

Reporting the Attacks on Dubrovnik in 1991, and the Recognition of Croatia

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Edited by

Renaud de la Brosse and Mato Brautović

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PREFACE

In 1991, Croatia suffered a brutal war of aggression waged by the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian and Montenegrin Territorial Defence forces and volunteers. During the war, a third of the country's territory was occupied, numerous crimes were committed, and the country suffered tremendous material damage. The Dubrovnik area and the entire Dubrovnik-Neretva County were the far southern military targets. Consequently, a large part of the Dubrovnik region was occupied, pillaged, and burned.

In its attempts to justify the aggression, in its efforts to impose its political concept, and during the military attack and occupation, the aggressor resorted to various modes of propaganda, which are carefully and thoroughly analysed in this book. The relevant analysis significantly contributed to revealing the truth about the attack on the farthest southern region of Croatia.

The best attempt to justify the military intervention arguing that the military operation was necessary in order to help the endangered Serbian population and protect the military facilities and members of the JNA in the area proved entirely wrong and inapplicable in the case of the Dubrovnik region since there were no military bases there and the meagre Serbian population was not at all endangered.

The attempts to present the defenders as foreign mercenaries or rare extremists in TV news and reports and the magazine cynically called War for Peace were also unsuccessful since, even in the most difficult conditions, the local radio and improvised print media still operated in Dubrovnik.

The people in the occupied area where no objective news was practically available and where manipulation was therefore possible, faced the hardest times. It is precisely there that the idea of establishing the new Dubrovnik Republic was proposed in order to persuade the citizens who did not flee from the Dubrovnik area to separate from Croatia. Fortunately, this calculated plan was also unsuccessful.

The propaganda used by the aggressor in its attempts to justify the war of aggression fought against Croatia, as shown in the book, did not succeed in covering up the criminal intentions, the brutality, and crimes committed by those who advocated the idea of Greater Serbia in the Dubrovnik area.

—Nikola Dobroslavić
Head of Dubrovnik-Neretva County

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INTRODUCTION

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In autumn 1991, the city of Dubrovnik underwent a siege of several weeks, marked by loss of human life and destruction. As with so many other martyr cities of today - like Aleppo or Kobani in Syria - this assault against ancient Ragusa illustrated the 'special' place devoted to urban areas within armed conflict. The destruction caused, in the context of such urban clashes, refers to the reality of established facts, as well as to their representations for the warring parties and their inhabitants. From this point of view, in an era marked by excessive media coverage of armed conflicts, opponents at stake aspire to something more than only military benefits strictly speaking. Of course, the city as such can represent an important strategic issue, because of the concentration of power, the wealth at its disposal, and its demographic weight (Tratnjek, 2011). Do not cities, today, concentrate the majority of the world's population? Thus the conquest or the capitulation of a city is seen as an indicator of military and political success, more so when it is a symbolic centre (capital, etc.).

But if the city is a place and object of the theatre of war, it has always been the subject of narrative discourse by the belligerent. As if a scene in a play, and through the media, the city has turned into a full discursive place - that of the existing representations between opposing parties in conflict. Urban warfare does not take place only in the city, it also takes place in the discursive construction through the media, and often in a context marked by the absence of neutral or free media... Twenty-five years on, it's clear that only the traditional media participated in the process of narration of the Yugoslav conflict. Today, we must of course add the role played by social networks in the coverage of urban conflicts, as in Syria, for example. These are no longer just journalists of traditional media that

broadcast images from the battlefield, at least when they manage to get there despite many difficulties, but more and more citizen journalists, and actors of the conflicts themselves. The novelty, in this case, arises from the incessant flow of information which emanates from more and more actors, that henceforth media professionals do not have time to check... Some, in this respect, are using the expression “information pollution” (Yaman, 2016) to describe this phenomenon on which professionals have little control. It is therefore sometimes impossible to see clearly what is relevant or important among the jumble of stories and figures, especially where these mobile sources are sometimes solely those of the conflicting parties. Besides the military action itself, belligerents have integrated the fact that they must also control the management of public and international perceptions of the nature of the conflict in which they are invested.

Going back to the siege of Dubrovnik, the aim was not its annihilation, as was the case for example for Stalingrad as part of the total war waged by the soldiers of the Third Reich against those of the Red Army. In this case, it was more of a targeted campaign of destruction intended to meet specific goals. One being to remove, by bombing, the symbolic places of exchange and of the possible meeting between diverse populations that ordinarily took place in the city. The former mayor of Belgrade, Bogdan Bogdanović (1993) coined the concept “Urbicide”, to express the orchestration of the massacre of cities in the former Yugoslavia, and the relentlessness against buildings seen as symbols of urbanity (libraries, places of worship, etc.).

The media images of the damage caused to the Pearl of the Adriatic have been deeply rooted in the minds of residents of the city itself, among outside observers in general, and of the international public opinion in particular. Out of the approximately 11,425 buildings damaged in Dubrovnik and its surroundings by the artillery of the Yugoslav People’s Army (Pavlović, 70), which was mainly composed of contingents of Montenegrins, there were a large number of cultural monuments (the Sponza Palace, the Rector’s Palace, Saint Blaise’s Church, the Franciscan Monastery, the Onofrio Fountain...) without any military value. Here, as in Sarajevo, the Urbicide consisted of the destruction of monuments and sites symbolic of the plural identity of city dwellers. François Chaslin (1997) defined it as “monumental hatred,” that is to say as a desire for “urban cleansing”, aspiring to “cleanse” the territory by denying the existence of the city by the destruction of its monuments.

As stated by S. Pavlović, the “government-controlled Montenegrin daily Pobjeda played a crucial role in “reminding” the citizens of Montenegro (...) of the “urgency” of defending the Motherland against the forces of fascism and oppression...” (2005, p. 60). Any dissenting voice was likened to an act of betrayal, and was denounced as such. A controlled media was one of the pillars that allowed the Presidents Bulatović from Montenegro and Milošević from Serbia, to broadcast a truncated view of the military situation on the ground. The military threat represented by Croatian troops in the region was grossly exaggerated. The underlying goal was to invite the Montenegrin population, and the Serbian one, to adhere to the military operations against a city that was indeed delivered to itself concerning its defence...

As in the case of other besieged cities like Vukovar, for example, military operations on the ground were presented in the media as defensive actions. The result is known, the nationalist sentiment has always been flattered, annihilating any credible form of opposition to the policy conducted against Dubrovnik, as a plot of Croatian territory coveted by the powers that be, in Podgorica particularly.

Structure of the book

This book is special in that it gives a combined scientific and practical overview of the subject matter, considering that the articles presented in it have been prepared by both, the scientists and the practitioners (war ministers, journalists, and propagandists) who were actually involved in the events that the media of the time reported about. By giving such a combined scientific and practical overview, this book represents not only a secondary, but also a primary source of information about the propaganda war waged during the conflict between Croatia and Serbia in 1991.

The book is structured in three parts: Global media, international relations, and strategic communication during wartime: The example of Dubrovnik, practices of wartime reporting from the Dubrovnik area: journalists between patriotism and profession and Media analysis on the subject of war in Dubrovnik and Croatia.

In the first part, the book examines the impact of the attack on Dubrovnik on the recognition of Croatia by the international community, the strategic steps taken by the Croatian Government in the media/propaganda war and the role of the diaspora in winning over the international public to favour the Croatian side.

In an article titled “Media-political paradigm: Dubrovnik and the creation of the Croatian state”, Dr. Albert Bing analyses foreign media perceptions of Dubrovnik during Croatia’s Homeland War (1991-1995) and its relevance to Croatia’s state independence. Besides an analysis of the basic features of contemporary media in shaping public opinion and their influence on political decision-making, the author also considers the phenomena of “accelerated history” and “real-time history.”

Croatian wartime Minister for Information Branko Salaj, in an article “Informing against aggression and foreign prejudice”, gives an overview of a weaker part’s defensive strategy, aimed at improving the general image of the attacked country, and untied to any direct military objectives or wartime disinformation activities. Salaj points out that during the war of aggression which the country suffered in the beginning of the 1990s, Croatia’s most serious information problem was how to reach foreign audiences with simple facts about the conflict. The Ministry of Information fulfilled this task by carrying out a programme of great openness to foreign journalists and rejecting the idea of war censorship.

Subsequent initiatives to create a solid professional media environment in a country lacking adequate democratic experience were somewhat less successful. Large semi-covert post-war foreign programmes of media support, but mainly instigating political change, largely failed to identify and address roots of instability in South East Europe.

Dr. Ivo Banac, in “Six hours apart: about the surrounded Dubrovnik from afar”, addresses the siege of Dubrovnik as seen by an outside “observer” - namely by himself as a researcher working in the United States. In the context of divided and largely passive Western policy, it is shown how the battle for public opinion has been important in Croatia and abroad. Starting from his own position, the author examines how the Croatian-American Diaspora started acting as an impromptu interpreter of Croat interests at that time. Even if they tried to act as a lobby on behalf of their homeland, it was, from the beginning, without any significant contact with the American media or for that matter with the relevant academic and political communities.

In the second part, the book examines the reporting practices used to cover the siege of Dubrovnik and the role of local and international journalists, non-governmental organisations and fixers. Special attention is devoted to the conflict which arises when professional journalistic standards and

patriotism clash, particularly if the journalist is reporting from his own town and his own family is in danger.

In an article titled “Journalism between patriotism and profession”, Dr. Stjepan Malović discusses the issue of strict adherence to professional standards in war reporting. The author argues that, in certain cases related to the Croatian side, journalists were forced to disregard professional standards, as well as that a journalist must report according to his/her personal conscience, professional dignity, and integrity, while applying professional reporting standards and principles of ethics.

Dr. Mato Brautović, Julijana Antić Brautović, MA, and Marko Potrebeca, MA, in an interesting contribution “News reporting about attack on Dubrovnik in 1991: The importance of being on location”, give an overview of the circumstances in which the reports about the war in Dubrovnik during the autumn of 1991 were prepared, presenting the differences in the working conditions of local and international journalists. The authors analysed the possible impact of official sources, limited access to information, and the role of fixers in specific war conditions, such as a siege.

In an article titled “Dissemination of Information as a Contribution to the City Defence”, war participant and Inter-University Centre War Secretary Berta Dragičević describes cooperation between the named non-governmental organisation and international journalists, specifically emphasising the role of Dr. Kathleen V. Wilkes, a world-renowned British philosopher, in the promotion of Dubrovnik.

“HTV studio Dubrovnik during the Homeland War 1991/92” is an article written by war correspondent Vedran Benić. He describes the activities and work of correspondents of Croatian Radio-television Dubrovnik (*HTV Dubrovnik*), the only permanent TV crew working in Dubrovnik during the first months of the war. Thanks to intelligent technical solutions contrived by the engineers and technicians of *Odašiljači i veze*, the *HTV Dubrovnik* crew managed, despite all the difficulties, to regularly broadcast footage from besieged Dubrovnik only 24 days after the Yugoslav Air Force had destroyed the TV transmitter on Mount Srđ, which was indispensable for broadcasting news reports.

The third part of the book is an analysis of the war propaganda used by the Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin media.

Dr. Renaud de la Brosse, in an article titled “Milošević’s propaganda during the attacks on Dubrovnik and Croatia”, defines war propaganda *per se* and the manner in which the media controlled by Serbian President Slobodan Milošević used it. De la Brosse states that Milošević took control of the Serbian media in order to impose his nationalist propaganda and justify the political project of creating a Greater Serbia – which would be home to all Serbian people. The media turned out to be an active tool that contributed to the preparation and conduct of war, against Croatia particularly. Dubrovnik, as well as Vukovar, were priority targets, both victims of and subject to propaganda war. The author describes the processes at stake, providing numerous examples of misbehaviours by media and journalists during that period.

Dr. Goran Cvjetinović, Romana John, MA, and Dr. Mato Brautović, in “Reporting about the attack on Dubrovnik by Montenegrin (bi)weeklys”, analyse the role of the Montenegrin media in the war waged during the 1990s, which has so far not been analysed at all, but rather superficially marginalised and belittled. The article gives an analysis of the texts published on the topic of the war in Dubrovnik in the period from 1 October to 30 November 1991 by two Montenegrin (bi)weeklys, *Nikšićke novine* and *Boka*.

In an article titled “The Serbian justification of wars in Yugoslavia through media: Reporting war in Croatia – Dubrovnik”, in which the authors give an overview and analysis of reports published by Serbian daily *Politika*, Janja Sekula Gibač and Slaven Ružić argue that *Politika*, as a medium strongly inclined to Slobodan Milošević’s regime, wrote about the war in Dubrovnik in a particularly inconsiderate and biased manner. *Politika*’s reports fully supported the aggressor and actions in an attempt to discredit the legally elected government of the Republic of Croatia and the small number of defenders that protected the Dubrovnik area.

In “The Serbian justification of wars in Yugoslavia through media: Reporting war in Croatia – Dubrovnik”, Nora Nimani Musa and Sadie Clifford examine the way the Serbian newspaper *Jedinstvo*, published in Kosovo, reported the war in Croatia at the beginning of the attacks on Croatian cities. The newspaper’s headlines and articles helped in the creation of public discourse among Serbs in Kosovo by representing the war as a war for freedom. This study of *Jedinstvo*’s front page articles shows how Serbs spread propaganda by representing the Croatian fighters as hooligans who looted and sacked the cities, and the Serbians as the military forces fighting for order against these rebels. They also

highlighted the number of troops from neighbouring countries who volunteered to join the Serbian army, in order to give the impression their cause was widely believed to be righteous.

In the last article called “Humanitarian activities in the Dubrovnik area in 1991 as reported in the Croatian media”, Julija Barunčić Pletikosić and Željka Križe Gračanin give an overview of the manner in which the media, particularly the print media, reported on the grave situation in Dubrovnik, and covered the related humanitarian campaigns and efforts.

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PART I:

**GLOBAL MEDIA, INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION DURING WARTIME:
THE EXAMPLE OF DUBROVNIK**

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEDIA-POLITICAL PARADIGM: DUBROVNIK AND THE CREATION OF THE CROATIAN STATE

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Summary

The focus of this work is an analysis of the foreign media perceptions of Dubrovnik during Croatia's Homeland War (1991-1995) and its relevance to Croatia's state independence. Besides an analysis of the basic features of contemporary media in shaping public opinion and their influence on political decision-making, the author also considers the phenomena of "accelerated history" and "real-time history."

Keywords: Dubrovnik and war, collapse of Yugoslavia, media and politics, wartime propaganda, Croatia's state independence, real-time history

Dubrovnik in 1991 as a media/political paradigm and real time history

"To besiege those who have besieged Dubrovnik with public opinion..." (d'Ormesson, 1992, p. 126)... This lucid thought was perhaps the most precise diagnosis of the significance of public perceptions of Dubrovnik contained in the reflection which summarises the efforts by the countless global personalities who raised their voices against the barbaric devastation of this historical city and the imperilment of its residents in 1991. This "defensive formula" was coined by the French humanitarian André Glucksmann (otherwise an intellectual who earned his doctorate on

a thesis rather appropriately entitled “The Philosopher in the City”).¹ Glucksmann, Jean d’Ormesson (writer and academic), together with Bernard Kouchner and others, formed the French contingent in an international humanitarian “brigade” whose informal members decided to assist the besieged city through activism. Their objective was, as formulated by d’Ormesson, “to attract the world’s attention to Dubrovnik’s fate.” In order to achieve this, he was prepared to take deliberate action to provoke media attention; in an interview published in 1992, he announced that if impeded by the blockade, he would descend into the city by parachute. He explained the purpose of such – targeted – actions using the idea that today, in the “modern era,” communication is so potent that it is possible to halt war by means which are no longer within the domain of war but rather peace (d’Ormesson, 1992, p. 126).

Besieging those who had besieged Dubrovnik with public opinion implied the attraction of media attention and the provocation of political responses. As formulated by linguist Dubravko Škiljan in a study of the semantics of war, war constituted “a multi-dimensional phenomenon,” and one of the vital dimensions of this phenomenon is the “media presence,” not only in reporting, but also in “the production of wartime reality itself” (Škiljan, 2000, p.177). The latter postulate implies the influence which the media may exert on the course of a war by forming public opinion and policy. The case of Dubrovnik at war was just one of the media vignettes in the kaleidoscope of complex stories which accompanied the dramatic collapse of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav state. Nonetheless, after the siege and the frequent attacks on the city which culminated in the autumn and winter of 1991, Dubrovnik attained the status of a first-class news item on the global stage and became a value-laden criterion for political assessments.

This metamorphosis, crucial to an understanding the importance of Dubrovnik’s reception in Croatia’s process for gaining state independence, requires a brief overview of some of the general aspects which link the historical context of interactions between events, the media and politics. First, there is the phenomenon of “accelerated history,” of which the media are an integral component as “a part of the diplomatic-political process”; this is a correlation of the exceptionally dynamic alteration of the

¹ One of the paradigms that would be imposed as a stereotype of the Yugoslav wars was the motif of besieged cities (Vukovar, Dubrovnik, Zadar, Sarajevo...), wherein the city was often interpreted as a cosmopolitan entity confronting the ethnically uniform armies (often with a rural character) besieging them. On this, see Belaj, V. (1992). See also Bougarel, X. (1999).

qualitatively different events (“accelerated history”) which characterised Yugoslavia’s demise (Plevnik, 2003, p. 87), and the possibility of their interactive observation, wherein integrated technologies play an increasingly prominent role. This primarily communicative aspect in which the media play a major role ties into the tendency of shorter lapses between the gathering, transmission, and processing of information on an event – practically within the framework of “real-time (history)”; even as an event is ongoing, scholarly works appear which analyse them, and their synthesis opens new historical perspectives as well. The appearance of integrated media – and their most vigorous aspect in the final decade of the twentieth century was the development of the Internet – reflected a new dimension in the process of global democratisation (even though one may equally speak of the possibilities for public manipulation). This question also became relevant to the formation of two media paradigms during the siege of Dubrovnik in 1991: the Croatian defensive paradigm, represented by Dubrovnik, and the aggressor paradigm, which encapsulated the Greater Serbian ambitions of Slobodan Milošević and the Yugoslav People’s Army.

In the broader historical context, events tied to Yugoslavia’s collapse and international circumstances overlapped with the centuries-long process of democratisation of Western civilisation which was certainly very closely tied to the development of free media and the involvement of public opinion in policy (Kissinger, 2000, p. 144). Even though this is a generally-accepted fact today, this trend assumed global proportions only at the onset of the twentieth century, and experienced its culmination in the past two decades (which coincided with events such as Yugoslavia’s break-up). The emergence of the United States as a superpower on the world stage in the First World War validated the Wilsonian precedent in extolling global public opinion as a moral authority to oppose secretive backroom deals and the *Realpolitik* of the nineteenth century (Kissinger, 2000, p. 207). In the words of contemporary *Realpolitik* guru Henry Kissinger, “leaders are obliged to deal with constituencies that tend to receive their information via visual images. All this puts a premium on emotion and on the mood of the moment at a time that demands rethinking of priorities and an analysis of capabilities” (Kissinger, 2000, p. 786).

The contemporary phenomenon of symbiosis between the media, public opinion, and politics proved to be a vital factor in the collapse of the Yugoslav state. The question of interpretation of events, particularly of a complex war (actually the series of Yugoslav wars), as elaborated by Škiljan has shown many ambiguities and controversies, which in the

historical context of the confrontation between *Realpolitik* and universal principles, in Kissinger's words, have followed history "from Abyssinia in 1935 to Bosnia in 1992." Despite the unprecedented spread of the possibility of observing events and the commensurate cognitive perspectives, the problem of attaining a consensus on many burning issues in international relations, including the problem of sanctioning the criminal behaviour of individual states, remains an open problem. However, the contemporary phenomenon of synergy between the media, the public, and policy at its base creates a potent confrontation between empathy and public assessments based on universal values and the stance which reduces the human community to "the nihilistic banality of *homo homini lupus*" (Arendt, 1996, p. 214).

Internationalisation of the Yugoslav crisis and the media

The violent collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s provoked considerable consternation in developed democracies. From a state which had a reputation as the most successful communist experiment in the imagination of the international order, Yugoslavia became virtually overnight a "temporary by-product of the collapse of European empires" (after the First World War) and a Pandora's Box which it was best to ignore. At the moment of liberal democracy's triumph, the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the proclamation of a new world order and the appearance of unity among Europe's developed democracies, the Yugoslav reminder of the recent quality of European history in the twentieth century (which Zbigniew Brzezinski described as the "era of European civil war") seemed an inappropriate, vulgar gesture which dared impinge upon the idyll of the end of history. The event was all the more unpleasant because it was not occurring in some far corner of the world, but in Europe's immediate backyard.

The image of dying Yugoslavia in the early 1990s in the perceptions of Westerners was perhaps best sketched by American historian Sabrina P. Ramet in the title to one of her books which followed this event: *The Balkan Babel* (in Webster's Dictionary, one of the definitions of the term *Babel* – here linked to the proverbially problematic term Balkan, is: *noisy confusion*) (Ramet, 1992; Ramet, 1999). In the cacophony of news in which the global media attempted to convey events in Yugoslavia, many stereotypes emerged, in which it was no easy task to discern "who's who" in the complex Yugoslav story. Even in a superficial perusal of the foreign media when tensions were rising in Yugoslavia, it is easy to observe a

priori aloofness toward the political motives of “nations in transition.” A stereotype which dominated the media of the politically most influential countries when the Yugoslav crisis began to escalate can be summarised using a headline from *The Los Angeles Times*, which told readers that “Fanatics shatter Europe’s Humpty Dumpty.” The diagnosis of this “shattering” was simple: “Nationalism that was cramped down by communist leaders for more than four decades burst out last year in the guise of democratic freedom. The Balkan interpretation holds that, having long been denied national identity, each ethnic group is now entitled to expression in the outcome” (Williams, 1991, May 19).

In the eyes of the Western media, the conflict which ensued had a “distinctly Balkan flavour, a tangled mix of obscure motives, ethnic hatreds, bluff and counterbluff.” The explanation for this diagnosis was certainly found in the experiences of the past, and added to these were instructive suggestions on how to deal with the “latest” episodes of current Balkan disputes: “the history of the Balkans is written in blood. The Serbs and Croats have hated each other for centuries, the Hatfields and McCoy’s of a murderous backwater that has long threatened the peace of Europe. Now the region where World War I began could present Europe with its first big conflict of the post-cold-war period. This time there is a crucial difference: the outside world is not taking sides (...) Europe doesn’t need another economic basket case, and in the case of Yugoslavia, it could have six of them to deal with (...) the crisis in Yugoslavia also may set a bad example for nationalists and central governments in other countries with disgruntled minorities...” (Watson, 1991).

Attempts to rationalise the problem of perceptions of the “Yugoslav crisis” constituted a long-term process which never definitively elaborated the media stereotypes established in 1991. The paradigm of a static understanding of Yugoslav unity was at the very least just as problematic as the stereotype of the “eternally chaotic Balkans”; the media stereotypes which accompanied the outbreak of the “Yugoslav crisis” became prejudices which served as a demagogic pretence to avoid the problem. Ultimately, this stance by the West led to a series of tragic repercussions.

The media and the establishment of the Croatian state

Besides organising its defence after the onset of the aggression in 1991, Croatia was confronted with the challenge of legitimising its position in the international community. The process of dismantling a formerly common state implied the transformation of the existing republic

institutions into new state institutions of authority. Given the complex circumstances surrounding the collapse of Yugoslavia, this was not a simple task, particularly given the extraordinarily vital role of the foreign media in the formulation of public perceptions of this event (Bing, 2009, p. 50). Upon the establishment of the new government in Croatia, institutions which were supposed to respond to the need to legitimise Croatian interests were also established. Despite varying success and divergent approaches to reporting (depending on political influences), an important contribution to these efforts was made by the newly-formed Ministry of Information, the new Croatian National News Agency (HINA), and the Croatian Information Centre, under whose auspices the Foreign Press Bureau (FPB) operated.² A propagandistic approach was apparent in the work of individual institutions and media which indicated transition difficulties, i.e. the problem of aligning the media aspects of political culture with the standards of developed democracies. Over time, this approach proved not only a problematic way to confront Greater Serbian aspirations, but also a chronic source of discord. The view held by the authorities that the media are a suitable instrument for denouncing political opponents proved to be a problematic manifestation of continuity with rigid authoritarian policies (which prior to the introduction of political pluralism were successfully opposed by the media in Croatia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s), and this did not go unnoticed among foreign observers of Croatian society's transition (Thompson, 1999).

The individuals filling some of the most important posts relevant to the promotion of Croatian interests abroad were appointed according to the principle of political party affiliation (rather than qualifications), which provoked dissatisfaction among a part of the Croatian public, and particularly among the ranks of the Croatian émigré intelligentsia (Bing, 2007, p. 179). According to political analyst Višnja Starešina, Croatian representative in the United States Frane Vinko Golem's associates described

² Even those these – information-oriented – institutions were headed by individuals perceived as political émigrés (with differing political affinities), such as Branko Salaj or Ante Beljo, who were, not without grounds, seen as holding the aspiration (unpopular abroad) to depose Yugoslavia, they demonstrated an openness to the media. According to Jerry Blaskovich, “In sharp contrast to many of their colleagues, they were well aware of the value of truth in the media and democracy” (Blaskovich, 1998). Institutions such as the Foreign Press Bureau demonstrated a high level of professionalism and credibility, which did not pass unnoticed in international media circles. This was, for example, acknowledged by Pulitzer Prize winning reporter Roy Gutman of *Newsday* (Blaskovich, 1998).

him “as an honest, simple, and above all frugal man,” who was “exceptionally loyal to Tuđman.” However, “he knew nothing about diplomacy, nor did anybody tutor him prior to his arrival”; “his spoken English was passable, but his writing skills were poor” (Starešina, 2004, p. 77). President Tuđman himself was the primary generator of misunderstanding of Western media culture; his efforts to personally represent the state he headed were not the most successful. Tuđman’s book *Horrors of War: Historical Reality and Philosophy* at the time of its U.S. publication was ranked 146,567 in sales on Amazon.com (*Globus*, 1998). On the other hand, the most influential person representing Croatia in the United States was Croatian journalist and writer Slavenka Drakulić (Letica, 1997). However, due most certainly to her political opposition to Tuđman’s views, she was actually not included in the first edition of the lexicon of Croatian writers published in Croatia (HRT1, 2004).

That approach to the Western media was not without consequences to Croatia’s presentation of itself abroad. As noted in his subsequent writings by President Tuđman’s advisor at the time, Mario Nobile, summarising Croatia’s official relations with the U.S. at the beginning of the 1990s: “Croatia did not, unfortunately, place sufficient emphasis on publicity in New York and throughout North America, even though the role of the United Nations and the U.S. was crucial to resolving the crisis. The Croatian authorities were more obsessed with the status symbols of hard-won independence rather than on deployment of resources to end the war and facilitate reconstruction” (Nobile, 2000, p. 266). The consequence of these chronic problems in Croatia’s presentation abroad was the never entirely overcome tendency to equate the aggressor with the victim.

The role of Dubrovnik in changing the media paradigm

The fate of the two most outlying bastions of Croatia’s defence – Vukovar and Dubrovnik – was the most decisive in influencing a change in the world public’s perception of Yugoslav circumstances in 1991 (Silber, 1991; Bing, 2009, p. 50). The fall of Vukovar, followed by massacres, expulsion of its residents, and the removal of Vukovar POWs to unknown destinations, was accompanied by a great deal of disinformation intended to conceal and manipulate the truth.³ But in the case of Dubrovnik, the

³ One such piece of disinformation was the report of the alleged massacre of 41 Serbian children in Borovo Naselje by Croatian soldiers. The obvious propaganda aim was to validate the actions of the Yugoslav Army and Serb paramilitaries and to conceal the true crimes perpetrated against captives which soon followed. This

media did not exhibit the same doubts. Even though at one point during the shelling, Croatian humanitarian Dr. Slobodan Lang responded to protests by those preoccupied with protecting cultural heritage by saying that Dubrovnik's historical fortified walls also serve to protect the city's residents; the image of this ancient pearl enshrouded in a thick cloud of smoke became a media motif much more potent than the veritable inflation of human casualties that could be found at every step in occupied Croatia.

The most important element in the transmission of information was the image. As explained as long ago as 1922 by Walter Lippmann in his seminal work *Public Opinion*, the foundation of successful media communication is the empathic connection between "the world outside" and "the pictures in our heads" (taken from the title of his book's introduction: "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads") (Jergović, 2004, p. 187). The motif of imperilled Dubrovnik as, crudely stated, "the pretty picture" desecrated by some vandal without doubt corresponded to the rudimentary foundation of receiving, processing, and accepting information on a criminal act, in Lippmann's words, as a clear "picture in our head." The picture of the attack on "the Croatian Venice" – as Dubrovnik was portrayed (in words and photographs) by individual journalists, was a message in and of itself, but nonetheless simply a form. The genuine content was provided by many individuals from a diversity of backgrounds, who experienced the attack on Dubrovnik as an attack on a complex of civilisational values. D'Ormesson's exclamation uttered in besieged Dubrovnik in 1991 – "A new Europe is being born here!" (Lang, 2008) – threw down the gauntlet before the members of the European Community, which at the time were attempting to promote the economic integration (of particular national interests) into a union that would not only share interests but also a set of values. During the critical autumn and winter of 1991, the city's defence by arms was bolstered by the written word, a concert held in the besieged city, a conference of scholars... and, as needed, the readiness of an activist and respected intellectual (d'Ormesson) to make a precarious parachute jump.

Appeals issued by Ivan Supek and Kathrin Wilkes, the tireless advocacy of humanitarians Slobodan Lang and Bernard Kouchner, and the efforts of

false story originated with Belgrade Television, and was picked up by *Reuters* (reporter Goran Mikić) and then published in a number of media, e.g. *The Chicago Tribune* (1991). Serbs, Croats level new charges of war-time massacres (Gorin, 2008).

emergent Croatian diplomacy and distinguished foreign politicians such as Emma Bonino and Claiborne Pell created a global network of guardians of Dubrovnik which was rooted in universal humanitarian, but also civilisational, values. Images of the city's suffering coupled with a virtual choir of countless major personalities, from members of the Pugwash Group to Nobel laureates – whose call for an end to the war in Croatia was published by *The New York Times* in late December 1991 – gave succour to the city's small number of defenders and made the aggressor waver.⁴ By linking the struggle for freedom with universal values, the *Dubrovnik paradigm* conferred legitimacy to Croatia's positions. Lang's admonition that Serbian military actions were "The War Against Three Crosses" corresponded to a minor but significant adjustment of the media picture of the Croats in the Yugoslav chaos (Blaskovich, 1998, p. 65). Dubrovnik was no longer just "a tourist attraction (...) from Yugoslavia"; it was also a historical cosmopolitan hub - "a medieval walled city on the Adriatic (...), for centuries a meeting place of three great civilisations, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim" ("each contributed to its artistic heritage"); Dubrovnik became a vital point of distinction in the Yugoslav conflicts: "Currently the city is being shelled by Serbian troops who are trying to wrest it away from its Croatian defenders" (*Anonymous*, 1991). One of the chroniclers of the war in Croatia, American physician Jerry Blaskovich, in his study on the foreign media during the war in Croatia, astutely stated: "The Serbs made a cardinal mistake when they besieged Dubrovnik in the beginning of October, 1991. The Yugoslav conflict

⁴ The role of Dubrovnik ("an ancient city which for a thousand years has preserved its freedom though surrounded by powerful forces") as one of the world centres for the promotion of the anti-war Pugwash Group was underlined by Ivan Supek together with the members of the Croatian Pugwash Group in the journal *Encyclopedia moderna*. In their appeal (July 9, 1991) addressed to their "Dear Pugwash Friends," they condemned the "neo-Stalinist regime of Serbia" and warned that the "the new association of free Europe cannot be created by insisting on preservation of political entities created in the past for various reasons, entities which did not fulfil the expectations and interests of their people". "Dear Pugwash Friends", (Ivan Supek and Paolo Budinich, eds.), *Encyclopedia Moderna* 36, Year XII, 1991, Croatian Academy of Arts and Science, Zagreb and Trieste International Foundation for Scientific Progress and Freedom, Trieste, 44-45. The same journal also contained older reports on the organisation of a Pugwash symposium in Dubrovnik on "Science and Ethics" (1975) and "The Dubrovnik-Philadelphia Statement" (1976) which "also incorporates material from a report entitled Humanistic Morality". See *Ibid*, 157-160, 181-186. The appeal from roughly one hundred Nobel laureates calling for an end to the aggression against Croatia was published in *The New York Times*, 14 Jan. 1992.

might have remained a backwater civil disorder in the eyes of the media if the Dubrovnik attack and siege hadn't drawn international attention. For the first time the media became sceptical of Serbian justifications for their war" (Blaskovich, 1998, p. 70).

The shelling of Dubrovnik, accompanied by official statements made by the city's attackers about the "burning of automobile tyres" in the city – as an allegedly contrived attempt by "Ustaša" propaganda to discredit the "liberation" operation by the Yugoslav People's Army – aroused the genuine astonishment of many reporters who witnessed a rather different state of affairs on the scene.⁵ The demonstration of the struggle against "the special war" using leaflets about 'Ustaša criminals' did not fare better (Biserko, 2006). Attempts to use the media to prove the "supra-national" character of the Yugoslav Army's military campaign by broadcasting the Balkan epic motif of *gusle*-playing above besieged Dubrovnik – which was apparently supposed to evoke memories of the national liberation character of the World War II Partisan movement – was another complete fiasco (in this regard, a bizarre detail which may be noted is the 'marketing' move by the German television network RTL, which decided to air a series of Yugoslav war films just as the Yugoslav conflict broke out). Essentially the actions taken by the Yugoslav Army's propagandists actually did more for the Croatian cause than the totality of Croatian publicity.

The evident difference between "lead" and "gold" finally spurred significant changes in media paradigms. The attention accorded by the most respected European media to the situation in Dubrovnik can be seen in the example of articles contained in the British newspaper *The Independent* at the end of October 1991. Notable British foreign affairs commentator Marcus Tanner filed a summary report from Belgrade on "the danger to Dubrovnik." Together with a detailed report on circumstances in the besieged city, compiled on the basis of wire reports, Tanner provided a series of details which set the criteria for evaluating this event. Dubrovnik

⁵ The airing of images of Dubrovnik in flames on Belgrade Television was accompanied by comments in which Western cameramen in particular are accused of manipulation; that "automobile tyres were set on fire in front of the cameras to convince people that the city was burning." A "moderated" interpretation of this event in August 1992 was offered by Belgrade Television's chairman of the board, who "acknowledged that some damage was inflicted upon the city, but with the following caveat: *Only four houses were destroyed in Dubrovnik, all owned by Serbs.*"

was depicted as a city that not only belonged to Croatia, but also to European and world heritage: “the spirit of Europe.” As a universal bond between European values and the motif of the city’s defenders, he cited the “Latin inscription on Fort Lovrijenac: ‘Liberty is not to be sold for any kind of gold’.” Tanner countered statements made by Yugoslav Army officers that reports of Dubrovnik’s shelling were part of a “diabolical plan” to impugn the army with wire reports sent from the Dubrovnik area which contained information on attacks on the city, including its historical core. Citing reports from European Community monitors, Tanner also warned of the suffering of the besieged population and noted that besides the motive to conquer there was no other reason to attack this Croatian city, because there were “neither a substantial Serbian minority nor federal military base which the army can claim to be protecting” (Tanner, 1991).

Tanner’s colleague Phil Davidson was reporting directly from Dubrovnik at the same time. Davidson reminded readers of the peacetime image of the city as a centre of world culture by citing Berta Dragičević, “of the city’s Inter University Centre”, who “pined for the days when Shakespeare was played in the open air during the summer festival: ‘Derek Jacobi played the lead a few years ago,’” she said. ‘We used to play *Hamlet* on the ramparts of Fort Lovrijenac. It’s our own Elsinore’” (Davidson, 1991). Several days later, the same reporter noted news and credible testimony to the fate of the city and its inhabitants, Britain’s Ambassador in Belgrade who “along with diplomats from four Western nations (...) saw the suffering of the people of Dubrovnik at first hand yesterday”; after visiting refugee centres for those who fled their combat areas to the safety of the walled city, the Dutch Ambassador said that although the shooting had stopped for several days, ‘the destruction of the soul of Dubrovnik is going on.’” (Davidson, 1991).

Prompted by the suffering of Dubrovnik and its inhabitants, some of the most influential bards of world journalism raised their voices against this barbaric assault, censuring their governments for their silence. “Suppose that at this moment Venice were being shelled and bombed in a civil war, its treasured monuments menaced, its population starved. Would the Western world be silent?” thundered Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times*, in his article “Where Is the Outrage?” (Lewis, 1991). Lewis noticed that “the tragedy that has overtaken Yugoslavia is the direct result of the ambitions of the Serbian Communist leader, Slobodan Milošević.” The shelling of Dubrovnik, and “it is hard to see what military value it has as a target (...), best illustrates the nature of Mr. Milošević’s war.” Lewis concluded by warning that despite the fact that “the United States and its