought to bankruptcy. With such experience it was not surprising that media label all tycoons as *tricksters*. There are plenty of examples. ‘Media number one star’ was probably Miroslav Kutle who was a kind of Croatian media mogul. But soon (in 1996) he ended up in the court because of several economic crimes (he did not obtain his property in a legal way). Croatian newspapers named him the “most eminent new-capitalist from Herzegovina, the one from the new generation of young Croatian businessmen”, “Murdoch from Široki Brijeg” and his business property was named as “Kutle’s express founded business imperia.”⁵³ He was the “most popular Croatian tycoon”⁵⁴, the “most popular tycoon”⁵⁵, the “Al Capone from our street.”⁵⁶ ‘Feral Tribune’s headline was: “Miroslav Kutle, occupation: tycoon”⁵⁷. All these texts were about how much money Kutle has embezzled and all of them were negatively framed. The message was very clear: tycoon = thief.

Reading about such ‘Kutle’s type’ tycoons, it is clear they are all labeled as thieves, tricksters who made their wealth using other people’s money (e.g. money from pension funds), using other people’s employment (e.g. many employees lost their jobs when companies they used to work for went bankrupt). Such examples prove the negative definition of tycoon, as stated before.

However, there are some examples of ‘positive’ tycoons in Croatia. But, myth functions as stereotype: the individual villain presents the whole group. Even when media write positively on successful businessmen, usually there must be some irony, some suspicion on the legality of their management. For example, Ivica Todorčić is Croatia’s most powerful businessman and billionaire. He started his flower business in 1970s during the Yugoslavia time and by the end of the 1980s when the

⁵² Županov, Josip: *Od komunističkog pakla do divljeg kapitalizma*, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, Zagreb, 2002.

⁵³ Weekly “Feral Tribune”, February 12th, 1996;

⁵⁴ Daily „Slobodna Dalmacija“, September 30th 2000;

⁵⁵ Daily „Vecernji list“, May 20th 2001, p.2;

⁵⁶ Daily „Slobodna Dalmacija“, May 20th 2001;

⁵⁷ Weekly “Feral Tribune”, May 11th 1998;

market started to liberalize he founded his company *Agrokor* whose revenue in 2007 was about 2 billion Euros⁵⁸. Even if Todorčić was pretty 'clean' in his business, with few 'smaller misdeeds', Croatian media named him as "most powerful Croatian businessman"⁵⁹, "one of Croatian biggest capitalists, owner of the *Agrokor* concern"⁶⁰, "grand entrepreneur in the jaws of the state"⁶¹, "the king of Croatian food industry"⁶², "Croatian mega-tycoon" and "king of the groceries"⁶³, often with negative tone.

Again, these two case studies prove that media choose the angle from which the story or the person will be presented. Somehow, in transitional countries as Croatia is, the media angling is more often negative than positive.

Conclusion

The media are one of many different institutions that exist within a society. They inform us, educate us, socialize us, most often entertain us and sell things to us. Very often, media also indoctrinate us. Media transmit the reality, but how real this reality is depends on media framing, on the discourse the media use. There are only a few examples where we can say that media objectively transmit the facts on events or people. Mostly, media tell stories on things that have happened or are happening. The angle from which the story is told frames the whole story.

While telling us about things, media use narratives, myths or mythical structures to give value to characters and events. In most media texts all around the world master-myths, like Jack Lule's seven master myths, can be found: the victim, the scapegoat, the hero, the good mother, the trickster, the Other World, the flood.

Hence, the same person with the same values doesn't always have to be hidden under the same myth. For example, the same tycoon can be a hero in one society, but a trickster in another. Further more, a person or a group of people with particular characteristics, within the same society

⁵⁸ <http://www.agrokor.hr/345.aspx>; seen on August 05th 2008.

⁵⁹ Weekly „Nacional“, January 4th 2005, p.36;

⁶⁰ Weekly „Globus“, December 5th 1997, p.26;

⁶¹ Weekly „Nacional“, January 14th 1998, p.19;

⁶² Daily „Jutarnji list“, September 16th 2000;

⁶³ Weekly „Globus“, September 8th 2000, p.35;

sometimes can be heroes, sometimes tricksters, depending on the political, social or economic context at the particular time.

As media largely influences people's life, it is very important how media use narratives in their texts, especially how they use mythical structures. Myth is a cultural construction and labeling some social groups is a very complex process which takes a long time. If media are not consistent in using myths, if they don't explain the context or the background of a story, media contents can be very confusing for the reader or viewer to understand. It happens especially in transitional countries, where some social or economic values are not yet stabilized and where the presence of 'political myth'⁶⁴ is still very strong. That 'political myth' can be recognized in the example of war veterans in Croatia where mostly the state politics challenged the media to use particular mythical structures and narratives for this social group. In transitional countries some occupations or life-styles are new and with no pre-existing social values, so the media influence on creating social attitudes and values is very big, often crucial.

Back to the journalism aspect of this paper, we can assume that journalists often use myths in their texts unconsciously, as myths are deep-rooted in their attitudes and social values. On the other hand, the lack of media culture among the audience is still a large problem which results in superficially reading of media texts, leaving plenty of room for manipulations and indoctrinations. Only educated journalists and editors can help make this transitional process fair. And only educated citizens can become its corrective factor.

⁶⁴ Tismaneanu, Vladimir: *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998.

References

- Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*, Seuil, Paris, 1970.
- Berger, Arthur Asa: *Media & Society: A Critical Perspective*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, 2003.
- Branigan, Edward: *Narrative Comprehension and the Fiction Film*, Routledge, London, 1992.
- Branston, Gill, Stafford, Roy: *The Media Student's Book*, 4th edition, Routledge, London, 2006.
- Burton, Graeme: *More than meets the eye*, Arnold, London, 1990.
- Danesi, Marcel: *Understanding media semiotics*, Arnold, London, 2002.
- Fiske, John: *Television culture*, Routledge, London, 1987.
- Gamson, William A., Modigliani, Andre: The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action, *Research in Political Sociology*, 1987; 3: 137-177.
- Kozloff, Sarah: "Narrative theory and television" in: Allen, Robert C.: *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 67-100.
- Kunczik, Michael, Zipfel, Astrid: *Uvod u publicističku znanost i komunikologiju*, Zaklada Friedrich Ebert, Zagreb, 1998.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Structural Anthropology*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1967.
- Lule, Jack: *Daily News, Eternal Stories. The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford Press, New York, 2001.
- Malović, Stjepan: *Osnove novinarstva*, Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, Zagreb, 2005.
- McLuhan, Marshall, Fiore, Quentin: *The medium is the message*, Bantam Books, New York, 1967.
- McQueen, David: *Television. A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998.
- Propp, Vladimir: *Morphology of the Folktale*, first published in 1928, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1970.
- Ricoeur, Paul: The narrative function, in: Thompson, John B. (ed.): *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981., pp. 274-296.

Silverstone, Roger: *The Message of Television: Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Culture*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1981.

Tismaneanu, Vladimir: *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998.

Watson, James: *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process*, first published in 1998, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.

Žanić, Ivo: Nove stvarnosti i njihovi nazivi. Kako i zašto nastaju rijeci i tko je za to 'kriv', *Politička misao*, 2004; 41(1): 74-91.

Županov, Josip: *Od komunističkog pakla do divljeg kapitalizma*, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, Zagreb, 2002.

