

Belgrade Television carried out on the Croatian front line warns the Serbian viewers to: "*Be careful with Ustashas. Even when they are dead they can kill you*"<sup>145</sup>... The good and evil Manichaeistic approach was also valid for describing the fighting. Reports showing the Serbian forces manoeuvring presented no images of destruction or civilian victims. When the Serbian forces attacked a town, the action was presented as a means of defence. According to official terminology, the Serbs never attacked first<sup>146</sup>. The contrast

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*now we should feed them so that they could kill us all!"; "My only son and a 22-year-old grandson got killed ! I don't want anyone to help the Ustashas ! They burned down my home ! What more do they want!"; "I lost a 17-year-old daughter and my husband ! I won't let them kill again !", etc. "Images and Words of Hate: Year Three", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.*

The words and expressions used by the people interviewed are those learned from the television and mentally structure their way of talking and serve as ready-made terms.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted by Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* p.36.

<sup>146</sup> Thus, when Vukovar in Slavonia was captured, Belgrade TV's evening news on channel 1 described the battle triumphantly: "*Our army has the situation under control, the Ustasha fascists had to withdraw*". Reported by Jean Ariel, "*L'écran non aligné*", *Télérama*. No. 2180 of 23 October 1991, p. 68.

It is true that on *Serbian Television* the fighting at Vukovar was always presented as another "liberating" act of the town – this extract from a report by one of the special on-site envoys when control was taken of one of the districts of the town by the Serbian troops is evidence of this: "Another in a series of victories in the battle for Vukovar – the fall of the infamous Milovo brdo, the last oasis of Ustasha fighters in the upper part of the town, proving that army assessments were absolutely realistic. As of today, the Yugoslav flag is flying on the town's highest point. The citizens from this part of town have come out of their shelters to embrace the freedom they had waited for so long. In this military operation, Yugoslav People's Army units were accompanied by brave local territorial defense units. This successfully completed operation has become one of the most significant victories in the campaigning to liberate Vukovar. Fighting side by side, the Army and territorial defense units made a significant drive into Pionirska Street, finally taking and connecting with the liberators of Milovo brdo. It needs to be said that enemy resistance was crushed without losses. Presently the Army is pulling out the exhausted civilians in the occupied areas and moving them to safety. The suffering and pain in their eyes have given way to tears of joy, kissing and embracing the liberators, and a thousand and one "thank you, thank yous"". 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.

The journalistic commentary provided to the Serbian public on the television news on *TV Belgrade*, as the key to understanding the conflict, does show any distance either and becomes a caricature. The siege of Vukovar is thus justified by Ratko Dmitrovic, the presenter of the news at 19:30 hours: "*In Vukovar more than a thousand Serbs are feared to have been butchered by the Croatian neo-fascists, including several dozen Serbian children who have fallen victim to the Ustasha knives. Bodies of entire families are still being found slaughtered on the very doorsteps of their homes. This town is a great Serbian martyrdom. For the past months, Vukovar's outskirts have just been the outer limits of a huge concentration camp*". "*Images and Words of Hate: Year Two*", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

Another example is this extract from the programme "*No-one is like me*" broadcast on *Radio Belgrade's* second station on 12 December 1991 during which Milos Bojovic, a Socialist Party deputy in the Serbian parliament, declared: "*Why are you asking me about war? You must also know that Serbia is not at war! Serbia is not at war! Nor is Krajina. At war are Ustasha authorities in Croatia, and you have witnessed how they do it - in a wily, perfidious way. They have prepared a genocide against Serbs. They simply want to eradicate us. But it is not only war. At stake are the interests of Germany, Italy and Austria. Small people get a handful of dollars and you can do anything with them. But Serbs are different, they cannot be bribed, or bought. They are always ready to defend their homeland, their state, their freedom. That is*

with the reports on the offensives conducted by the Croatian troops who spared nothing, destroyed everything and systematically slit the throats of Serbian civilians is startling! Croatian and Muslim soldiers said to be "dirty, cowardly and drugged up" were compared with Serbian fighters who were praised as brave and rash, always ready to come to the aid of the victims and the innocent<sup>147</sup>. When the idealised image was shown to be seriously flawed, like for example on 2 August 1992 when the *New York Newsday* revealed the existence of Serbian camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, through the UN, the international community appointed a special reporter for the Human Rights Commission on 14 August, the *RTS* came to the rescue of Radovan Karadzic. During a live interview on the evening television news, he quietly denied the accusations without being in any way embarrassed by the questions of the presenter or by the reports contradicting what he was saying.<sup>148</sup>

66. For Catherine Humblot, a journalist for *Le Monde*, an entire "war mythology arose, glorified by Belgrade television through heroes worthy of featuring in strip cartoons, such as Captain Dragan who suddenly materialised from the depths of the age-old

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history. That is a genetic legacy in Serb genes. But all the cards are now on the table. Now everything is clear. There are the three largest denomination: the Catholics, the Muslims and the Orthodox - the best and brightest among them. All possible efforts are now being made to enslave all of the Orthodox peoples living in these territories, to turn us into galley-rowers. But that shall not happen!"

<sup>147</sup> Two war reports of *TV Belgrade*, Mostar, illustrate this manner of speech. The first reports on the destruction of an army barracks: "Current events in Bosnia were recently anticipated in Mostar. Right after the peace talks and on the very eve of Bairam, the army barracks "Severni logor" were blown up. It was planned by Ustasha and carried out by jihad warriors with a cruelty typical of both. It marked the first time jihad set foot on European soil". In another report, the current enemy is more explicitly compared with yesterday's enemy: "The day on the Mostar frontline has been relatively peaceful without significant military provocation. In places, however, the Ustashes launch occasional attacks, but they are obviously too weak to mount an all-out offensive. Their commando unit now choose to raid the liberated territory. Especially worrisome are reports of what's happening to the Serbs of Roska Gora and Bogodol where two to three hundred Serbs were savagely massacred and all their property destroyed. The crime resembles those committed by the Ustashes in 1944". "Images and Words of Hate: Year Three", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.

<sup>148</sup> Presenter: « Mr. Karadzic, good evening. May we please have your comment on the allegations that there are camps in which Serbs torture Croats and Muslims? »

Radovan Karadzic : "Good evening. During my stay in London, we invited British reporters to come and visit all locations with such alleged camps. They visited four locations in Serbia, including Loznica. They visited Pale and saw there was no camp there. They saw a penitentiary in Kula, where criminals and POW's are kept in decent conditions. Today they have visited Omarska and Prijedor. We offer every corner of our territory for international inspection".

"Images and Words of Hate: Year Three", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.

*shadows with his militiamen*"<sup>149</sup>. From this angle, RTS and the press bore particular responsibility for misrepresenting war crimes as heroic actions conducted by "warlords" (such as Arkan, Dragan and Seselj<sup>150</sup>) who were held up as examples or models for television viewers and readers<sup>151</sup>.

67. Admittedly, the Croatian and Bosnian media can also be criticised for making so much use of terms discrediting the Serbs, including "Chetnik terrorists"<sup>152</sup>. If a comparison is made between Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian nationalist propaganda, it is noticeable that Serbian propaganda surpassed the other two both in the scale and content of the media messages put out<sup>153</sup>.

### Conspiracy paranoia

68. However, what set Serbian nationalism far apart was its paranoia. This can be illustrated by the fact that in the media and politicians' speeches the idea of a conspiracy against the Serbian nation was ever-present. The principle vehicle for the theory of the international conspiracy of which Serbia was allegedly the victim, in its reports *Serbian Radio Television* systematically advanced this argument and denounced "*the world (which) wants to make us submit, and sacrifice our honour and our brothers in Bosnia and Croatia*" against a background of Serbian people in exile and massacred Serbian soldiers<sup>154</sup>... Shortly after the start of the war with Croatia and in light of the support

<sup>149</sup> *Le Monde*, 23 July 1993.

<sup>150</sup> Speaking of Seselj and his troops and with regard to events which had taken place in Borovo Selo near Vukovar, the 4 April 1991 issue of *Politika Ekspres* paid tribute to "the volunteers who left to defend the threatened Serbian people".

Purposely confusing the issue and distorting the facts, Seselj told *NTV Studio B* shortly after on 3 May that "*Borovo Selo demonstrated that the Serbs are armed...They killed 12 Ustashis. That is Serb heroism....I have contacts with those Serbs in Borovo Selo....where the major role was played by the Chetnik movement. Chetnik arms triumphed on 2 May in Borovo Selo. Not even 15 Ustashas could take one Serb Chetnik. We have sent our volunteers everywhere. The best ones are in Zagreb - those trained for special raids and terrorist actions*". This statement was later printed by *Borba* on 10 May.

<sup>151</sup> "*I met Arkan and kissed him. I always kiss heroes*". Biljana Plavsic, *Duga*, 22 January - 4 February 1994.

<sup>152</sup> Serbian extremists.

<sup>153</sup> At the time, Serbian "perfection" and "know-how" was expressed in the former Yugoslavia by a cliché claiming that "Goebbels was a child" in comparison – implying thereby that Serbian propaganda was even more effective than Nazi propaganda and its main creator.

<sup>154</sup> *Reporters sans frontières, La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Report 1993*, pp. 338-339.

which certain sections of the international community were giving to Croatia – *Belgrade Television* was often to target the Vatican and Germany, seen as historical allies of Croatia. As such, it was to broadcast a report covering a street demonstration accusing the Vatican of supporting the “Ustasha fascist regime”. An elderly woman waving a banner on which was written “Vatican Satan” stated: “The Pope should go to Jasenovac! The Pope is an Ustasha” In the same report pictures were broadcast of the historian, Ratko Petrovic, with a loud-speaker in his hand, addressing the demonstrators in these terms: “The genocide of the Serbian people has been going on under the auspices of the Vatican. This is now going to stop!”<sup>155</sup> ... At almost the same time, Germany was directly accused of being at the head of a conspiracy by the Serbian Minister of Defence, Veljko Kadijevic, whose communiqué was read by the presenter of the television news on *TV Belgrade*: “Germany has openly attacked our country for the third time. It now resorts to modern methods, but it also uses the fascist methods from World War II. Germany then made use of the so-called “fifth column”. Now it is opting for various other methods of special warfare, in preparation for economic and military action”<sup>156</sup>. The written press also spread the notion of a conspiracy supposedly hatched abroad, which recurred like a leitmotiv<sup>157</sup>.

<sup>155</sup> See “*Images and Words of Hate: Year Two*”, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>156</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>157</sup> See for example:

“*The fate of our state no longer depends on our will power, courage, honesty, intelligence, and orientation towards the heavenly empire - all the virtues in which we have excelled throughout history. We now depend on international carpet-baggers, wheeler-dealers, financiers, and the masterminds of the policy whose aim was to break up the state which was created by the shedding of much blood*”, Academic Radovan Samardzic, *Epoha*, 5 November 1991.

“*Saint Sava opted for a humiliated and weakened Byzantium for he saw in it the indomitable spirit of Orthodoxy, and he turned his back to the all-powerful Rome, from which the foul smell of the first inquisitional pyres was coming - hints of Auschwitz and Jasenovac. We fear that a new world order is emerging, and that it is based on a trilateral alliance between America, Japan and Europe... A planetary anthill is being created and only the laws of hedonist society shall have their place there... We should do penance in order to have a pious and kind tsar, in both Serbia and Russia .... It would mark the return to the sense of the cult and not to the formal rite (which we are frequently witnessing now)*”. Mr Danilo Krstic, bishop of Budim, *Pogledi, Kragujevac*, 18 October - 1 November 1991.

“*It is better for all of us to perish than to accept dubious foreign decisions regarding our fate*”, Momcilo Djujic, *Chetnik Duke, Borba*, 14 January 1992.

“*The international community is immoral. It shall kill us all*”, Priest Amfilohije Radovic, *Borba*, 13 July 1993.

“*By carving up Yugoslavia through national secessions, in which Germany played a decisive role and which were made possible by EC, US, and Islamic forces, the Serb people was de facto declared WW3. All*

69. The conspiracy took different forms depending on a context which itself changed. In the final analysis it mattered little who was actually behind the conspiracy since each time this classic technique was used the purpose was to divert Serbian public opinion away from those actually responsible for the problems experienced by the population within the country. Belgrade, and the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs in turn, would bring up the "Vatican<sup>158</sup>/Ustasha/German" conspiracy<sup>159</sup> (so directly alluding to the massacre of Serbs during the Second World War), the American conspiracy (a resurgence of communist propaganda is evident in places) and international conspiracies which would be most clearly demonstrated by the United Nations embargo on Serbia beginning in May 1992<sup>160</sup>.

As the attitude of the international community hardened towards Serbia and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in particular after the strikes against Serbian targets around Gorazde, RTS and the Bosnian Serb media introduced the notion of an international conspiracy to commit genocide against the Serbs. Following the NATO bombing, the news presenter explained to viewers: "*The bombs dropped on Gorazde hit the UN building in New York. The USA, which, in fact, initiated the air-strikes, have destroyed the UN in an effort to gain full control of war and peace in the world and in*

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*those factors had goals similar to the ones pursued by the Axis Powers in both WW1 and WW2*", Dobrica Cosic, *Nada*, 29 June 1994.

<sup>158</sup> In its 10 February 1991 issue, *Politika* would state that Croatia had received a \$US 4 billion loan from the Vatican with which to pull Yugoslavia apart...

On 21 September 1992, Dragan Krivacevic, editor-presenter of the television news stated for example: "*The International community led by the Vatican wants Serbs on their knees. Together with our enemies from inside, Muslims and Croats from Serbia, they want us to beg them. But, they are not going to see that scene*". Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* p.34.

<sup>159</sup> For example, on 30 August 1995, TVB1 broadcast extracts from a report shown on a German channel in which young Nazis expressed their hatred for the Serbs and boasted of having fought alongside the Croats and exterminated a good number of Serbs. The report also showed Nazis in France and Italy suggesting, through presenting such extremist figures, that the programming for exterminating the Serbian people was indeed part of a world-wide conspiracy.

<sup>160</sup> The embargo and its consequences were usually presented in a biased manner. Thus on 20 November 1992, during the television news, the presenter Stefan Grubac distorted the content of a Security Council resolution which exempted food and pharmaceutical products, when he explained: "*They [the foreigners] deny food and offer news, they deny medicine and offer comments instead*". Quoted by Vojin Dimitrijevic and Jelena Pejic, University of Belgrade Law School, in "*The effects of UN Sanctions Against Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro): Theory and Conventional Wisdom in the Current Context*", note no. 43. <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/politics/publications/journals/kentpapers/dimitri.html>.

*this way possibly started an era of new colonialism. And every colonialism implies genocide, which was, unfortunately, first committed against the Serbs. The civilian casualties in this attack are proof of that.*" Applying this same logic, the statements made by the academic and writer, Dobrica Cosic, in his capacity as Yugoslav President during a meeting with the leaders of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina would also be shown on RTS. They too took up this obsessional theme: *"It is a total war waged against our nation. We are victims of all sorts of genocide: physical, spiritual and moral, by our being denied the right to be one nation. It is waged by armies, politicians, churches, the media, by an entire universe set on winning this war against us. I believe the most important thing of all is to do everything in our power to defend the truth. We must tell the world that these are the times of shame and deceit in which no means are spared to spiritually annihilate an entire nation. This spiritual genocide against our nation is committed by an entire civilisation through the so-called mass-media."*<sup>161</sup>

70. At the same time, the international community's successive peace plans were denounced as machiavellian ruses to make the Serbs abandon their brothers in Bosnia and Croatia. As such, on 10 April 1993, the newsreader of Serbian television declared that signing up to the Vance-Owen plan was tantamount to approving "the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs". Faced with the pressure and threats of the international community, the media's propaganda would take a new tack, as would Slobodan Milosevic who, in early May, called upon the Bosnian Serbs to ratify the plan<sup>162</sup>. Milosevic's power over the RTS

<sup>161</sup> *"Images and Words of Hate: Year Three"*, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B92, ARHITEL, 1999.

<sup>162</sup> Borislav Jovic recounted how Milosevic did everything within his power to make Karadzic give in and how he organised a campaign to satanise him in which the media participated: *"When Radovan Karadzic, President of the Republika Srpska, refused to accept the so-called Vance-Owen plan, which Milosevic himself supported, Milosevic organised a campaign to demonise Karadzic that was below not only any personal moral dignity but also the high-ranking positions they both occupied"*. In *Book on Milosevic*, Belgrade, 2001 (draft translation by ICTY), p.29.

Another interesting episode shedding light on how the media were bent to Milosevic's will took place at RTS itself when the Vance plan was being negotiated in 1991-1992. The editor-in-chief of RTS, Krste Bjelic, was fired because he was deemed too close to Milan Babic, the "president" of the Serbian Republic of Krajina, who had rejected the Vance plan and who opposed Milosevic. Bjelic was replaced by Dragoljub Milanovic from the daily *Politika Ekspres*.

It is interesting to note that from the moment Milosevic accepted the Vance plan, the pejorative terms "oustaha" and "throat cutters" were replaced by the words "Croatian army" or "Croatian forces". Moreover, the war reports became shorter and were broadcast at the end of the television news... *Serbian Television* presented the Vance plan as a victory achieved through Serbian action and its leader. During its

was confirmed once again on this occasion. The journalistic comments about the Vance-Owen project changed completely in a month, loyally falling into line with the about-face of the Serbian leader. Milica Pesic notes in this regard: *"At the beginning of April 1993 Bosnian Serbs were offered a new solution: the Vance-Owen plan. The Serbian regime was against the plan. So was the TVB: And on 2 April commentator Ratko Dmitrovic<sup>163</sup> says: "The plan is a way for ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Bosnia. If they sign that plan there will be nothing else for them but to commit collective suicide or convert to*

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adoption, the presenter of the national television news stated the following in his editorial: *"The Serbian people's intense craving for peace was once again confirmed by the official Serbian policy. By adopting the peace plan drawn up by Cyrus Vance, acting as the UN Secretary General's personal envoy, and enjoying the unambiguous support of the United States, Serbia has finally and definitively cast off the stigma of belligerence forced on her by the neo-Nazi forces of Croatia and Europe. If any Balkan nation has ever reached maturity through hardship and the pain of a war fought for peace and freedom, it is the Serbian nation. From such a nation and its government nothing could have been expected but a policy of peace. But by the same token, no one could have expected it to capitulate and renounce its national dignity and rights in the name of somebody else's illusion of peace. The Serbian peace policy cannot be regarded as an attempt to save face or preserve the regime. Rather, it is an expression of full moral, political and historical adherence to its principles. The policy that Serbia and its president Slobodan Milosevic have pursued so far leaves not even a shred of doubt when it comes to protecting the interests of the Serbian nation". See "Images and Words of Hate: Year Two", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.*

Borisav Jovic provides another interesting example of the umbilical cord between Milosevic and "his" media. Milosevic was opposed to Slobodanka Gruden becoming the head of Belgrade municipality - he had his own candidate - and so he would destroy Gruden's reputation by conducting a smear campaign against her: *"Since all of the media were under the complete control of Slobodan Milosevic, and since Slobodanka was elected against his will, the already proven mechanism of isolation and discrediting went into operation. Then, it clearly showed how powerful Slobodan was within the SPS leadership compared to us, who benevolently and trustingly left him with all the influence over the media (...) Within the media a campaign against Slobodanka Gruden started. They said that she had been bribed to allocate some plots of land to Dafina Milanovic, owner of the Dafiment Bank, but it was never proved. It was only to dishonour her and to show that persecuting and overthrowing her were justified. The machinery for discrediting her continued to operate right up until Slobodanka had enough of it all and resigned", op. cit., pp. 116-188.*

<sup>163</sup> Politika correspondent in Zagreb before becoming a figurehead of ultra-nationalism on television, Ratko Dmitrovic was to become particularly well-known for his positions with regard to war: *"Despite claims of some military-political analysts that artillery and missile attacks on some towns failed to bring the war victory or help Krajina prevail in armed conflicts, I tend to share the view that this is the best way for Krajina to keep Croatia in a checkmate situation. Serbian heavy artillery forces can thus control Sisak and a large industrial zone (refinery, ironworks, thermo-power plant, chemical industry "Radonja"), Karlovac and its industrial potential, Zadar, Šibenik, Osijek... As regards Zagreb is it only 25 km away from the range of the Serbian heavy artillery", in Argumenti, July 1994. Quoted by Petar Lukovic, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.*

[http://www.helsinki.org.yu/authors\\_singletext.php?lang=en&idteksta=448](http://www.helsinki.org.yu/authors_singletext.php?lang=en&idteksta=448).

Some years later, interviewed about his role on RTS where he had been news presenter from 1991 to 1993, Ratko Dmitrovic attempted to exonerate himself: *"I resented the way RTS presented the events at the time. It has all got far worse by now, it has hit rock bottom. I tried to raise it with the editors. I was not one. I was just a commentator with no say in shaping the programme. I requested that we enter the media war and wage it through the most powerful of its media - television. They never fought one. It was all cheap, party propaganda, a total disaster"... "Images and Words of Hate : Year Three", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.*

Catholicism or Islam or leave Bosnia". Just a month later, after Milosevic changed his attitude towards the plan and became an advocate of it, TVB had all news bulletins full of politicians and ordinary people appealing for a signature of the plan because Serbs in Bosnia "had enough of war there and it is time for peace now"<sup>164</sup>. The same about-turn took place at Radio Belgrade I. While in April propaganda in favour of the war had reached its peak and the maps of the Vance-Owen plan were shown as unjust and anti-Serbian, the tone changed radically as of early May<sup>165</sup>.

71. Another facet of the anti-Serbian plot was the conspiracy purportedly orchestrated by the internal "traitors"<sup>166</sup>. The journalists accused of not adhering to the Milosevic line<sup>167</sup> would be dismissed from their posts after being called "traitors" by the regime's heralds. At several press conferences covered by the official media, the ultra-nationalist leader of the Radical Party, Vojislav Seselj, who announced the government's true intentions in advance<sup>168</sup>, would draw up lists of the "uncontrollable or partisan" journalists who would

<sup>164</sup> *Op.cit.* p.23.

<sup>165</sup> Lola Stamenkovic, who studied the programmes of Radio Belgrade between February and May 1993 (the programmes between 15:00 and 19:00 hours) notes the following: "After the Bjeljina Assembly the style of reporting on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina changes. Unlike in the previous period, this new style sees the transmitting of statements which endorse the Vance-Owen plan as a whole and point to the danger of prolonging the war and risking military action against Yugoslavia if the peace is not signed. The statements of Serb leaders in Bosnia that the Vance-Owen plan does not guarantee peace are criticised. Less radio and television time is devoted to accounts from the war front; reporters are called to quote new sources of information (diplomatic sources, etc.)". See article "Radio Belgrade I – Domination of Ethnic Stereotypes", in *Hate Speech. An Analysis of the Content of the Domestic Media in the First Part of 1993*, Centre for Antiwar Action, Belgrade, 1994, p.38.

<sup>166</sup> When the war with Croatia began to become exposed to criticism from the Serbian civilian society, and at a time when the new boundary which had come about through the territorial conquests needed to be strengthened, Serbian Television read on the television news a communiqué by the socialist party in power which sounded like a warning to all dissenting voices: "The Socialist Party gives its full support to the Army and calls upon all its members and citizens to fulfill their civic duty, defend their homeland from fascism and prevent the extermination of the Serbs in Croatia. The Serbs have always managed to pinpoint and eliminate traitors, and we believe they will be able to do it again". See "Images and Words of Hate: Year Two", *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1997.

<sup>167</sup> Such public pressure on independent journalists was a phenomenon not only in Serbia but also in Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro.

<sup>168</sup> This collusion, not to mention confusion, between the Socialist Party and the Radical Party was public knowledge as the following three examples demonstrate:

- "I respect Seselj because he is consistent in his political convictions and because I believe that his party and he are not financed from abroad", Slobodan Milosevic in *Tanjug*, Belgrade, 22 March 1992.

- "We share with the Radicals their love for Serbia, their patriotism, and the air that we breathe", Radovan Radovic, SPS deputy, during the parliamentary session, RTS, 28 January 1993.



later be sidelined<sup>169</sup>. When a six-day strike broke out in April 1992 at the radio's second (culture and music) station in protest against the fact that the services had been taken over by the political authorities, Vojislav Seselj held a press conference at which he made public a list of radio and television journalists whom he believed had to be eliminated<sup>170</sup>. The list was read out on the television news programme during prime time. Most of the striking journalists, who were described as "pro-Bulgarian", such as Ana Koteska, were subsequently put on compulsory leave or marginalised<sup>171</sup>. On 6 January 1993, Vojislav Seselj again made an announcement at a press conference in which he stated that there would be a fresh purge against the "*uncontrollable or partisan journalists in order to set matters at radio-television to rights once and for all*". He threatened: "*there will be purges wherever we hold power and wherever we share it*"<sup>172</sup>. On 9 January 1993, a high-ranking official within Milosevic's party, Goran Percevic, made a similar announcement on the television news when he explained: those who do not think like us cannot work in public institutions. A few days after he uttered these portentous words, 1,500 journalists and other technical or administrative staff were banned from entering the premises of radio-television and put on "compulsory leave". The journalists who were dismissed, most often members of the trade union for independent journalists, were then replaced by newcomers whose deficient training and experience was less important than their obedience and patriotism, which thus resulted in tension within the editorial staff. Amongst the new arrivals were, in particular, the journalist Aleksandar Ljubicic in the information service at *TV Belgrade*, who was to become a news editor and who used to threaten those who thought "differently" with his revolver"<sup>173</sup>...

The independent media were subject to just as much condemnation and were likewise attacked as traitors. For instance, on 27 May 1992, the presenter of the second edition of the Television-Belgrade (RTS) "News" announced: "*For the first time in Belgrade since the war erupted, the supposed supporters of peace are wearing a black armband as a sign of mourning. The international media are trying to outdo one another in anti-*

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- "Milosevic is powerful because of the strength of his power and because he has the backing of the second most powerful party - the Serb Radical Party", Vojislav Seselj, *NIN*, 20 August 1993.

<sup>169</sup> John McKay, "Working for a Beta [sic] Day", in *War Report*, May 1995, p. 18.

<sup>170</sup> Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* p.18.

<sup>171</sup> See C. Humblot, "Résistances et purges", *Le Monde*, 24 July 1993, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup> *Politika*, 7 January 1993.

*Serbian hysteria. Even within the country, the Belgrade publications Borba and Vreme are now doing the same thing”.*

### **Triumph of disinformation**

72. If disinformation consists of using “information - and especially mass information - techniques to mislead or to conceal and misrepresent facts”, we may truly say that it triumphed in the Yugoslav conflict. From whatever angle the problem is considered – and although it is again true that the Serbian media “distinguished themselves” in the field – all the media (press agencies, newspapers, radio and television...) or almost all of them regularly falsified the truth, imposed blackouts on certain “crucial” information or invented false news. Some of the “media” would use the whole range of possibilities afforded by the three techniques indiscriminately.

73. Generally, any information contradicting the official propaganda was methodically swept aside. Indisputably, one of the most flagrant examples of this was the shelling of Sarajevo and Dubrovnik by Serbian forces. The images shown of Dubrovnik came with a commentary accusing those from the West who had taken the film of manipulation and of having had a tyre burnt in front of their cameras to make it seem that the city was on fire<sup>174</sup>. As for the shells fired at Sarajevo and the damage caused, for several months it was simply as if it had never happened in the eyes of Serbian television viewers because Belgrade television would show pictures of the city taken months and even years beforehand to deny that it had ever occurred<sup>175</sup>. Through the voice of its presenter Risto Djogo, *TV Pale* was to assert throughout the siege of Sarajevo that the Muslims were

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<sup>173</sup> Reported by Milica Pestic, *op. cit.* p.18.

<sup>174</sup> On 11 August 1992, the president of the board of directors of *Belgrade Television* acknowledged the damage inflicted on the town but specified: “*There are just four houses in Dubrovnik which are destroyed and these belong to Serbs*”...

<sup>175</sup> The journalist, Daniel Deluce, formerly a *Reuters* correspondent in Sarajevo, would write in this regard: “Serbian Radio Television created a strange universe in which Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, had never been besieged and in which the devastated Croatian town of Vukovar had been ‘liberated’”. He went on to say: “the media offensive launched by Belgrade contributed to the appearance of equally detestable propaganda in other Yugoslav republics and its after-effects would be felt for years”. In “The Media War”, *NATO Review*, Vol. 48, no. 3, Winter 2000-2001, p. 16.

"shelling themselves"<sup>176</sup>. This negative reconstruction of the facts was to be widely relayed by *Television Belgrade* which stated on 26 December 1992 for example that the siege of Sarajevo was being carried out by the Muslims: "*Muslims are keeping Sarajevans under siege from inside the city, and Serbs are just protecting their own hills around the city...*" Along the same lines, the *TV Belgrade* commentator attributed the fire in the Sarajevo University Library to the Muslims and gave the following account of the event: "*Last night in Sarajevo, there was a fire in the University Library. Luckily, the invaluable cultural treasure had been moved out of it two months before. It is now difficult to establish what exactly caused the fire. True, there was heavy fighting near Trebevic last night. We scrutinised the façade for shell-damage close-up, but were unable to find any. We noticed, however, that the flames licked from within. It all points to yet another Muslim manipulation like the one in Dubrovnik when car tyres were set on fire*"<sup>177</sup> ...

#### Disturbing news automatically minimised or distorted

74. The significance of a disturbing piece of information was frequently minimised. The simple announcement in July 1995 that the Srebrenica enclave had fallen was thus relegated to a spot at the end of the televised news by *RTB*<sup>178</sup>, far behind the day's headlines, namely, the economic affairs of the country and the war in Chechnya... The meaning given to the event by the Serbian media was, to say the least, distorted. Katarina Subasic wrote in this regard: "*As the world's attention was fully focused on the mass deportation of Muslim civilians and still unclear number of victims estimated between 6 and 8.000, both the Bosnian Serb media and Milosevic-controlled outlets in Serbia described it as a "liberation of the town run by Islamic fundamentalists", not mentioning*

<sup>176</sup> Katarina Subasic, *op. cit.* p.16.

<sup>177</sup> "*Images and Words of Hate: Year Three*", *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92, ARHITEL, 1999.

<sup>178</sup> Whereas it is well known that, at the time, "*Mladic's soldiers were machine-gunning the refugee columns, murdering people and slitting throats*" as Rémy Ourdan writes in "*Ratko Mladic le barbare*", *Le Monde*, 9 February 1996.

at all any of the widespread atrocities committed during the weeks of the Serb offensive"<sup>179</sup> ...

75. When despite everything certain information directly implicating Serbian responsibility for the perpetration of atrocities managed to filter through it was distorted. On 27 May 1992, seventeen inhabitants of Sarajevo were killed and one hundred and fifty wounded by a Serbian shell as they were queuing for bread. The pictures of the massacre would be broadcast by RTS only with the Serbs' official version of events which accused the Sarajevo government of having organised it to cause the West to intercede<sup>180</sup>. From Sarajevo, a journalist reported commented on the event with images of the carnage shown in the background: "*There has been another atrocious massacre today in Sarajevo. A mortar shell fell amidst a group of civilians who were queuing for bread in Vase Miskin Street. Twelve people were killed and more than a hundred wounded. The scene shocked the local people. With reference to this, General Nedjo Boskovic, who is negotiating the withdrawal of the Army from the barracks said it was unbelievable that there could be such a monster who could shoot people who came out of shelters to buy bread. 'The perpetrators and their commanders must be found' said Boskovic, and since he did not see the scene of the crime, he refrained from commenting on who the possible culprits were*". This was followed by an interview of Momcilo Krajisnik, the president of the Assembly of the Serbian People of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who declared: "*Having gathered all information about this incident, I can claim that the Serbian Army never fired a single shell on Sarajevo today or violated yesterday's truce. We must certainly preserve peace in Sarajevo at all costs*". A short while later in another report from Sarajevo, TV Belgrade broadcast the following commentary which disputed that a shell could have caused the carnage and blamed the Bosnians: "*Serbian forensics claim that anti-personnel contact mines had been planted there the night before. They also claim that they have evidence that the bombing was planned by Mirza Jamakovic, a police*

<sup>179</sup> *Op .cit.* p.17.

<sup>180</sup> A scenario which would be repeated with the 68 people killed and 142 wounded by a Serbian mortar shell which landed in Sarajevo market on 5 February 1994. On 9 February, "Pale Serbian Television showed images from Western television stations and, using freeze frame, analysed every detail and fact which the Serbs thought proved that it was a Bosnian set up" In this regard, see the interesting masters

*specialist for precisely this type of assignment, and Halil Rusmir. They also say it was a planted device and not a mortar shell because the blast caused no damage on the pavement and the casualties mostly suffered wounds on the lower extremities. Ballistics experts add that it was impossible that a single shell could have been so precisely lobbed into this street surrounded by many high-rises"... As if to lend more weight to this interpretation, a statement from the Bosnian Serb Army would also be broadcast on TV Belgrade: "During this day, May 27th, this year, the Army of Republika Srpska did not open fire from either infantry or any other weapons, on any target in the Sarajevo area. As for the TV shots of alleged explosions in downtown Sarajevo, we are sure this is a malicious propaganda scheme aimed at achieving certain effects from here and abroad. This is even worse than the alleged bombing of Banoki Dvori, or Dubrovnik."<sup>181</sup>*

Three months later, on 8 September 1992, the RTS journalist Lidija Duvancic, without waiting for confirmation, ascribed an explosion which had caused four casualties in Sarajevo to the Muslims "who are continuing with their plan, now well known, of demonising the Bosnian Serbs with the intention of provoking international military intervention".

76. RTS was not the only one to take such a course. *Politika* also tirelessly justified the Bosnian Serb party's war effort, accrediting only information received from the Bosnian Serbs. Using tendentious presentation and offering no analysis of the conflict – notably by providing no explanation of the Bosnian government's position whatsoever – the Belgrade daily newspaper also actively contributed to blinding Serbian public opinion.

#### Broadcasting false news to stigmatise the enemy further

77. The making up of false news is another form of disinformation, perhaps the most harmful. SRNA, the Bosnian Serb television station, would speak "of the starving lions in Sarajevo zoo to whom 'the Muslims threw the Serbian children and women to eat' at a

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thesis "Le rôle de la télévision d'État dans la montée du nationalisme extrémiste en Serbie", Sonja Milenkovic, University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas, 1994/1995, pp. 79-82.

<sup>181</sup> "Images and Words of Hate: Year Three", Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, B92, ARHITEL, 1999.

time when Sarajevo was cut off from the world”<sup>182</sup>. This propaganda technique which involved hammering home and repeating the same words and expressions over and over again to make the masses believe they were true was previously employed by Nazi Germany. The war in Bosnia was to be particularly favourable to the invention of false information and coarse lies by *Television Belgrade*, like for example the information broadcast on the television news of 20 August 1992 in which a reporter sent to the scene stated that 4,000 Serbs from the left bank of the Drina were being threatened with genocide; or the alarming news broadcast on the news bulletin of 16 October 1992 referring to a plan hatched by the Muslim authorities in Sarajevo whose objective was to murder some 200 Serbs<sup>183</sup> ...

78. Other equally insane lies used by the Serbian media without checks being made – such as the existence of “*necklaces that the Croats made from fingers cut off Serbian children*”<sup>184</sup> - were invented to fanaticise the Serbian populations scattered over various territories and ultimately to justify policies of conquest and ethnic cleansing<sup>185</sup>. Implicit in the crude set ups was the notion that all means were valid against such demons.

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<sup>182</sup> In “*Les émules de Goebbels*”, *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, Jelena Ponorac, November 1992, p. 7.

<sup>183</sup> Milica Pesic, *op. cit.* p.28.

<sup>184</sup> C. Humblot, *Le Monde*, 23 July 1993.

<sup>185</sup> In its report *Restriction on the Broadcast Media in FR Yugoslavia*, the International Committee to Protect Independent Media in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia writes: “*News programs modify or even create information in order to fit the political objectives of the government. Often that objective is to create and foster enemy images among the population. Before and during the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, RTS whipped up Serbian nationalism by dehumanising non-ethnic Serbs and promoting visions of Serbia's historical glory. The media campaign aimed at instilling and fostering fear among the public, a feeling of threat, of helplessness, and the need for resistance*”. *Free Slobodna* 2000, September 1998, p. 7.

### III. Bringing into line any alternative information or opinion as a condition for official propaganda to succeed

79. In any given regime, official propaganda has all the more impact since there is no opposing counter-propaganda, or at least the contradictory political ideas and opinions are not voiced through broadcasting channels which can reach the masses. S. Milosevic's regime understood this well, in that by following the political circumstances of the moment, it systematically ensured that the embryonic independent press was confined within narrow boundaries. The recourse to legal and extra-legal means to still the voices of dissension and the pressure exerted by the regime on professionals in the field of information ultimately account for why no real public arena for discussion emerged and explain the ease with which the large majority of the Serbian population was deliberately manipulated for over ten years. In this respect, the propaganda used during the Kosovo war would serve to demonstrate this one last time.

#### Serbian press under tight surveillance

80. We have seen that, as of 1987, Milosevic used the State or State-controlled media for his own ends. This take-over first became evident when close collaborators of Milosevic were appointed to the highest positions in those media. All were members of his political party. Dusan Mitevic, Milorad Vucelic<sup>186</sup>, Dragoljub Milanovic, Ratomir Vico<sup>187</sup> were appointed to RTS and personally ensured that directives from Milosevic himself were put into operation. At the same time, purges were organised within press companies to separate the wheat (the "patriotic" journalists) from the chaff (the journalists considered too independent who fervently supported presenting information fairly)<sup>188</sup>.

<sup>186</sup> He was vice-president of the SPS. Furthermore, prior to the war against Croatia, he was in charge of TV Novi Sad, from where most of the belligerent Serbian propaganda was transmitted to Croatia. His successes whilst in this post would earn him an appointment to RTS when the war against Croatia ended.

<sup>187</sup> In April 1982, whilst *Radio Belgrade's* political editor-in-chief, he became a member of the presidency of the Municipal Committee of the Belgrade League of Communists. He would later become Minister for Information.

<sup>188</sup> Marie-Claude Vogric states that "*Tanjug, the famous press agency set up by Tito, (...) and the most widely read daily newspapers, Politika, Ekspres, Vecernje Novosti, were put back in their place in 1987 with a purge of the directors and editors-in-chief, who were accused of not having supported Milosevic. In*

### Psychological pressure on recalcitrant journalists

81. In general, the regime would have recourse to a whole arsenal of psychological terror already tried and tested by the fascist regimes between the two wars and meant to convince even the most recalcitrant individuals to support Milosevic's nationalist policy. This involved "journalists fired overnight or victims of persecution, physical threats, intimidation, and anonymous phone calls"<sup>189</sup>. Certain names were even blacklisted as "enemies of Serbia" requiring elimination<sup>190</sup>.

### Rejection of all media broadcasting federal information

82. It must also be stated that in keeping with his wish to maintain an absolute monopoly over information in Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic would do everything to oppose the project for the federal television station *Yutel* sought by the Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic who wished to broadcast an unbiased information programme to the entire country. As of its launch on 23 October 1990, the project was sabotaged by the Serbian authorities who ordered the mobile transmitters throughout the territory of the republic and further afield to be dismantled<sup>191</sup>. Some months later, the *Yutel* offices in Belgrade were destroyed and the staff roughed up by a unit from the Serbian extremist movement "the White Eagles"<sup>192</sup>.

### Plan of action against the independent press

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"*La presse de Belgrade sous la férule de Milosevic*", *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, February 1995, p. 16.

<sup>189</sup> Jean-Claude Raspiengeas, "*Le dernier espoir démocratique*", *Télérama*, 17 February 1993.

<sup>190</sup> For example, see the testimony of Nenad Pejic, former programme controller for *Sarajevo TV*, who states: "*In late April 1992, Serbian television showed a report on the journalists who had to be killed. My name was on the list.*" *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>191</sup> Jean Ariel, op. cit.

<sup>192</sup> Reporters sans frontières, *La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Report 1992*, p. 321.



83. As opposed to the media under the authorities' direct control, the few and far between independent media channels barely had more than a tenth of the national media space<sup>193</sup>. The main reason for keeping and tolerating such media – of symbolic importance – appears to lie in foreign policy considerations. Serbia exhibited this media to provide, when necessary, a democratic image of itself to the international community<sup>194</sup>.

84. Despite the obvious concern for respectability, the government of Belgrade used and abused legal and extra-legal means to counter these troublesome voices<sup>195</sup>. It was in fact through this independent media that Milosevic's political opposition managed to voice its opinions since they did not have access to public media. The incident of the municipal elections won by the opposition coalition *Zajedno* ("Together") on 17 November 1996 whose outcome was recognised by the authorities only after more than three months of almost daily demonstrations in the large towns, would confirm that, as soon as it got into political difficulties, the regime closed the door it had left partly open to seduce the international community.

85. In fact, the independent press was to be taken over again in late 1994 when a *putsch* was organised against the daily *Borba* which had dared "to denounce the responsibility of the Belgrade regime in the Bosnian war" and "to condemn the shelling of Vukovar and Sarajevo"<sup>196</sup>. After declaring the corporation which published the newspaper illegal, the state Minister for Information, Dragutin Brcin, was appointed to run *Borba*.

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<sup>193</sup> See "Situation of the Media in Former Yugoslavia", Report to the Commission of the European Union, AIM, Paris, March 1995, p. 1.

<sup>194</sup> Véronique Soulé gives a good account of this strategy when she writes: "rather than ban them, they (the authorities) put the independent media under financial and legal pressure; more infrequently the Serbian police carries out seizures or raids. The aim is to limit their audience as much as possible whilst maintaining an appearance of pluralism which Belgrade parades before the international community in order to drive home the message that "there is greater democracy in Belgrade than in Zagreb". In "Serbie: la difficile survie de la presse indépendante", *Libération*, 10 January 1996.

<sup>195</sup> In 1993, for example, while the consequences of the embargo were being fully felt, particularly by the independent media, the Federal Minister for Information had an amendment added to the Law on Public Information which authorised the Federal Parliament to veto foreign aid provided to the media.. See Milica Pestic, *op. cit.* p.19.

<sup>196</sup> Florence Hartmann, "Le quotidien serbe 'Borba' tente de résister à Slobodan Milosevic", *Le Monde*, 12 January 1995.