

51. In July 1991, in the wake of the decree ending Kosovo's autonomy and following the dissolution of the government and parliament, it was decided to stop all radio and television programs in Albanian in the province – thus depriving over two million Albanians of news in their mother tongue – and to ban *Rilindja* newspaper there<sup>104</sup>. At the same time, twenty or so Albanian-speaking journalists from Kosovo were arrested and imprisoned by the Belgrade authorities and some five hundred radio and television journalists working in Kosovo were dismissed.

### Television, the system's lynchpin

52. Locking the media down almost completely would allow the Serbian leader and his party, the Serbian Socialist Party, to run away with the first free elections in December 1990<sup>105</sup>. Aside from the *Politika* written press group, television would prove to be the essential instrument for turning the history of Serbia into mystique. The traditional dispenser of official ideology, television remained the most important medium by far

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upheld the following September by Belgrade Supreme Court. Reported by *Reporters sans frontières, La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Rapport 1994*, p. 391.

See also the testimony of Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* pp.48-51.

Vukar Jokanovic, the president of the Administrative Council, justified the sidelining of the journalists who opposed RTS's belligerent editorial line in the following terms: "RTS, the national and State television station, is of special importance. In times such as these when we are being subjected to all kinds of pressure and genocide is being perpetrated against the Serbian people stripped of all its national rights, RTS must take a national position and come to the defence of the interests of the nation, which are vital (...) The people who work for the media institutions arrived at various times. None of them has ever left. As such, Belgrade RadioTelevision is more a Yugoslav institution than it is a Belgrade or a Serbian one. The same goes for certain newspapers and magazines. Within all of these media there are people working against Serbia. They are Ante's Serbs. They are undermining these companies by setting the members of staff at odds with one another. As a result of being weakened in this way, they are no longer able to organise themselves effectively". In *Epoha*, March 1992.

<sup>103</sup> *Nin*, Serbia's best known weekly publication, would have its editorial staff completely reshuffled in June 1988 on the order of Milosevic who would decide to use the newspaper to announce in an interview on 30 June "the awakening of the humiliated Serbian nation", so foregoing any reference to communist ideology in his programme.

<sup>104</sup> *Reporters sans frontières, La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Report 1991*, p. 180.

<sup>105</sup> Despite the fact that multiparty elections were authorised, the official media remained closed off to the growing opposition, to whom they gave no chance and whom they set about discrediting: "On TV, the demonstrations by thousands of people are hardly mentioned and Milosevic's potential rival, Vuk Draskovic, the president of the Serbian Renewal Movement, is caricatured as a dangerous hothead". *Idem*.

since for a long time it would constitute<sup>106</sup> the only source of information for over 90 % of the Serbs<sup>107</sup>. As such, by re-writing history and relying on snippets of truth – through a selective memory which “involves exonerating oneself from (one’s own) crimes while stirring up memories of the crimes committed by the others”<sup>108</sup> – the media would contribute to demonising the other communities, especially the Kosovo Albanians, Croats and Bosnian Muslims.

53. In 1990, to prepare and justify Milosevic’s reassuming control of the province of Kosovo<sup>109</sup>, Serbian television launched a campaign of generalisations against the Kosovo Albanians who were accused of “poisoning wells and slitting the throats of children”, a campaign followed up by *Politika* which published readers’ letters – often fabricated – confirming that the Albanians were raping hundreds of Serbian women there<sup>110</sup>. In the 9 February 1990 issue of *Politika*, Vojislav K. Stojanovic, president of the *Association of University Teachers and Scholars of Serbia*, wrote that “(...) the savage Albanian terrorists are now running amok in Kosovo and Metohija attacking and destroying everything that is Serbian, breaking into the homes of Serbs and terrorising the few people who have stayed behind. Kosovo and Metohija are gripped by the fear of terrorists armed to the teeth (...)”.

Slobodan Milosevic himself was to take part in the stigmatisation of the Kosovo Albanian community, providing an extremely Manichean version of the situation and closing the door to any non-nationalist solution in the autonomous province. Thus he stated in a address retransmitted by *TV Belgrade*: “Even children know the truth about

<sup>106</sup> The restricted number of news organisations existing in Serbia up until 1995 – including the few and far between media organisations which were independent but extremely limited in what they could broadcast and so had small followings – were more than ever under threat. After control was reassumed over *Borba*, the only independent daily newspaper (early 1995), and *Svetlost*, which had the largest regional circulation in Serbia in September, the independent television station *Studio B* (limited to Belgrade) was nationalised in February 1996.

<sup>107</sup> In this regard, the journalist Nicole du Roy notes that “in this country (Serbia) where 46% of people are illiterate (nearly one in two), the only form of media which covers the whole territory and reaches out to the countryside is State television”. In “Serbie: la télé parano”, *Télérama*, no. 2257 of 14 April 1993, p. 12.

<sup>108</sup> Stanko Cerovic, “Is Information Possible in the Face of Propaganda?”, in *Dialogues and Documents for the Advancement of Mankind/Experiences and Reflections on National Reconstruction and Peace*, working documents of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mankind, no. 64, p. 190.

<sup>109</sup> On 28 September 1990, Belgrade promulgated a new constitution revoking the autonomy of its two provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo.

<sup>110</sup> See Catherine Humblot, “La manipulation de la mémoire”, *Le Monde*, 22 July 1993.

*Kosovo and Serbia, so it is quite superfluous to say anything more about it. To those who think otherwise I should say that I refuse to talk about it because we need never try to find excuses for Serbia's determination to put an end to the murders of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo and for our unwillingness to accept any discussion on establishing an Albanian state on Serbian territory. To avoid any confusion, I hasten to add that anyone seeking concessions along these lines would first have to depose the ruling Serbian leadership*"<sup>111</sup>. This door closed to any discussion led in July 1990 to the proclamation of the Independent Republic of Kosovo and immediately after the suspension of the Pristina Assembly by the Serbian government which introduced emergency management in *TV Pristina* and in the Albanian newspapers.

54. Generally, before Serbia triggered the war, Belgrade's audio-visual media broadcast many programs recalling historic events always likened to the persecutions allegedly suffered by the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs.

The taking of power by the HDZ in Zagreb during the April-May elections 1990 was to be a jump forward in this respect. With the pretext that the new constitution voted by the Croatian parliament turned the Serbs into a national minority and supported by the signal given to them by Slobodan Milosevic in an address to the Serbian parliament and broadcast by *TV Belgrade*<sup>112</sup>, organised on-the-ground resistance. Thus a new kind of propaganda "war reporter" came into being at *Serbian Television* and a great many interviews of Croatian Serbs were carried out and broadcast, all tending towards an exacerbation of the on-the-ground situation<sup>113</sup> and only the most extremist positions were

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<sup>111</sup> See *"Images and Words of Hate: Year One"*, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1996.

<sup>112</sup> *"Recent events and, above all, grave conflicts and acts of state-terrorism in Croatia, aggravated the Yugoslav political crisis, which already had a long history of ethnic strife, and assumed proportions of an armed conflict with elements of a civil war, with numerous casualties, columns of refugees, break-downs in traffic and supply... What we have now is a natural and legitimate self-defense immanent in the historical dignity of any nation. All efforts directed at qualifying it as banditism through loud, well-organised propaganda and ballyhoo only reveal a counterproductive and non-effective concept, essentially chauvinistic and pro-fascist, which stifles the national interest and human dignity of a people fighting a just battle for equal national and civil rights"*. *"Images and Words of Hate: Year One"*, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1996.

<sup>113</sup> After interviewing several Croatian Serb citizens, a reporter, facing the camera and in front of an audience of Serbs in favour of autonomy, concluded his report as follows: *"Is this the opinion of all inhabitants of Knin, all Serbs in Kranija and Croatia? It is hard to tell. The people we interviewed don't*

permitted to appear. At the same time as such reports which were the lead story on the televised evening news, there were special programmes, some of up to 90 minutes, whose primary aim it was to pit the Serbian public against its designated enemies and to prepare the way for war<sup>114</sup>.

In another attempt to intimidate public opinion in late January 1991, *Serbian Television* broadcast a document – “*The truth about the arming of the HDZ terrorist groups in Croatia*” – filmed by the the defense ministry counter-espionage service (KOS) in mid October 1990 which had “proved” the direct responsibility of the leaders in power in Zagreb in the illegal arming. In the black and white video, the public can see the Croatian Minister of Defence, Martin Spegelj, filmed by a hidden camera, setting out his plan of action against the Yugoslav barracks and promising liquidations. At least that was what was announced by *Serbian Television* because, on screen, the words spoken by Martin Spegelj are inaudible and it is an off-screen voice which repeats them for the Serbian viewers: “*And if something should happen, just give orders to all your men : kill the extremists. On the spot. On the street, in the barracks, wherever. Just shoot right in the stomach. It is not going to be a war, but a civil war without mercy. Not even for women and children. Just plant bombs in family apartments*”.<sup>115</sup> Whether or not it was true, the video, broadcast twice the same evening, created the desired effect, that is an electric shock in Serbian public opinion which thus saw the confirmation of the intrinsically evil

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*represent all of them, but their feelings are quite indicative and should be counted by those who make decisions in their names*”. *Idem*.

<sup>114</sup> In these programmes we find the themes of Serbian resentment as expressed in the *Mémorandum* of the Academy of Belgrade in 1986. There again the interviews with the Croatian Serbs appeared over and over again. One woman stated for example:

- - « *Serbs were ready to forget their names and heritage, their ancestors, all for brotherhood and unity, mass graves and concentration camps... I have a lot of ancestors in those graves. However, if the policy towards Serbs in Croatia continued... »*
- - « *You mean communist policy ? »*
- - « *Yes. The majority of Serbs would be assimilated in 10 years ».*

One man being interviewed said: “*Baranja and West Srem ethnologically and historically absolutely belong to the Serbian people. So do all other territories inhabited by Serbs. It would be absurd to turn Croatia, or any other territory into a Serbian one*”... To the question of what, in his opinion, should be the boundaries of the new Serbian State, another man answered: “*The boundaries of the Serbian autonomous Region will be... There is a historical link. Where Serbian blood was shed by the Ustasha knives, there will be our boundaries*”. In another interview, a third man said that: “*If the Croats really want to create an independent state they can do so on their ethnic territory. Could you imagine that these people would disappear, that these mountains would fall, or a Croatian flag would be hoisted instead of the Serbian one?*”. See “*Images and Words of Hate: Year One*”, *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1996.

<sup>115</sup> *Idem*. See also F. Hartmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-109.

nature of the authorities in Zagreb... The highest Serbian moral and intellectual authorities were involved in conditioning public opinion to justify the upcoming war with Croatia. On national television, from the heights of their unchallenged authority, they participated in interpreting what the vital interests of Serbia were. The incessant reminders of the Independent Croatian State and atrocities committed by the Ustachas were an alibi for the political objectives of the regime and were at the root of the development and strengthening of inter-ethnic hatred. A televised report on 4 August 1991 was thus devoted to a ceremony held during the excavation of the remains of martyrs of Ustasha crimes, presented to the public in dozens of small coffins, presided over by the academic Dobrica Cosic: *"One of the greatest sins of my generation, is this funeral which we perform fifty years too late, the funeral of Prebilovac martyrs. We committed this sin because we foolishly believed that by forgetting the Ustasha crime we contributed to the brotherhood of the Serbian and Croatian peoples"*<sup>116</sup>. The parallel between the past and the present comparing Frandjo Tudjman's regime to that of Ante Pavelic, was made to raise anti-Croatian hatred to fever pitch. Thus we see Jovan Raskovic, psychiatrist, academic and leader of the Croatian Serbs on *Serbian Television* at the time state at a rally at the time: *"The genocide has begun, and it depends on the Serbs in Croatia and in Serbia and the international factor, Europe and the world whether their movement will reopen its concentration camps and the pits used as collective tombs. But one thing is for sure : Serbs will never again be led to the pits by just a couple of Ustashas. Serbs have to put up a great resistance and the genocidal idea will collapse along with the genocidal Croatian state"*<sup>117</sup>.

This tendency would continue to grow when the war with Croatia began, especially with the showing of a documentary called *"Umetnici o genocidu"* ("The Genocide Professionals")<sup>118</sup> which, drawing on the testimony of many people, recounted the crimes

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<sup>116</sup> *"Images and Words of Hate; Year Two"*, *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92 – ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>117</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>118</sup> The supposed "genocidal nature" of the Croatian people was originally discussed in the work of a Croatian Serb psychiatrist, Jovan Raskovic, who, in a book entitled *The Mad Country (Luda Zemlja)*, would contribute to awakening the Serbian people and justifying the creation of a Greater Serbia. There was not a single debate or Serbian TV programme on the issue of the Serbian minorities in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo to which this special guest and specialist in such matters was not invited. Meanwhile, his book was the subject of a media campaign throughout the Federation in 1990 (newspapers and television) during which he was described as the greatest scientist and psychiatrist of his age. Radovan Karadzic, his

of Ante Pavelic's Croatian government in 1941. The intention of the program was to awaken in the collective memory a feeling of persecution identical to that felt by the Serbs during the Second World War and ended with the entire Croatian people being cast as criminals<sup>119</sup>.

55. The images of the Turks and the lengthy Ottoman domination in Serbia would also be widely used to blacken the Bosnian Muslim community which was presented as the bridgehead of the Turk's natural expansionism and, therefore, implicitly as a threat that the Ottoman Empire of yesteryear might be re-established.

56. The media propaganda was especially successful because it exploited deep-rooted reflexes relying on feelings enduringly entrenched in the Serbian collective consciousness. A systematic contrast was made between the Serbian people characterised as innocent and just and those who had made martyrs of them down the centuries and who now had to be stopped to prevent new misfortunes from befalling the Serbs<sup>120</sup>. In this regard, the countless and suspect "historical parallels" truly prepared public opinion day in day out for the outbreak of the conflict.

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psychology student from the groups in Zagreb in 1988-1989, would draw greatly on Raskovic's ideology to alert the Bosnian Serb population to the threat of genocide fomented by the Bosnian Muslims which allegedly hung over them. The action of Karadzic, who rose to head of the SDS thanks to Raskovic's protection and that of his party, followed in the steps of Raskovic. See for example the declaration "Nation and State Above All" which he delivered to the Pale Assembly in June 1996; *SRNA News*, June 28, 1996 ([http://www.4cbiz.net/kosta/tar/RS/dean/rs\\_news/rs\\_news\\_info.html](http://www.4cbiz.net/kosta/tar/RS/dean/rs_news/rs_news_info.html)).

The "genocidal nature" of the Croatian people would especially be exploited by *Duga* magazine in the column by the journalist and intellectual, Brana Crnevic. The radical, Vojislav Seselj, would himself state on several occasions that, as a genetically cowardly people, the Croats were disposed to perpetrating genocide. During a meeting with the Orthodox bishop, Lukijan, in Borovo Selo, near Vukovar in Croatia, in September 1991, he openly described the Croats as a "genocidal" and "perverted" people. See *Stav*, no. 82, 9 September 1991, p. 29.

<sup>119</sup> On this subject, Florence Hartmann writes: "During prime time on 27 July 1991, Belgrade television broadcast a programme juxtaposing edited footage of speeches by Franjo Tudjman and Ante Pavelic, the ally of Hitler and Mussolini. The columns published by the press stirring up memories of the massacres perpetrated by Pavelic's Croatian State, the Serbian martyr appearing endlessly on Belgrade television, the reminder of the past which ended up devouring the present in people's minds and the fusion of past persecution with the one then being suffered by the Croatian Serbs all contributed to inciting and justifying the violence which would follow. Under the sway of propaganda, the Serbs would no longer call the Croats by any other name than Ustasha or fascists and they looked upon them as instruments of the hegemony of a Germany creating the Fourth Reich". Milosevic, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>120</sup> What a coincidence then that, as Stanko Cerovic wrote, "before the Serbs set the war in motion, Serbian television showed only dreadful accounts, all of which were invented and backed up by "false" witnesses,

57. By exaggerating some of the facts and simplifying others, the entire media would become stays for the Serbian nationalist ideology. By creating “*simple oppositions, clearly defining enemies and using shock phrases and carefully chosen words*” they would offer to millions of people a simplistic and narrow reading of a reality that was otherwise complex and ambiguous<sup>121</sup>.

58. The anti-Albanian propaganda of the early days would be followed by anti-Slovenian, anti-Croatian and then anti-Bosnian propaganda – multifaceted propaganda used for one and the same political goal: the creation of a State for all the Serbs.

At the same time as the propaganda was directed against the external enemies, the total control exercised by Milosevic’s socialist party on *Serbian Television* allowed it to silence the dissenting voices internally. When not simply ignored, the action of the opposition was systematically distorted and compared to acts of treason against Serbia. The typical disinformation procedure at work, whenever media coverage was involved, is perfectly illustrated by the way in which *TV Belgrade* presented the great opposition demonstration of 9 March 1991 to the viewers. When 200,000 people gathered in Belgrade in front of the seat of the *RTS* to demand the departure of its management, the gathering turned to a confrontation during which a policeman and a demonstrator lost their lives. The same evening the television news reader presented an incomplete version of the events<sup>122</sup>. The news, which focused on the death of the policeman with pictures of the widow in tears being carried, was widely broadcast. Nothing was said however of the second person killed, a 17-year old demonstrator, whose death the communiqué of the Minister of the Interior, read out on television, did not acknowledge<sup>123</sup>. Images, filmed

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*of the crimes and rapes committed by the Muslims and Croats (...)*. In “*Is Information Possible in the Face of Propaganda?*”, p. 190.

<sup>121</sup> On these processes in action, see Henri Madelin, “*Information et idéologie, Télévisions en guerre*”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1990.

<sup>122</sup> “*Thanks to the rampage of vandals, so far 76 people have asked for medical help in Belgrade. The majority of them are policemen. One of them, guarding law and order, lost his life on the sidewalks of Belgrade. Nedeljko Kosovic, father of two, was killed by the demonstrating mob. Our crew visited the Nedljko Kosovic family...*”.

<sup>123</sup> “*While trying to prevent the violent attacks by the Serbian Renewal Movement supporters against the TV building, the National Assembly and the Republic Presidency during the SRM demonstrations in Belgrade, so far, a few dozen policemen have been wounded. One of them succumbed to his wounds. The Serbian Home Ministry also warns in its statement that if these destructive and terrorist acts by the SRM*

and broadcast by the independent television channel *NTV Studio B*, whose broadcasting area was limited to the capital, presented a very different version of the official truth. These pictures showed a crowd listening calmly to the speeches of the opposition leaders and that it was the use of gas by the police forces to break up the demonstrators which started the bloodshed. Such pictures, contradicting the official truth, were not shown on national television where the scenes of police brutality were censored and where only those "proving" the violence of the opposition were seen by the viewers. When the student demonstrations took place the next day, the events of the day before dominated the television news. Pictures of President Milosevic making a speech to Parliament in which he pointed to foreign involvement in the acts of the opposition<sup>124</sup> were widely broadcast. At the same time, the régime encouraged all the social classes to support him and condemn the student and opposition demonstrations. National television threw open its doors to them, in particular on the television news where appeals were read out to participate in a large support demonstration which was to take place that same day<sup>125</sup>. This support demonstration received wide coverage from *TV Belgrade* which assigned a central position to the speech of the academic and Vice-President of the party in power, Mihajlo Markovic, condemning the traitors of Serbia and praising Slobodan Milosevic: "*Just when the neo-ustashas are getting ready for the decisive attack on Knin, an invisible hand has started the mechanism for the destruction of Serbia. Since the time of Peter I, we haven't been blessed with such an extremely capable, honest and courageous leader, Slobodan Milosevic*"<sup>126</sup>.

### **Media at the heart of the Yugoslav war**

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*supporters do not cease right away, in order to protect the constitution and people's lives, all means will have to be used, including firearms".*

<sup>124</sup> "*There is not a single citizen of Serbia or not a single Serb outside Serbia who can gain from destroying peace and democratic institutions in Serbia. Only an enemy of Serbia could have such an aim: to divide the citizens of Serbia from within so that Serbian people will quarrel among themselves instead of striving for prosperity and welfare, to destroy a united Serbia, or to install a puppet regime to rule it, executing, without question, orders from abroad*".

<sup>125</sup> "*Our Women's Movement calls upon all women and all citizens who have a free and proud Serbia at heart to come to the rally at Usce today at 1 P.M. There we shall defend Serbia and its president, who are endangered by their enemies' plots*".

<sup>126</sup> For this quotation and the previous ones, see "*Images and Words of Hate: Year One*", *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1996.



59. The propaganda action to make the population support the nationalist war policies took the form of genuine opinion-forming campaigns. Sometimes, it was a matter of justifying the capture of territories termed ancestral but occupied by the enemy – an enemy that had to be “driven out” – and sometimes it was a matter of blackening an ethnic group or nation to better legitimise the violence used against it (that is, in fact, to cast yourself as the victim of the others’ nationalism to better feed your own) or even reducing to nothing or almost nothing any form of opposition<sup>127</sup> to the nationalist powers within each of the republics.

Milica Lucic Cavic, a journalist in the Serbian public audio-visual sector during the war, summarises the cant of the State television and certain professionals in their action during the conflict: *“In these wartime years television has completely pushed aside its initial function – to provide information – and has become a propaganda tool, a propaganda vehicle that serves the state. Many reporters working on television forget that there is a codex, that a journalist’s duty is to provide timely and accurate reporting and they served some other aims. These other aims were to kindle disposition for war, to ignite ethnic hatred, which naturally made it easier for the war to flare up. In those news reports, in those news stories, there were always the good guys and the bad guys. Ours are the good guys, they are not murderers, they are members of a celestial people, a heroic nation; the others are the killers, the others have perpetrated crimes against us, the others are supported by a world-wide conspiracy, the Vatican, America, the CIA, the KGB, the masons, and who knows what not”*<sup>128</sup>.

The war was to accelerate the cant of professionals who were becoming actors, if not soldiers, in the conflict. In contradiction with the ethics of the profession, we see for example, reports participating in interrogating Croatian and/or Bosnian Muslim prisoners<sup>129</sup>, taking sides with one of the protagonists in the conflict<sup>130</sup>, presenting people

<sup>127</sup> In the media industry for example, Belgrade tightened its control over information by creating in 1993 a government *Media Council* mostly made up of “patriotic” journalists. The Council was set up on the initiative of Brana Crnevic, a nationalist intellectual close to the authorities who worked for *Duga* magazine. In parallel, a battle against foreign journalists began in April with the introduction of a compulsory visa for entering Yugoslavia.

<sup>128</sup> In *“Images and Words of Hate: Vukovar 1991”*, produced by Lazar Lalic, ARHITEL, *The Right to Pictures and Words against Censorship and Abuse of Media*, 1995.

<sup>129</sup> See *“Images and Words of Hate” “Year Two” and “Year Three”*. *Op.cit.*

<sup>130</sup> This example is quoted from a report by a journalist from *TV Novi Sad*, interviewing a Serbian or Montenegrin pyrotechnist shelling the enemy lines on the front around Dubrovnik:

who were too close or too far away from the events being reported as witnesses to the crime, etc.

The feeling aroused in the Serbian public by the broadcasting of images of bodies of innocent Serbian civilian victims or the relating of such facts, was a technique that was to be widely used by *Serbian Television* to provoke a reaction of horror towards the enemy and so support for the regime – which we think of as the war in Croatia and Bosnia. Television played on the emotions of the public by presenting individual tragedies without given prior warning as to the programme content with whom the viewer would always sympathise, particularly when it concerned children, the most fragile group. This is illustrated by the following three examples.

When the fighting was raging in Croatia, *TV Belgrade* broadcast the “testimony” of an Orthodox religious dignitary from a monastery in Zenum – Friar Filaret – who, sitting in front of a table, on which was lying a blackened human skull which the camera zoomed in on, told the following story:

- *« Ustashas raided a Serbian village near Kukuruzari. They captured little Llija and made his mother watch them cut the boy's throat. Then they took his body away”*
- Reporter : *“If happened on his birthday ?”*
- *“Yes, on August 2, this year. The boy's mother ran after them begging them to give her son's body, but they carried him away and later burned his corpse. The skull is the only thing left. But she wouldn't have got even his skull if it hadn't been for one woman who, although a Catholic, was humane and compassionate enough to show her the place where her son was buried. So she went there and found only this charred skull”<sup>131</sup>.*

Another example is this “portrait-report” of a young Bosnian Serbian boy told by a war reporter from *TV Belgrade*: *“This is my new friend, Cvetko. It was the war that made our paths cross. I wish it hadn't, not in this way. Until the war, he used to live here*

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- Reporter : *« How long have you been here ? Do you have visitors ?”*
  - Pyrotechnist: *“It has been... two months. A month and a half”*
  - Reporter: *“Have you had any reporters or TV crews ?”*
  - Pyrotechnist: *“Apart from this crew from TV Novi Sad, no one else came”*
  - Reporter: *“TV Novi Sad wishes you luck”.*

And the pyrotechnist resumes his shelling again in front of the camera. *“Images and Words of Hate: Year Two”, op.cit.*

and he had everything (pictures of a looted house are shown). Now, at 14, he has his youth and nothing else and no one else (the young boy is filmed praying at three graves with appropriate music). It was 7 in the morning that Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1993. When Muslim troops raided his village, they killed his mother Ivanka, father Novak and sister Mitra, while his elder brother vanished without a trace. Just for the record, this is the fate of little Cvetko Ristic, the fate of a small nation"<sup>132</sup>.

A third example is the war report on the death of two Serbian boys during fighting at Testic, Bosnia, broadcast on RTS: *"Instead of a truce, there were new victims in Testic (...). Alija's missiles have killed two boys in the streets of Testic, a 9-year old Marko Parovic and 12-year old Igor Jotanovic"* (broadcast of pictures taken at graves with flowers and photos of children). Pictures follow of the father and one of the two children collapsed in front of his house and saying to the report: *"Let's go home, please... I can't stand it... He was playing right there... Ustashas shot him... The motherfuckers!"*. The father then grabs the microphone and shouts: *"I swore at my son's grave that I will get my revenge!"*. The viewers are then taken into the house; with the photo of the boy behind her the mother crying: *"They took away your joyful youth, my son! How am I going to live without you? Oh, God, where are you now? Help us if you are out there"*. Then again, pictures of the father, injured: *"The world doesn't see this curse on it! Cursed be America! Milosevic, my precious! Help us, please!"<sup>133</sup>*

#### Justify the use of force against the enemy

60. The political and military goal of a State for all the Serbs, which presupposed annexing Bosnian and Croatian territory in which Serbs lived, was supported by the Serbian media that served as tools to legitimise the use of force and violence. In July 1991, Slobodan Milosevic would again choose *Serbian Television* to deliver a speech in

<sup>131</sup> *"Images and Words of Hate: Year Two"*, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>132</sup> *"Images and Words of Hate: Year Three"*, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.

<sup>133</sup> *Idem.*

which he announced that war had become inevitable<sup>134</sup>. Similarly, the most senior military authorities took over the television resulting in an increase in the number of reports on Milosevic's visits to the Armed Forces and the Army's high level of readiness in case it was required to act. Furthermore, the Defence Minister, Veljko Kadijevic, announced the decision to intervene in Croatia in a speech retransmitted on national television. From that point on, everything possible was done to swing public opinion firmly behind the regime. Messages of support flooded in to RTS, such as those for the Army convoys leaving Belgrade for the front "cheered on by the students": *"We filmed the long convoy around 2 a.m. on the Belgrade-Zagreb highway. Several hundred students came down onto the highway cheering the Yugoslav Army convoy"*. The following day, messages from hand-picked Serbian citizens filmed in front of the endless procession of military convoys were shown one after another on television to galvanise public opinion and promote a united front: *"This should have happened long ago. Tonight we will all go and defend our country"; "You are ready to defend it?";*<sup>135</sup> *"Any time."*

Above the ensuing noise of weapons and fighting, only those opinions most strongly behind the objectives of territorial conquest would be heard. Systematic media coverage was given to Vojislav Seselj's positions, such as the declaration he made in September 1991 before the Serbian parliament which was broadcast by *Belgrade Television*: *"Karlobag-Ogulin-Karlovac-Virovitaca must be our option and the army must withdraw its troops to this line. If they cannot be withdrawn from Zagreb without a fight, they should pull out under fire, and constantly shell Zagreb. The army still has unused resources. If its troops are in danger it has the right to use napalm bombs and everything else it has in its arsenals. It is more important to save an army unit than to fear there might be casualties. It's their own fault. They wanted war, now they have it"*.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> "Serbia cannot protect itself from the war to which it may be exposed if it is not ready for it and if it becomes lulled into a belief that it cannot happen. Its readiness should, for now, be expressed, firstly, within the Yugoslav National Army and, secondly, within its own armed forces, comprised of the Serbian Territorial Army units which are trained to defend the Republic of Serbia. The Serbian Territorial Army forces have modern equipment and, when it comes to their number and quality of training, they are superior to similar forces outside Serbia, including their so-called 'para-military units'. This is what the citizens of Serbia should know and take into account". *"Images and Words of Hate: Year Two"*, Foundation for Rights to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>135</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem.*

61. Belgrade television systematically strove to justify the use of force and therefore violence by the Serbs by bombarding the public with simplistic statements which contained only very rarely any exact information or indications, even as concerned dates or places. *Serbian Television's* coverage of the fighting in Vukovar was especially illuminating: in the way in which the events were portrayed, and in particular the losses inflicted upon the enemy, all possible means were used to make the public think that it was the Serbs that were defending the town.

Through reports and commentaries interwoven with images, television sought to foster inter-ethnic and religious hatred towards the Catholic Croatian community: general opinion portrayed them as inhuman - thereby making their humiliation, destruction and elimination easier and indeed more legitimate. To achieve this end, special correspondents carried out more and more interviews of forces, personnel and civilians. The interview of Ljilja Kojic, commander of the Slavonia and Baranja Region Territorial Defence Headquarters, which was filmed with the front-line in the background, demonstrates that the Yugoslav Federal Army participated in the demonisation process. Questioned by the *Serbian Television* journalist about the Ustashes' use of Serbian women and children as human shields (it should be noted that the question was not framed as an allegation), the officer confirmed that it was true without providing any evidence in support: *"Well, that is unfortunately correct, it proves they are weak, it proves they are inhuman, it shows how far they are prepared to go, they are not only sacrificing Serbs, whom they have imprisoned and arrested and kept as hostages, but also their own Croats who did not go along with them."*<sup>137</sup> The accounts of supposed Ustasha atrocities obtained from civilians by the reporters on location in Vukovar did not provide a shred of evidence supporting the allegations and the witnesses were never eye-witnesses. In a report which examined the issue, a journalist showed to the camera some gold teeth in the palm of his hand and asserted: *"I am holding in my hand some gold teeth, they told me these teeth were extracted with a knife, from practically living people, whom they killed."* Later on during an interview of an elderly man in green uniform, the journalist asked:

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<sup>137</sup> See *Images and Words of Hate: Vukovar 1991*, produced by Lazar Lalic, ARHITEL, *The Right to Pictures and Words against Censorship and Abuse of Media*, 1995.

- "Do you have any examples of anyone being killed, slaughtered or having suffered similar atrocities?"
- "I left earlier but as far as I know there were other kinds of torture."
- "What happened?"
- "Well, they slaughtered, gouged out eyes, cut off children's fingers. In baking pans on liberated territories we found children they wanted to roast. Soldiers with heads cut off, the injured were disembowelled."
- "They have no mercy even on those wounded?"
- "They have no mercy on anyone, I don't know how that is, what are they, animals or what, they are not human."<sup>138</sup>

Everything possible was done to stigmatise the enemy. From this angle, the Serbian media constantly emphasised the crimes committed by the Croatian regime during the Second World War. As such, television viewers were led to believe that the Croatian people were all genocidal and the Serbian public was conditioned to lapse into inter-ethnic hatred. Again during the Vukovar siege, *Serbian Television* announced, very appropriately, that a newly-published, historical account referring to Italian sources confirmed that the Croatian Ustashas had indeed intended to annihilate the Serbian people during the Second World War - allegedly an intention also implicitly shared by Franjo Tudjman's Croatia: "A very special historical testimonial has just recently been published on Croatian Ustasha crimes against the Serbs during the so-called Independent State of Croatia. Previously undiscovered secret documents of the Italian Army say, among other things, that Zagreb had a Church-State project of total Serb annihilation (...) In those several months in 1941, practically from the birth of the Independent State of Croatia on April 10, all through April-May 1942, inasmuch as the Italians were there to record the events, the number of casualties reached a number probably greater than 80,000. Every serious researcher could easily confirm this, but regardless of this figure, here it says 46,286 people - Serbs, and it gives the dates, places, names of perpetrators and indicates where those documents can be found."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Idem.

<sup>139</sup> *Images and Words of Hate: Vukovar 1991*, op. cit.

Another example, though this time concerning Bosnia, featured on the televised news on 2 August 1992, when the presenter stated: "the Croatian and Muslim forces want to eliminate everything that is Serbian in these places. Terror, fanatical hatred, the physical and mental genocide of the Bosnian Serbs, aggressive actions on Serbian territory all fall within their military and political vision".

62. To lend more weight to these assertions, the edited version of the pictures shown played fully on the suffering of men and women to incite hatred. During its 7:30 p.m. televised news, that is when 2.5 million Serbs were glued to the screen, *RTB* would show disturbing images (the dead bodies of men, women and children - said to be Serbs although it was impossible to identify them as such - in close ups: splattered brains, decomposed bodies etc.; houses and churches destroyed, graves desecrated...) which were presented as proof of the aggression against the Serbs. As if that were not enough, the pictures were backed up with simplistic but effective war rhetoric whose aim was to single out the enemies of the Serbian people. The Muslims were called "Mujahedin", warriors of the "Jihad" or Muslim fundamentalists. All of these terms were of course closely associated with the reminder of the Ottoman occupation and the forced conversions to Islam.

#### Stigmatise the opponent

63. The comments of Serbian journalists, including in the newspapers, banished the words "Bosnian" or "Bosnian forces" and instead used derogatory expressions with the most negative connotations, for example, the "warriors of Ali<sup>140</sup> armed by Saddam Hussein" conducting "a holy war in the name of Islam". On 17 August 1992, the journalist from *Television Belgrade*, Ranko Elez, indiscriminately called the Muslim Bosnian forces "*Islamic fundamentalists*", "*Islamic chauvinists*" and branded them as the "*the cruel hoards of Alija [Itzebegovic]*"<sup>141</sup>. In addition, Serbia was historically described as the bulwark against the Islamic invasion of Europe.

<sup>140</sup> That is, Alija Izetbegovic, leader of the Bosnian State.

<sup>141</sup> Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* p.36.

64. Meanwhile, the Croats and their soldiers were bluntly singled out as “Ustasha”<sup>142</sup> or fascists fighting on behalf of Germany. Serbian television and press tried to show the public that the Croatian government led by President Tudjman was nothing other than an echo of the Second World War Ustasha power. *Politika Ekspres* drew this parallel in its 27 July 1991 edition when it reported on the fear of the Croatian Serbs faced with the “Croatian militia” and its checkerboard emblem (the “Sahovnica”) inspired by the flag of the Croatian fascist regime allied to the SS and Hitler.

More generally, the war reports prepared by *Serbian Television* correspondents at the sites of the fighting were entirely shot around this objective of branding the enemy. In one of the first war reports devoted to the fighting in Croatia and broadcast on the news at 19:30 hours, the description given to the viewers of the opponent’s camp was symptomatic of the media coverage in the months to come: *“The panic-stricken Tudjman mercenaries and villains, calling themselves the guards, have barricaded themselves in the centre of Kostajnica, shooting at everything. We also found out that a horde of butchers from Tudjman’s Black Legion is headed towards Banija. The horde of mercenaries and murderers thirsty for Serbian blood barricaded in Kostajnica seem to realise that they have been written off”*<sup>143</sup>.

65. The Serbs’ enemies were compared to demonic forces using carefully chosen vocabulary designed to stir up fear and hatred<sup>144</sup>. On 21 January 1993, a report from

<sup>142</sup> Croatian fascists allied to Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy during the Second World War.

<sup>143</sup> See *“Images and Words of Hate: Year Two”*, *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>144</sup> The terminology used by the Serbian media to stigmatise the enemy was imposed on them by the policies set out in unwritten directives. They were requested not to say things such as “the Croatian forces attacked the village” any more but instead to speak about the “Ustasha hordes” or “Vatican, fascist, barbarian hordes” who “attacked the village”. See, for instance, the testimony of Backo Diklic, a *Tanjug* journalist, reported by Catherine Humblot in *“Ex-Yougoslavie: médias fauteurs de guerre - II. L’Hystérie ‘patriotique’”*, *Le Monde*, 23 July 1993, p. 5.

We note that this terminology had an effect on the way of thinking and speaking of the public in general. The vocabulary created by the Serbian media under control, principally of the *RTS*, became the way people spoke. In a great many accounts of and interviews with civilians, the same expressions and turns of phrase figure endlessly. As on television, the word “genocide” was used indiscriminately. We hear this in the report on the blockade at Ljubovija of the UN humanitarian aid meant for Srebrenica and Bratunac, in which the reporter interviews several Serbian women on their motivations. Their answers follow more or less the language of the journalistic propaganda: *“My son was killed in this war. I don’t want this aid to feed his enemies! They committed genocide against the Serbs, they slaughtered, castrated, gouged eyes and*