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A magazine on Dealing with the Past



MEDIA FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

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NEWS & UPDATES

REGIONAL

"Bosnian War Crime Atlas, 1992-1995", 2019 @ Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

In 2019, the Research and Documentation Center, Sarajevo (RDC) and Network for Building Peace, in cooperation with forumZFD BiH, organized presentations of the Bosnian War Crimes Atlas 1992-1995 (Atlas) throughout the region. The final presentation, on 12.12.2019 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), saw the official launching of the Atlas online, on RDC's web portal www.mnemos.ba. The Atlas uses Google Earth technology and documentary evidence from multiple sources, including the RDC archive, to provide a geographically precise and browsable map locating sites of crimes, damage, and human casualties documented from the war in BiH (1992-1995), as well as monuments, events and sites of important cultural heritage in connection with the war.

Access the website www.mnemos.ba, to download the Atlas' file to use with Google Earth to zoom into the map of BiH. The four volumes of the Bosnian Book of the Dead will also be available on Atlas to download for free.

NORTH MACEDONIA



Photo Credits: "Let's Invest in Futurism" panel discussion, forumZFD

"Let's Invest in Futurism", 22.11.2019 @ Kino Kultura, Skopje

What happened to the modernist architecture of Skopje? Is the city preserving its material and cultural wealth? Are these buildings protected? HAEMUS and forumZFD discussed these questions on a panel together at Kino Kultura. Speakers joined from the Faculty of Architecture, the Cultural

Heritage Protection Office, HAEMUS, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Before the panel, "Slumbering Concrete: Episode Skopje", a documentary on the modernist architectural heritage of Skopje, which was a result of rebuilding efforts after the 1963 earthquake; it also showed current attitudes towards this period of Skopje's history.

SERBIA



Photo Credits: Panel "Can Populists Draw Us out of the Wartime Narrative?", Srdjan Veljović

Panel debate "Can Populists Draw Us out of the Wartime Narrative?" (Ahmici Massacre revealed), 28.11.19 @ Kombank Dvorana, Belgrade

On November 28, 2019, forumZFD, in collaboration with the SENSE Center for Transitional Justice in Pula, Croatia, hosted the debate "Can Populists Draw us out of the Wartime Narrative?", to conclude the final stage of their joint 2019 project Ahmici Massacre revealed. The panel included experts on the topic of warcrimes: Dejan Jović, professor at the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb, Dino Mustafić, director and public supporter of RECOM from Sarajevo, Srdjan Milosevic, historian at the Institute for Contemporary History of Serbia, and Mirko Klarin, journalist and author of the interactive narratives at the SENSE Center for Transitional Justice. Narratives on the suffering in the village of Ahmići on April 16, 1993, as well as narratives on the suffering from Srebrenica, Operation "Storm", Kosovo, and the covering up of history and memory were presented at the panel. It was pointed out that the post-war situation in the states of ex-Yugoslavia is rife with the production of lies, the glorification of crimes and not victims, and aggressive discourse imposed on us by the majority.

EDITORIAL

Issue: 13

Welcome to this 13th edition of Balkan.Perspectives.

DEAR READERS,

The media is our window to the world and the events that are happening around us. We rely on it to inform us about current and past events, to provide us with details that we couldn't access otherwise, and to help us to interpret and react to them.

Since information is power, the media also has great power to influence how we interpret and react to events and how we connect them to our past and identities. Worldwide, the media landscape is saturated with tabloid, clickbait and sensationalist "journalism", delivered by media conglomerates run by moguls whose interest is to sell "news", rather than to inform, analyze or reflect. Investigative, critical journalism doesn't sell like tabloid journalism, nor does it give audiences instant gratification, something we are perhaps used to in the time of social media. With shortening attention spans, who wants to receive in-depth, critical reporting anymore?

Yet, without it, how can individuals and societies better understand the present and past? Facing oneself and one's past, requires the difficult work of attempting to critically analyze past events, particularly traumatic ones, and the structures that supported their occurrence and continue to do so. How else to gain a fuller understanding and an ability to, in some way, reconcile with the past? "Reliving war" is unavoidable when politicians and the media perpetuate ideas of collective "victimhood", and continue to spout inflammatory, dichotomous "us and them" rhetoric. And yet, the media has the potential to serve as a reflective, analytical, and conflict-preventative resource

that highlights and questions this rhetoric and chooses not to endorse only the dominant narratives.

In the western Balkans, where post-war societies are still trying to rebuild their lives, and tensions lie just below the surface, media messages influenced by the politics of the day are destabilizing. For some, this is poorly disguised propaganda, a kind of political "spin", "spun" by many of the same political elites who were in power in the 1990s and delivered to the public by the mainstream media. In doing so the media is perpetuating divisive rhetoric, and not allowing societies to have reprieve from, or reflect on their traumatic pasts.

In this kind of environment, the space for journalists and actors to investigate all sides of a complex story, and to report on present and past events based on facts, in turn challenging dominant societal narratives, is limited. And not only limited, but dangerous.

In this 13th edition of Balkan.Perspectives, authors from academia, journalism and law, Dafina Halili, Dinko Gruhonjić, Dushica Nofitoska, Dr. Lejla Turčilo, Sara Velaga, Serbeze Haxhaj, Teofil Pančić, and Zhaneta Zdravkovska, reflect on the current state of media in the region, the structures supporting it, and what could change to give space and attention to all sides of a story, in order to challenge dominant interpretations of the past and bring about constructive discourse on these topics.

We hope you find this edition of Balkan.Perspectives a reflective, challenging and interesting read. As always, your feedback is welcome.

Season's Greetings and see you in 2020,
Vanessa Robinson-Conlon / Editor in Chief

IS IT "TABOO" TO REPORT OR SPEAK OPENLY ABOUT WAR CRIMES IN OUR SOCIETY?

VOX POPULI

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

In our society, it is still difficult to talk about war crimes because people are divided and often have negative reactions to reports about war crimes. It's not only a challenge as a journalist to work on these topics, but it's also becoming more difficult to raise these issues in general conversation.

S. N. (28)

The problem is that everyone here has their own truth and their own version of the story. It's impossible to accept media reports on war crimes, because discussions and arguments erupt on social media. It would be great if we could objectively talk about what happened in the past, but as long as we approach the topic this way, of course it will stay a taboo. B. D. (27)

Everyone speaks about war in their own way, and it is impossible to know the truth. There is plenty of war mongering by the media, so I don't think that it's a taboo, but it's difficult for ordinary people to decipher the messages that the media sends us. We all create our own truth when we are left to interpret it ourselves, and of course, we are divided on all levels even when we interpret those media messages.

L. T. (26)

KOSOVO

It depends on who the perpetrator is as to how war crimes are talked about. In Kosovo, if reference is made to Kosovar Albanians having committed war crimes, it is at best considered a taboo, and at worst, treasonous. A. O. (24)

As a journalist I can report openly about war crimes. Still, it is important to be careful when new information surfaces, say, if a politician is accused of some wrongdoing during the war. That would be very sensitive, and people are quick to react. In those cases, journalists can face threats. In general society, there are more limitations to speaking about war crimes. If, for example, you are a victim of wartime rape, you, as the victim, will likely be judged and questioned as to why you let this happen, because of the mentality we have here.

V. C. (26)

In general, facing and discussing war crimes has failed at many levels in Kosovo. It depends on the type of crimes we are talking about. People here, as survivors of war, have been focused on rebuilding their lives. I would not say that it is taboo to speak about it, but rather we lack a state mechanism to treat and document these crimes competently. If one existed, I believe people would talk, face them and heal. We do have discussions about war crimes, which are often emotionally charged, say, about willful killings, torture, mutilations and other inhumane treatment. Certain warcrimes, however, we don't speak about, such as the rape of women and men. Nor do we discuss the psychological trauma and consequences that we continue to face, or the compulsory military service during the war, or the denial of fair trials, or about those who were wrongly sentenced or executed. Maybe we don't speak about them because we are not aware, or maybe we are focusing on surviving the other socio-economic challenges of a post-war society. S. K. (26)

SERBIA

As time passes, trials for war crimes seem to be “winding down”. The public discusses these topics less now, and the media hardly mentions them. As if they never happened. This is not fair to the victims and their families. Rarely does more than one media outlet report on them. There is a media blackout on these issues, seeing as the media here is completely serving the government. War crimes and dealing with the past are rarely mentioned, because they’re not in the interest of the current government. **M. L. (30)**

I have always been on the side of justice, of prosecuting all forms of guilt and trying to get to the truth. For a while now, I’ve felt cheated, because I don’t get to hear or read anything about war crimes other than what I already know. This topic has always been taboo, but I remember that several years ago public stations in Serbia did report on war crime trials. Unfortunately, that time is long gone. I am happy when I read an article on the topic or there’s a segment on online radio, but it’s negligible and not enough to help us to understand more. The media is far more vocal about the book launches of convicted generals, which is impermissible and unjust. **A. S. (43)**

At school, we didn’t have the opportunity to hear or learn about the wars of the 1990s. It was a real taboo, as it is today. Some professors want to speak about it now, but they can’t – they aren’t given the space to. Mostly, discussions happen outside of the school curriculum. I watched a lot about the wars on YouTube. At first, I was in shock. Is it possible that all this happened? Then I started to investigate. What is strange is that it’s not mentioned in the media. I understand a lot more now than I did before – I really had no knowledge back then. So, I am able to compare the extent to which it is being discussed or not. Yet, I hardly find anything reported in the media. At times I’m ashamed, at times I cry. And sometimes it seems that everywhere is the same, because the media in other countries don’t talk about this either, except when it’s for some annual commemoration. I wish it was different.

S. N. (24)

NORTH MACEDONIA

War crimes is not a topic that is present in our everyday life. Good or bad, the armed conflict in Macedonia was not as intensive as it was in the other countries of the former Yugoslavia. It seems the public has forgotten. Our media and public institutions rarely mention it. Those who were accused of war crimes now hold state positions, so I doubt someone will speak up about it. **D. S. (26)**

I think that Macedonia as a country has many problems, and maybe that is why this topic is almost never mentioned. It’s not taboo, but we have so many other issues facing us. It seems that institutions never really gave attention to war crimes. Almost 20 years have passed since the war and the signing of the Framework Agreement, but our war crimes still haven’t been dealt with. **A. F. (34)**

Without the cooperation of institutions, we cannot talk or report about war crimes. Media here does not inform us about these crimes, apart from the occasional TV debate. I think the main reason it’s a taboo here, is that our state institutions are inaccessible. Imagine if they were transparent and accessible, and this information was visible to everyone, we would certainly be able to speak to this topic in a more informed way. **V. G. (51)**





CHALLENGING THE TRUTH

DAFINA HALILI

At the beginning of 2015, I read a story on Balkan Insight about 170 Serbs, 90 from Kosovo, who were welcoming in another New Year at Krnjača, the last remaining collective centre for refugees in Serbia's capital. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, many ethnic Serbs fled from their homes in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

In 1999, over 200,000 Serb civilians fled Kosovo and travelled north as NATO peacekeeping troops entered the country, according to UNHCR data. I observed limited reporting on the precarious status of the potentially hundreds of displaced Serbs, forgotten by both Serbia and Kosovo.

In September 2015, I found myself in the Krnjača collective centre in Belgrade, considered Serbia's worst refugee camp, documenting the living conditions of more than 150 Serbs. Over 80 of them had been displaced from Kosovo. Built in the 1990s to shelter Serbs who had become refugees overnight, the camp's desperate conditions were attributed to how quickly its simple barracks had been built.

The shocking sight before me, and the conversations I had with the despairing residents living at this collective centre, influenced me in a way I had never experienced before. I questioned my own understanding of how journalists document life after the war in the territories of the former Yugoslavia and how much I actually knew about the range of experiences people faced during the Kosovo war.

Were the Serbs of Krnjača not also victims of the Milošević regime? In his attempts to create a Greater Serbia for all Serbs, the notorious Serb politician transformed the region into the bloodiest theatre of war that Europe has seen since World War Two. When Serbian forces retreated, ending their campaign of ethnic cleansing and war crimes in Kosovo,

many Serb civilians also left for fear of retaliation by Kosovo Albanians. Was their fear not justified considering the persecution that took place and the murders committed after the war ended?

The article that I wrote on Krnjača, in 2015, was the second one through which I had explored the subject of dealing with the past. The first I wrote a few months earlier, on missing persons from Kosovo who had been taken by Serbian forces and the anguish felt by their families as they continued to wait for information about their loved ones.

Over the last four years, I have reported more frequently on transitional justice issues in Kosovo, writing articles about survivors of wartime sexual violence, survivors of wartime mass killings, people whose lives have changed dramatically, survivors who struggle to overcome the trauma they experienced and the resulting anxiety they feel today, and those who will not stop seeking justice.

It has taken me some time to understand the complexities of transitional justice and the mechanisms that are in place to address mass human rights abuses. Regardless of the specialization of the journalist or their knowledge of the correct terminology, it is extremely important for journalists reporting on these cases to be 'on the ground', to observe, to speak with people, and to attempt to understand the different experiences and needs of those who have suffered and continue to suffer from the ramifications of war.

Most survivors of wartime sexual violence in Kosovo are ethnic Albanian women. That being said, cases of sexual violence against men and non-Albanian women, particularly Serb and Roma women, also deserve attention in the media and public discussions.

Across the region, the media continues to demonstrate bias in its reporting of events, the voices it selects to cite and publicize, and the sides of the story it tells.

When it comes to missing persons, the media in Kosovo is rarely so brave as to report on the 400 people from Serb and minority communities who are amongst the 1,600 still missing from the war.

Across the region, the media continues to demonstrate bias in its reporting of events, the voices it selects to cite and publicize, and the sides of the story it tells. The voices and experiences of minority groups are almost completely omitted. Journalists have largely failed to distance themselves from their own community's collective memory and the dominant narratives associated with the ethnic group to which they belong.

The mainstream media tends to focus on reconstructing and republicizing trauma, which can further victimize and (re)traumatize survivors. Massacres, mass graves, and deportations that occurred during the war may be common knowledge, but the media rarely shares adequate or objective information about how the justice systems of Kosovo or Serbia treat victims, how legislatures have failed certain groups, or how, 19 years after the war, the survivors of rape still do not have access to free, confidential, and safe health care.

Journalists are supposed to seek the truth. It is in the public interest that we establish the truth about all human rights violations and incorporate these truths into our greater collective memory. The story must go beyond documentation, whether we are reporting on rape, loss of life, or missing persons. Consideration of life after war, which includes the progress and failures of war crime trials, the punishment of perpetrators, reparations for victims, and support given (or not) by the state, should accompany any comprehensive journalistic investigation into crimes

committed during wartime.

True dedication to accurate documentation often leads journalists from one story to another. Reporting on transitional justice in Kosovo and the region comes with an intellectual responsibility to provide readers with new stories and perspectives, rather than stories which merely reproduce dominant, one-sided narratives. Responsible, ethnical journalists must be prepared to dig for and expose the truth, even when the truth conflicts with dominant wartime narratives or collective memory.

Dafina Halili is an award-winning journalist based in Prishtina, Kosovo. She works as a journalist and contributing editor at Kosovo 2.0, an independent media platform, covering mainly human rights and social justice issues. Halili has a Master's degree in Diversity and the Media from the University of Westminster in London, U.K.



Photo Credits: Displaced Limbo in Krmjača, Dafina Halili

THE BURDEN OF REPORTING ON WAR CRIMES IN KOSOVO



Photo Credits: Ridvan Slivova

SERBEZE HAXHIAJ

It will be difficult to forget the image of a scared face and the testimonies shared with me by a Roma woman who was a victim of wartime and post-war sexual violence in Kosovo. During the war, she was raped by Serb military combatants. Two weeks after the war ended, her house was targeted by ethnic Albanian, uniformed men who kidnapped her on a June 1999 evening. When they brought her back the next morning, her house was ablaze and already ruined. For nearly 20 years, she testified in front of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) about the violence committed by Serbs in Kosovo but not about the violence committed by ethnic Albanians. Some of the Kosovo Albanian perpetrators were neighbors, and the family fears to name them.

The war in Kosovo ended two decades ago but, for many victims, suffering and fear continue with almost the same intensity. Some victims have already died in the darkness of their personal trauma, without having had the chance to see justice. Some could testify about only half of their truth. As a journalist, I investigate war and post-war crimes. While digging into the darkest sides of recent history, I often hear stories and testimonies, which have not been publicly spoken about before.

The war left many ‘double’ victims who were raped by perpetrators from both sides. In this regard, Roma women suffered the most.

In their homes, pain and suffering are still fresh. These cases demonstrate the failure of war crime documentation.

Two decades after the war, reporting war crimes is still a

minefield. Many journalists in Kosovo are fearful of reporting on crimes committed during or after the war by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Attempts were made to cover up crimes committed after the war, particularly in its aftermath, using the justification that Serbia committed many crimes and that justice was not served for most of these crimes.

The narrative surrounding war crimes in Kosovo is largely one-sided. There is little space for victims to come forward with facts, which could infringe upon the glory of ethnic Albanian, KLA fighters.

In Serbia, the state shelters war criminals, many of whom hold prominent roles in society. In Kosovo, the failure to indict those suspected of being involved in war crimes is becoming more and more difficult. For many years, the justice system in Kosovo has helped to build this one-sided narrative. Many KLA-affiliated defendants have been acquitted of war crimes due to lack of evidence, often resulting from the intimidation of witnesses.

War discourse in Kosovo has followed a trajectory that has been adapted to the political needs of wartime elites. For that reason, this discourse in Kosovo needs a fresh start.

The language used by each side to address the war reveals the weaknesses of both countries in dealing with war crimes and with the past. Wartime narratives and animosity also influence media reporting. War discourse since 1999 has constrained and shaped public discussion and rigidified

ethnic divisions, identities, ideologies, and collective understandings surrounding the war.

The conclusions drawn in this article are mostly based on the language and wartime narratives used by ethnic Albanians and Serbs in the post-war period. Rhetoric about an impending division is on the rise. The pervasiveness of divisive rhetoric is partly to blame for the continuation of (non-violent) conflict between the two sides.

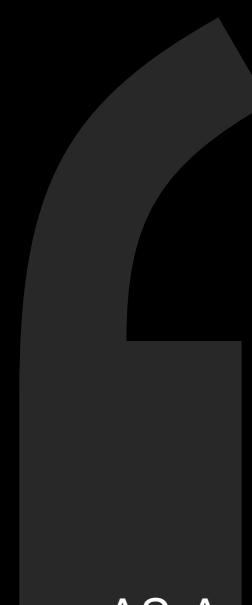
While I was investigating cases of children born from rapes that occurred during the 1998-99 war in Kosovo, the darkest chapter of the Kosovo war, I entered new terrain with regard to journalistic ethics and professional responsibility. One victim, who had killed her baby born from rape, begged me not to reveal her case or else she would kill herself. That kept me constantly under pressure and strained.

Dealing with the past is a difficult battle for the generation that experienced the war, which is trying to come to terms with the heavy burdens of Kosovo's painful past and free itself from it. Many cannot avoid looking back in anger.

Reporting on war crimes for journalists here is a challenge not only because we are exposed to the sorrow and trauma resulting from war. Shortly after I published a story on political assassinations in the aftermath of the Kosovo war, my car was painted red twice.

As a journalist investigating and reporting on conflict-related, sensitive topics in Kosovo and the region, I have found the 'journalism of attachment' to be unavoidable. One cannot and should not be always neutral when faced with scenes of suffering and injustice.

Serbeze Haxhiaj has been working as an investigative journalist and news editor in Kosovo and for international media for 20 years. She deals mainly with pressing issues such as corruption, human rights, security issues, religious extremism, terrorism and war crimes. Haxhiaj is currently an editor at Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) and a journalist for the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). She has previously worked for the daily newspapers Rilindja, Zeri, Lajm and Koha Ditore. She was the Prishtina correspondent for the French Le Courrier des Balkans and recently had her articles published in The Financial Times, Der Standard, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Al Jazeera. She also has worked for five years as a researcher for Navanti, an American research and analysis company. Haxhiaj has received 14 awards from local and international organisations for her reporting on war crimes, organized crime, corruption, human rights and violence against women.



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TRUTH NOT SPOKEN AT THE RIGHT TIME IS WORSE THAN A LIE

ZHANETA ZDRAVKOVSKA

The transparency of institutions in Bitola is improving. Some even have spokespersons that hold press conferences, and most of the authorities answer reporters' phone calls now. However, local journalists still struggle to obtain needed information quickly. As we are living in the age of electronic media, journalists should be able to obtain information quickly and, most importantly, official responses to media inquiries should be complete. In this respect, the institutions and journalists still have a lot of work to do.

This is the opinion of most journalists from Bitola, a town in the south of the Republic of North Macedonia, which is considered one of the most important strongholds of journalism in the country. Despite difficult times for the media in this country, one television station, one radio station, five newspapers, three online portals and seven individual correspondents still operate out of Bitola. In the past, Bitola had more than 250 media workers, and currently has around fifty.

Journalists are not a tool to serve the government's agenda

"For us, it is important to make institutional authorities, regardless of their political affiliations, understand that journalists should not be used as tools for achieving political ends or manipulation. Journalists "should be open, transparent and accountable", said Aneta Blazhevska, who has been working as a journalist for 22 years.

Five experienced journalists from Bitola who have each worked in journalism for more than two decades revealed through interviews conducted for this article that they perceive the government institutions led by the SDSM party (in the past three years) to be more transparent than those that were operating under the VMRO-DPMNE party government (2006-2016). But, there is still work to be done.

"I don't know if there have been other examples of this in our municipality or surrounding area in the 21st century, but under the previous local government in Bitola, when Vladimir Taleski was Mayor, I was not invited to a single press conference in the

municipality nor to any of his other activities. I suppose it was because I had previously asked the Mayor difficult questions, which he had directly dismissed, and because I then questioned this behaviour, he responded with awkward remarks", said Emilia Misirlievska, journalist and correspondent for TV Telma.

Blazhevska's experience with the previous local government is similar. "I was excluded from all municipal events for more than three years, due to my objective and critical approach to issues and events", she said. With respect to the current government, she adds that, despite communicating with certain spokespersons, she sometimes does not get an answer to her question for weeks or months on end. "They do not respond, because it does not benefit them", she added. Stevche Mitrevski, a long-time correspondent for MTV regards the public enterprise "Niskogradba" (Civil Engineering) from the previous government as a classic example of the lack of transparency. The responsible authorities of this public enterprise avoided answering questions about their operations, even though they are financed by the taxpayers. Martin Nikolovski from Bitola, a journalism student in Ankara, Turkey who has already worked for several media outlets in North Macedonia, asked the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services several years ago for public information and did not receive a reply. This year, he received a reply to his request for information after two days.

TV "Tera" received responses from all the current government institutions that they contacted. But, Stevo Bashurovski, the editor and an experienced journalist, says that the comprehensiveness of these responses is a different issue.

"The current government is trying to improve its transparency. The question that remains is to what extent the information acquired will be used at a time when media outlets are mostly concerned with the amount of pistachios someone ate at the state's expense and turning these stories into soap operas. The media's ability to obtain answers is improving, but the public impression is that the media is focused on exposing petty political tricks rather than on substantive reporting", said Bashurovski.

All governments react in the same way to awkward questions – awkwardly

Regardless of the political party they come from, politicians tend to react to awkward questions in the same way – awkwardly. Some are more restrained, while others are more explosive. Blazhevska says that “they are either angry or respond with arrogance”. Misirlievska says that all officials take awkward questions personally, and Mitrevski finds that “if they do not react instantly, they instead make sure to learn what media outlet the journalist is affiliated with after the event is over”, while Bashurovski states that “if something does not go in their favour, they try to draw water to their own mill (twist it to their own advantage)”. With a slightly different take on the situation, Nikolovski says that journalists can indeed be a nightmare for holders of public office; however, unlike in the past when journalists were publicly downgraded for asking awkward questions, today’s officials tend to answer questions from the media.

Journalists from Bitola find it more difficult to receive information from the public institutions based in Skopje than their colleagues who work in the capital. Over thirty public institutions operate in Bitola, some are municipal and some fall under the responsibility of the ministries. Only six have spokespersons. Decentralization processes have been implemented for years, but public institutions are still centralized. When journalists ask for information, they are directed to central institutions in Skopje. Of the 16 ministries, only the Macedonian Information Agency (MIA) has published the names and contact information of (17) spokespersons on their website. In most ministries, the Departments of Public Relations have appointed persons who are not spokespersons to fill the role of information officer. They publish landline phone numbers and email addresses, but now-a-days landline phones are rarely answered, making communication difficult.

Out of the thirty institutions in Bitola, only six have spokespersons

Communication is easy with the Municipality of Bitola, the Mining and Energy Combine, the Sector of Interior, the University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, the Clinical Hospital “Dr. Trifun Panovski”, and the Culture Centre, as these Bitola-based institutions all have spokespersons. Representatives from these institutions stated during interviews that their main commitment is not to silence the truth.

“The truth is the only way to face reality. I never suppress information”, said Metodija Kunovski. He is the spokesperson for the Mining and Energy Combine “Bitola”, where for many

years, unlike now, the communication was quite centralized. The spokesperson for the Municipality of Bitola, Emilia Sarafksa, said that there is no escaping awkward questions. “Sharing certain information may not always be in the interest of the institution. Nevertheless, transparency and truthfulness...is better than a lie”, says Sarafksa.

The spokespersons have set working hours, but the journalists work all hours, still they try to respond to inquiries as soon as possible.

“The Ministry of Interior (MOI) always sends a response, regardless of whether the questions have been asked via telephone, e-mail, Facebook and Viber. [The MOI] responds immediately, on the same day, in the shortest time possible, if the request does not require statistical data, which cannot be instantly provided. However, we try to answer even those requests in a few hours or the next day, at the latest”, says Sanja Stamatova, spokesperson for the MOI.

The spokespersons say that there is a lot of misinformation and spin these days. Kunovski explains that public interest in the Mining and Energy Combine “Bitola” has always been high, but that different or shifting political interests cannot and should not dictate media narratives. Sarafksa says that there have been cases where journalists asked for an explanation or interpretation and then used her quote out of context (sometimes as the title of an article that alluded to a different issue). In some cases, she told journalists from Skopje that the Mayor of Bitola was not available to see them within the following 48 hours; they nonetheless stood up to publicly criticize the Mayor for not making time to meet them.

Journalists and spokespersons do admit that they have a common goal – the accurate and verified sharing of information with the public. For this reason, they cooperate professionally. However, in some cases, they also spend their leisure time together and socialize. According to the spokespersons, they each started out as journalists and know that a reporter’s bread is hard to earn.

Zhaneta Zdravkovska, from Bitola, has worked in journalism for twenty years. She began her career as a reporter at the local television stations “Orbis” and “Medi” and has since worked as a correspondent for the national newspapers “Dnevnik”, “Vest”, and “Utrinski Vesnik” and for “Radio Free Europe”. She currently works as a journalist for the local portal Apla.mk and as a contributor to the national portal Sakamdagazham.mk. She is the coordinator of the Association of Journalists of Bitola and Prilep and the winner of several journalism awards.

MEDIA AS SOCIETY'S ALARM TO DEAL WITH THE PAST



Photo Credits: Mirjana Ribić

SARA VELAGA

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the first step towards building a better future is one which takes us back to the past. It is necessary for everyone to come back and confront the past events that have characterized them, both as individuals and as part of a collective. Journalists, in particular, should seek and determine the truth behind past events, in order to present accurate narratives of the past to the world.

The topic of dealing with the past in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also in the wider region, is the proverbial stone being rolled uphill in a Sisyphean struggle to reach the top. Despite our best efforts, it could easily slip from our hands, roll downhill and disappear. There aren't enough genuine attempts, even by young journalists, to understand that this is a topic to concern ourselves with. The burden we carry will become lighter as we face the past.

The first step is always the hardest, but it is also crucial – especially within local communities, in our so-called comfort zones. It is difficult to say that in your own town or city other ethnic groups had victims, let alone say that you yourself belong to or identify with them. If local communities undertook the difficult work of dealing with the past between conflict groups, changes would be visible at the state level as well.

The need to recognize all victims the same way, ultimately as innocents who lost their lives in the Balkan wars, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, grows stronger each day. In a society with divided narratives, nationalism, and war-mongering rhetoric, both in the media and in politics, it is necessary in this profession called journalism for journalists to preserve their integrity.



Photo Credits: Laying wreaths for the first time for Serb civilian casualties in Bravničke, near Jajce - organized by CNA, Sara Velaga

A healthy and functional society should have a foundation in inclusive memory politics and in the reconstruction of the past based on facts rather than one-sided interpretations of history. Anida Sokol, a journalist and researcher for Mediacenter, warns us about this:

“Unfortunately, our society is built on contradictory and one-sided ethno-national memory politics, in which every ethno-national group commemorates only its own victims and war heroes, which the current ethno-national political parties use in order to legitimize their power.”

Aware of the importance of dealing with historical facts and commemorating all victims, she adds that the media plays a very significant role in shaping narratives.

“The media can offer a space for inclusive, civic memory policies. Unfortunately, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the media are in the service of the ruling elites who are also reconstructing the past based on conflicting and one-sided ethno-national discourses. Yet, through constructive journalism and educational programs, the media could help build peace and reconciliation,” says Anida.

She adds that she didn’t face any criticism concerning her own work or the topics she deals with, for one disappointing reason.

“Articles which critically treat media coverage of the recent past are of no interest to the public and have been overlooked in the public domain,” Anida says frankly.

She concludes that it is truly important to question history at the local level, but local media is unfortunately biased in its coverage of such topics.

“According to the research conducted so far, local media

outlets selectively approach the wartime past and publish mostly news about the commemorations of their victims only. This further creates a rift between citizens, and particularly affects returnees in these communities. The local media serve the ruling parties and report in a selective and one-sided manner,” concludes Anida.

Still, such a statement shouldn’t discourage all of us journalists from continuing our efforts to shed light on topics relating to our recent past, which are, despite being extremely sensitive, very important for the peaceful development of our society.

The media should play the role of a social alarm. It should point out dangers, problems, and challenges arising from incorrect or one-sided stories about the past. In their local communities, journalists should be the people who do not take sides, who are ready to hear different narratives, and who acknowledge the fact that innocent people on all sides suffered greatly. We must persist in uncovering the truth for these people, so that nothing similar ever happens again.

Sara Velaga was born on April 28th, 1994 in Banja Luka and grew up in Jajce. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Communications and Public Relations from the College of Communications “Kappa Phi”. Velaga is a journalist and writer, who has won awards for her stories, “Nobody’s Children”, “Treasure Under the Roof” and “Great Pains Seek Great Souls”. Velaga is an activist, a feminist, and is currently working with the magazine “Buka”, the youth magazine “Karike”, and on a collection of stories, “Those Who Remain”, as an individual project supported by IMEP. She currently lives and works in Banja Luka.

TABLOID JOURNALISM AND DEALING WITH THE PAST

THE SERBIA CASE

DINKO GRUHONJIĆ

Reporting on topics related to Serbia's wartime past has decreased in Serbia in recent years, including coverage of trials for war crimes and for victims of war crimes and their families. Since the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has ended, and international pressure has weakened, serious issues relating to Serbia's wartime past have been notably marginalized in the press and only, rarely, reported on by independent media outlets. On the other hand, dealing with the past has been intentionally tabloidized by some mainstream media outlets, with the aim of creating even more public confusion.

There has been no political will to open the topic of Serbia's responsibility for war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, even under the former/current pro-European Serbian government led by the Democratic party. International pressure on Serbia to cooperate and support war crime prosecutions was presented as blackmail coming from the great Western powers or, even worse, as a kind of "trade": 'you give us criminals, we grant you (EU) funds.' It's simple logic that those Serbian politicians who served as accomplices and direct participants in Milosevic's criminal endeavors, and have remained in power since, will do anything they can to not only cover up the topic of war crimes, but manipulate the public to the point of presenting executioners as victims and vice versa.

The voices of the few professional journalists who still persist in writing about "war topics" simply aren't heard above the deafening noise of the propaganda produced by regime-aligned tabloids. Media outlets like *Informer*, *Alo*, *Kurir*, *Srpski telegraf*, and *Večernje novosti*, amongst others, compete in offending Croats, Bosnians, Albanians, Montenegrins and anyone else they can declare an enemy of the Serbian nation. That approach is "total propaganda", and blatantly shameless. In a symbolic sense, such propaganda is a natural continuation of Mladić's command during the multi-year shelling of Sarajevo: "Go crazy!"

Examples of the media "go(ing) crazy" are especially prevalent when commemorating the anniversaries of major wartime events, such as "Operation Storm" in Croatia (*Oluja*), the onset of the NATO bombing of Serbia, or the genocide in Srebrenica. "The Ustashes celebrate the slaughter of Serbs, the EU watches and says nothing"; "The Croats don't stand a chance"; "Serbia suffered, while Ustashas had orgies"; "NATO is murdering young girls in Serbia"; "The West is making chaos in the Balkans"; "We have to be ready for a new war"; "Bakir would kill again"; "The Hague crime: Karadzic getting a life sentence". Writing down all of the war-mongering titles from Serbian tabloids would take far too long and fill volumes of books.



The voices of the few professional journalists who persist in writing about “war topics” simply aren’t heard above the deafening noise of the propaganda produced by regime-aligned tabloids.

Of course, all of these titles are followed by articles completely devoid of background information or context. There are even articles written about this phenomenon of “omitted background”. What does that mean? To put it bluntly, in tabloid reporting – and, unfortunately, also in Serbia’s more ‘serious’ media outlets - the wartime narratives tend to be one-dimensional and one-sided. Take, for example, the media’s coverage of the anniversary of “Operation Storm” (Oluja), when they deliberately omitted information about what took place in Croatia from the spring of 1991 to August 1995. That kind of reporting, combined with an education system in which the wars of the 1990s are either not mentioned or are presented in a very biased way, produces new generations of Serbian citizens who are most likely convinced that Serbia, is regularly and wrongfully blamed and, is thus, the perpetual (and only) victim.

When the media mentions victims, they are only “our” victims (ethnic Serbs). The stories of and narratives surrounding these victims are manipulated; numbers are made up, events are fabricated, and history is forged. And then, after the relevant anniversary passes, even “our” victims are forgotten, left to deal with their suffering and trauma at the very fringes of society.

It’s obvious that the media’s tactic of “go(ing) crazy” and deliberately misleading and confusing Serbian citizens comes directly from the top leadership of the government. Serbia’s Ministry of Defence, with the notorious Minister Aleksander Vučić at the helm, is leading the show in this regard. This minister is in charge of permanently ruining relationships with neighboring states, addressing them with vocabulary

that is irresistibly reminiscent of Milošević’s time. Vučić is, of course, just one of the current politicians who were in power when war crimes were committed with the backing of the Serbian leadership, the “official Belgrade”. That is why it comes naturally for him to play the “scarecrow” or fear monger in the region, to publish books by convicted war criminals, to organize their book promotions, celebrate them as war heroes, and offer them the opportunity to give lectures at the Military Academy. There have been many examples of this. Veselina Šljivančanin, Vladimir Lazarević, and Nebojša Pavković – all convicted war criminals – have been decorated by Vučić’s halo of new-heroism. The minister justifies this by saying: “Serbia doesn’t need to be ashamed of those who have defended her.” Or: “The time of shame is over; this is the time of silent pride.” This kind of rhetoric voiced by Vučić’s ventriloquist dummies, is repeated in most of the media, with no critical detachment or even basic journalistic inquiry. Who were these “heroes” defending, and why was there a “time of shame” in the first place? Such reporting in the media cannot, in any way, contribute to the formation of critical public opinion around the scope of horrors committed across the Balkans in the name of Serbian citizens. And such reporting by the media, as well as the earlier refusal of the pro-European politicians to scratch below the surface of our war past, even after 2001, when the “discovery” of mass graves in Batajnica near Belgrade, in the suburbs of a European capital, respectively led to the restoration of this kind of rhetoric. Their behavior has brought to power those who would do anything to avoid taking responsibility for planning, implementing, or abetting ethnic cleansing, genocide, mass rapes, and other mass crimes in the former Yugoslavia. All of those in power, together with war profiteers and “deep state” structures, have taken too much of a bite out of the money and privileges bought with blood to now willingly transform themselves into some kind of “peacemakers”. Which is what many had believed the “new” and “pro-Western” Aleksandar Vučić would do.

The same goes for journalism: None of Milošević’s war propagators from the media were ever held responsible for warmongering in the 1990s. An unpunished crime will always create space for new crime. Today’s tabloid warmongering is nothing more than the continuation of that from the 1990s. There is one important difference: the hatred is now home, targeting its own citizens.

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MEDIA REPORTING ON THE PAST: CONTINUATION OF CONFLICT OR PEACE BUILDING?

DR. LEJLA TURČILO

The media is the power to present the world in a certain way. And that is why there are so many different and conflicting ways in which the meaning of the world can be constructed. It is of elementary importance what is presented and who is presenting it, what is being left out and who is doing it, and how are things, people, events and relationships presented.

This definition by Douglas Kellner illustrates the role and responsibilities of the media in shaping our awareness and perceptions of reality. Media responsibility is especially relevant when it comes to reporting on events and conflicts from the past. The media is one of the more important actors or agents of dealing with the past, and the way in which it reports on that past greatly determines the way in which the audience and public confronts that past, and the way that past influences the present and the future.

The media's responsibility does not only concern its approach toward events from the past, the way in which past events are represented and the language that is used. The media has a much more important role in dealing with the past, which relates to the construction of dominant narratives about the past and the (ab)use of those narratives today. Simply put, media reporting about the past can protract, entrench, or deepen conflict or it can be a tool for building peace. Which approach the media and journalists adopt depends on their moral habitus, their ethical code, and their awareness and internalization of the media's responsibility to play an emancipatory, rather than a repressive or inflammatory role in society.

When it comes to the way the media reports on the past in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even a superficial look at

media content and journalist approaches shows numerous examples of unethical, unprofessional, warmongering, and hateful journalism, which are based on the revitalization of events from the recent past that serve the political purposes of the day, such as glorifying criminals, victimizing one side exclusively, and a general unprofessional way of reporting that doesn't contribute to reconciliation or allow for taking positive steps forward or back from the wartime past in the Western Balkans.

These are, of course, extreme examples, although even the media outlets which do not report on the past in such an unprofessional way mainly only report on "special occasions" (commemorations of certain events, trials for war crimes etc.), which doesn't help the public's understanding of past events, but mostly presents them as something that prevents society from moving forward politically and economically (war as an "excuse" for today's dysfunctional state and society or war as a "burden" to continue living with in an individual and collective sense) or, moreover, something that should be forgotten in the interest of continuing coexistence and reconciliation (some media completely avoid talking about the events from the past, or do so in a "sterile" fashion, and avoid naming perpetrators and victims as though they are talking about a natural disaster, believing that this approach prevents further conflicts). The approaches of many media outlets when reporting on the past involve the collectivization of guilt and sensationalization of suffering, as well as the dominant "us and them" approach – "us" as victims and fighters for freedom and justice and "them" as the guilty party and perpetrators of crimes. These approaches do not contribute to peace building but rather to the rigidification and perpetuation of conflict.

How can the media, or in what way should the media, try to overcome such dominant, dichotomous narratives? How can the media develop practices in line with peace journalism and take responsibility for reporting on the past? The first step is to admit responsibility, not just with regard to media interpretation of past events but also for the role the media played in creating enabling conditions for violence and warmaking. On May 23rd 2004, the New York Times magazine apologized to its readers because it led them to incorrect conclusions about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which was the main rationale given by the U.S. administration for the invasion of Iraq.

The media can (and should) objectively reflect upon their role in past events. Only the media and the journalists who have themselves faced and managed to objectively analyze their role in past events and understand their responsibility in the present and for the future can take on an active role in building methods and approaches consistent with peace journalism. This would require a conscious decision by editors and journalists about what to report on, and how, in order to create opportunities for society to develop in accordance with non-violent values and to build responsible and objective approaches towards interpreting past conflicts. The essence of peace journalism is based on balanced, fair and objective reporting, channeling communication about the past in a way that can contribute to positive rather than negative peace, educating the public and building trust, deconstructing false and malevolent interpretations of past events, and analyzing conflicts based on facts rather than dichotomous narratives or one-sided opinions. It is a difficult job, but one that the media and journalists must immediately and continuously work on, for the sake of the public and in order to build stable peace.

The role of peace journalism is not only about properly interpreting events and dealing with the past. The media also has “preventive” potential, which is reflected in the public’s ability to react to past events in both an emotional and rational way, which does not deepen tensions, but rather defines and discusses the conflict in a responsible way, finds solutions for unresolved questions and interpretations of the past, and achieves a consensus on the past with the aim of preventing conflict in the future. The media must make full use of this potential. Otherwise they become complicit in deepening and prolonging conflict.

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Photo Credits: University of Sarajevo website

Media reporting about the past can protract, entrench, or deepen conflict or it can be a tool for building peace.



THE LAW ON FREE ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION IN PRACTICE

DUSHICA NOFITSKA

Free access to information is a human right. It is crucial for the development of open and democratic societies, and for ensuring that governments are accountable to their citizens. Through this powerful instrument, which is a key pillar of developed democratic societies, citizens can have insight into how public money is spent, whether public institutions comply with the laws, and whether public officials and civil servants have abused their positions or authority.

Freedom of information is recognized as a fundamental human right in international law. In the Republic of North Macedonia, this right is guaranteed by the Constitution and is regulated by the Law on Free Access to Public Information. This law regulates the conditions, manner, and procedures for exercising the right to free access to public information and pertains to public information held by state authorities, municipal bodies, public services institutions, and other bodies, organizations, and legal and natural persons exercising public authority as determined by law.

The Right to Free Access to Public Information is available to all legal and natural persons. The law provides three channels through which persons can request access to public information – orally, in writing (on paper), and electronically. The law clearly states that the person requesting information is not obliged to explain why they need the requested information, nor should anyone ask them to explain.

In the thirteen years since the adoption of the Law on Free Access to Public Information, there has been demonstrated improvement in the responsiveness of public institutions and officials in sharing requested information, as well as an increase in the exercise of the right to access public information. Still, citizens, civil society organizations, legal entities, and journalists face obstacles when requesting and accessing public information, and there are challenges which prevent persons and institutions from fully exercising this right.

There has been a noticeable increase in the openness and understanding of the obligation to provide access to public information by a growing percentage of public institutions, as evidenced by the appointment of contact persons. However, the law is not yet applied consistently, and institutions are not yet fully transparent, which limits and hinders the flow of information.

The procedures for accessing public information are still overly complex, and the public institutions know how to exploit legal ambiguities to avoid fulfilling their duty to expeditiously respond to requests with detailed and accurate data and information. Public institutions and officials often still consider requests for access to public information as “meddling” in their everyday work or as a way to “waste and flit away” their time, rather than as a legal requirement

and obligation. Often, it happens that public officials or institutions do not divulge information on the grounds that they do not have that information, when in fact they are legally obligated to have that information and to disclose it upon request. These cases demonstrate a neglect of their duty to collect, systemize, and update information and data that should legally accessible to the public. Also, some data and documents are classified as confidential, without sufficient explanation, which could be perceived as a misuse of legal exceptions and loopholes.

Citizens still have insufficient knowledge regarding their rights upheld by the law and the procedures for obtaining public information. A particular problem with regard to the practical application of the law is that the procedures required to obtain information from public institutions remain overly complicated and time-consuming. Citizens claim that they know they will not receive desired information without difficulty, and they do not want to waste time on administrative procedures that may not yield timely results. For them, the wait of up to 30 days for a first response from officials, possibly followed by a waiting period for the evaluation of complaints or appeals, is time lost. The process of providing proper access to public information requires fast and effective communication.

While the Law on Free Access to Public Information provides for reactive transparency (providing information in response to requests), institutions should also demonstrate proactive transparency by regularly publishing information and data online. Only a small percentage of institutions regularly publish online information about their programmes and budgets. Moreover, information available to the public is often presented in a way that is not easily understandable.

One positive step towards increased transparency by the government, is requiring ministries to publish their basic budgets and program documents online and to prepare and adopt strategies for the transparency of operations. However, there is still no unified approach among the ministries and the aforementioned documents can be found in different sections of their webpages.

Data show that NGOs submit the most official requests for public information, followed by citizens as natural persons and then journalists. According to a 2018 report by the Commission for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information, state institutions (particularly the parliamentary assembly) receive the largest number of Freedom of Information requests, followed by

municipalities, courts, public enterprises and institutions, and health institutions. In 2018, the number of citizens who issued official complaints to the Commission increased. Failing to respond to requests was the number one reason for official complaints, and a high percentage of the complaints resulted in a positive outcome for the those who requested information.

While there have been positive changes with respect to institutional transparency and access to public information, there is still room for improvement with regard to the practical application of the law, the simplification of procedures for requesting information, and proactive transparency.

The timely disclosure of information is essential for increasing the transparency of institutions. Enacting stricter penalties for public officials who do not respond to information requests in compliance with legal deadlines would be an effective way to improve compliance with the law and reactive transparency. If public institutions commit to publishing accessible information online, citizens, civil society, and journalists can stay informed without having to engage in complicated or lengthy administrative procedures to access information.

As a final word, greater openness and transparency strengthens institutions, which ultimately leads to more satisfied citizens.

Dushica Nofitoska is a lawyer, who passed the European bar exam and completed her master's studies in International Law and International Relations. She currently works at the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association.



Photo Credit: Macedonian Young Lawyers Association

THE MEDIA AND THE PAST THAT IS NOT PASSING

TEOFIL PANČIĆ

We cannot meaningfully speak about the media and the challenge of dealing with the past in Serbia before we answer a few key questions: Is the past even over? Is our present nothing more than our past, thinly veiled? Can a society, and its media, properly deal with the past if it does not seriously deal with the present, due to a systematic inability to perceive processes and events from a more objective standpoint?

These questions are fairly abstract, so, let's answer them more concretely. It is incontestable that Serbia has been, for the last seven or eight years, governed by the same people who were prominent actors in the warmongering, nationalist politics of the 1990s. The same political parties that were in power then, although party names have changed, are still in power now. These political parties and their leadership do, from time to time, claim that they have changed their ways since those 'early days'. However, these sweetened claims rarely hold up under scrutiny.

How then should the media approach reporting on reality (be it the 'past' or 'present' one) in a country where everything that happens goes in circles and nothing ever ends or disappears, especially those things that really should disappear, like warmongering politics and its protagonists?

It seems that the media is stuck spinning in circles, just like the politicians. The journalists who were critical of the aggressive nationalist politics of the nineties are now critical of the consequences and persistent supporters of those politics. However, these journalists are a small group.

Only a handful of media outlets are willing to publish critical analysis of this nature, including one daily and two or three weekly newspapers, one cable TV station, a few webportals, the only real 'new' (novelty) medium we have since the nineties, and unfortunately no radio stations (the best one, by far, was shut down long ago). The number of critical journalists is roughly the same as during the 1990s. Of course, some of those journalists have grown tired or have given up and some have crossed to the other side, while other new, younger journalists have stepped in to fill their place. So, all in all, where have you been – nowhere, what have you done – nothing. Only a small minority of journalists are ready and willing to deal with and critically analyze both the present and the past in Serbia. They are an island in an ocean.

Who makes up the ocean then? On the one hand, you have the state and crypto-state conglomerates, the print and broadcast media that have been around for decades. They are willing to serve the master and political leadership of the moment, and they are particularly well-trained in following orders from the very people who persuaded them to shed their credibility and principles in the nineties. They are casually repeating the same violation, twenty years later.

On the other hand, an even greater abomination to the journalistic profession in Serbia is the increasing number of flashy, mutant tabloids, which publish cheap, sensationalist stories and look like the kind of newspapers that are freely distributed on public transport in the West. Here, they provide daily updates on the 'enemies' and 'haters' of Serbia, its president, and the like.

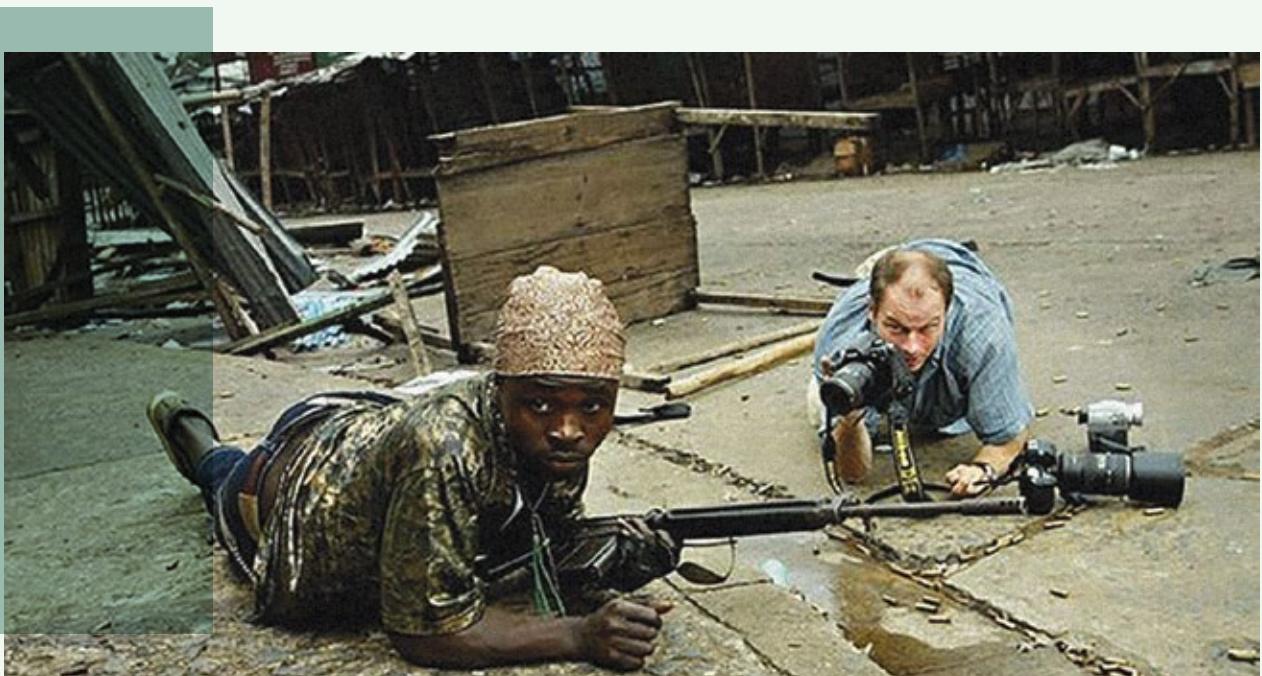


Photo Credits: Martin Adler killed in Mogadishu, Chris Hondros, Getty Images (2006)

The aforementioned conglomerates that serve the Serbian state saturate most of Serbia's media landscape. They create a powerful illusion of reality that holds a large proportion of Serbia's population captive and heavily influences public opinion. Therefore, most citizens of Serbia no longer have access to information that has not been passed through the regime-aligned media's reality-distorting filter. Over time, this becomes more than a political problem: it becomes, and is, a public health problem.

This issue is made manifest most intensely in the media's portrayal of so-called 'regional relations', that is, of Serbia's relations with its neighbors, particularly those who were once part of the former Yugoslavia. When it comes to the causes, background, and consequences of the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, today's dominant narrative in much of the Serbian media is almost identical to that of the nineties. According to this narrative, Serbia bears almost no responsibility, everyone else rushed to break away from Yugoslavia, tearing it apart, and the guilt lies solely with others; Croats are either open or latent Ustasha; Bosniaks are Islamic fundamentalists and/or runaway Serbs, and the Albanians are, well, ...Albanians. There is little space in Serbia's mediascape to blame the Serbian side or to claim that Serbia is culpable for any of the suffering or divisions which plague the region.

To ensure 'ideological continuity' with the nineties, many of those who were the pioneers of Slobodan Milošević's wartime propaganda machine are now in charge of the country's

most influential media outlets. For example, the editor-in-chief of the highly circulated, and essentially state-owned, daily *Večerenje novosti* headed the state-run TV network, notorious for its brutal war propaganda, in the nineties.

In such an environment, how to insist upon open and honest confrontation with the past? What could be achieved? It is easy to give a pessimistic answer to that question, as the state under Vučić provides an inexhaustible source of nihilism. However, the critical and professional journalists who made it through the nineties and recent decades, those who didn't take the easy road, will not give up so easily. Our job is to do the best we can. Even if things are changing at a slow pace on the macro level, there is cause for hope. The fact that the political elite whom we write about cannot hide their desire to erase us signifies that we do indeed make a difference. No matter how skillful they are at glossing over their pasts, they won't sleep soundly as long as we are here to remind them of what they were, what they have done, and what they are now.

Teofil Pančić, born in Skopje in 1965, is a journalist, columnist, critic, and culture editor at Belgrade weekly *Vreme* and a commentator at Radio Slobodna Evropa. He has published twenty one books with essays, columns, critiques and short stories. He has written for many relevant media outlets in the region, including *Feral Tribune*, *Peščanik*, *Naša borba*, *Autonomija*, *BH Dani*, *Dnevnik (Ljubljana)*, *Globus*, and *Jutarnji list*. He currently lives in Novi Sad.

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forumZFD is a recognized organization of the German Civil Peace Service, established in 1996. It trains international and local peace experts to work in post-/conflict regions alongside local partners to promote peaceful co-existence and non-violent conflict resolution. The western Balkans program focuses on dealing with the past, culture of remembrance, and establishing dialogue between opposing parties. The program encompasses peace education, supporting civil society, enhancing media capacities, among other activities that promote wider public discourse on the recent past.

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