

**FIGHT THE POWER: THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN
INDEPENDENT ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN THE
DEMOCRATIZATION OF SERBIA**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the major contributions of the Serbian independent electronic media to the struggle for the democratization of Serbia throughout the 1990s. The thesis also examines some aspects of the transformation of the media in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and outlines several different theoretical approaches to answering the question: *Can media influence social change?* The thesis further describes the development of Serbian independent electronic media from small outlets, such as *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B*, to a strong association of independent local radio and TV stations. Due to institutionalization and international support, the independent radio and TV stations not only survived, but became important parts of the civil resistance movement against Slobodan Milošević's regime. Finally, in the second half of the 1990s, a wide coalition of Serbian independent media, NGOs and oppositional political parties succeeded in creating the conditions for the regime's overthrow.

DEDICATION

To Gari, Krca and the generation that ceased to exist

Ivan and Bojan, Mitar, Saša, Orhan
Nenad and Zoran, Dušan, Vojkan, Ljuba
In the past days we conquered the pride
In the past days we lost everything

Milan Mladenović (1958-1994)

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INTRODUCTION

We were more a movement than a medium. From the beginning, we understood that our power does not originate from the broadcasting, but from the broad movement of different segments of civil society. Accordingly, the first line of defense was far from the center of *Radio B 92*. In order to break *Radio B 92*, Milošević had to break a whole movement of civil resistance that finally proved to be an impossible task.
Veran Matić, Editor-in-Chief of *Radio B 92*¹

From 1990 to 2000, a decade-long struggle for democracy in Serbia was carried out not only by the oppositional political parties, but by a broad social movement of civil resistance. Undoubtedly, one of the most important segments of this movement was the independent media. Despite all their disadvantages, such as poor and outdated equipment, limited transmission capabilities, lack of financial resources, and constant pressure from the regime, the electronic media (Serbian independent radio and TV stations) successfully upheld the popular revolt and directed it towards political change. Independent journalism in Yugoslavia did not have a long well-established tradition since the second part of the twentieth century was marked by communist rule and the absence of essential political freedoms, particularly freedom of speech. However, an entirely new socio-political environment emerged in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the subsequent introduction of the multi-party system in 1990 in Yugoslavia and Serbia motivated some journalists to start to apply the rules of journalistic objectivity to their reporting. Moreover, being aware of the significance that media have on forming public

¹ Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003.

opinion, independent journalists in Serbia openly supported democratic change and contributed to the formation of the democratic movement

A careful reader of this thesis can notice two contested terms introduced in the previous paragraph that need to be addressed with a certain analytical approach. These are the notions of *democracy* and *journalistic objectivity*. Indeed, before I present the media aspect of the dramatic struggle for democracy in Serbia in the last decade of the twentieth century I will briefly outline what democracy means in contemporary political theory and what is the essence of a democratic ideal. As Keane (1991) pointed out: “The struggle to control the definition of democracy is an intrinsic feature of modern societies” (p. 168). According to him “at a minimum...democratic procedures include equal and universal adult suffrage; majority rule and guarantees of minority rights, which ensure that collective decisions are approved by a substantial number of those entitled to make them; the rule of law; and constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly and expression of other liberties, which help ensure that the people expected to decide or to elect those who decide can choose among real alternatives” (Keane, p. 168). Yet, this minimal definition of *constitutional* or *representative democracy* does not cover the notion of *genuine democracy* or the democratic ideal of total participation of citizens in the political decision-making. In support of this, Lee (1995) accurately observes that “genuine democracy demands a system of constant interaction with all the people, accessibility at all levels, a public ethos which allows conflicting ideas to contend, and which provides for full participation in reaching consensus on socio-political, economic and political goals” (Lee, p. 2). One of the most important elements of genuine democracy goes beyond the realm of politics and includes equal access to the resources

for citizens' self-empowerment. Hamelink (1995) defines these essential conditions of self-empowerment as follows: "access to and use of the resources that enable people to express themselves, to communicate those expressions to others, to exchange ideas with others, to be informed about events in the world, to create and control the production of knowledge and to share the world's sources of knowledge" (p. 20). To conclude, *genuine* or *participatory democracy* should be a frame for the process of cultural production and communication on the global level.

Without a doubt, the history of Western democracy has already proven that genuine democracy requires more than a representative political system that excludes the widest possible participation of citizens in public matters - *res publica*. The vision of democracy that has for decades been desired by political opposition and dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia as well, is definitely the ideal of a genuine people's participatory democracy or, as it had been called in theory – the *ideal of civil society*. In the previously cited study *Media and Democracy* (1991), Keane also stresses that modern democracy requires "... building of a pluralistic, self-organizing (international) civil society which is coordinated and guaranteed by multilayered (supra-national) state institutions, which are in turn held permanently accountable to civil society by mechanisms – political parties, legislatures, communication media – which keep open the channels between state and social institutions" (p. 169).

Consequently, the entire section of Chapter One of this thesis is dedicated to the struggle for establishment of a civil society in the post-communist environment of Eastern Europe during the period of political transition. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic entered the transitional period with similar expectations and finally emerged

with similar, mostly disappointing outcomes. Instead, on the same road to democratic transformation, Yugoslavia and Serbia (despite their comparative economic and political advantages) ended up in a bloody civil war and economic destruction. The last section of Chapter One briefly presents the reasons for this *derailed transition*.

In the beginning of Chapter Two, I will address the second contested term, *journalistic objectivity*, in an attempt to identify it in the journalistic practice of the emerging independent electronic media in Serbia in the nineties.

My professional career in the media started a few years before the first independent media outlets in Serbia were established. Working as a news producer for *TV Belgrade*², I was involved in the production of daily news and witnessed the manipulation of media content by Milošević's spin-doctors. The absence of an independent journalistic voice and alternative sources of information at the end of the eighties contributed to the successful manipulation of the media by the regime, which laid the foundation for nationalistic homogenization. The emergence of the first independent TV and radio stations was an important turning point in the change in public opinion of Serbian citizens. Indeed, by presenting a different picture of reality and giving a different meaning to the media content, the independent electronic media for the first time questioned the general social consensus previously granted to Milošević's regime.

As S. Milivojević (2003) pointed out: "The only communication form promoted through the regime-controlled media was a dialogue between the leader and the masses. Every alternative form of communication, such as open political discussion between the ruling party and the opposition, was denounced as an unpatriotic activity" (Interview with

² *TV Belgrade* was one of the three state-controlled television stations in Serbia.

Snježana Milivojević, January 15, 2003). The first independent media outlets provided an open public forum for the dialogue between the ruling party officials and the first leaders of the opposition. It is not an exaggeration to say that these TV and radio stations served as schools for democracy, both for citizens and politicians. As the influence of the independent media on the formation of public opinion grew, Milošević's regime put more pressure on them. For that purpose he used all available legal and illegal methods. The oppression of the media culminated at the end of the nineties, especially after the passing of the notorious Public Information Act in 1998. Draconian fines established by the Public Information Act financially destroyed some of independent newspapers and media outlets, but that was not the worst. Since the emergence of the independent media, independent journalists were denounced as non-patriots and during the NATO bombing campaign in 1999, even as traitors. Some of them were threatened, arrested, kidnapped, beaten and killed. *Radio B 92* and *Nezavisna Televizija (Independent Television) Studio B*, the subjects of this study, were closed down by force a few times during the nineties. Chanted as slogans during the numerous street protests, the names of these stations became symbols of resistance. Until the end of a decade-long struggle for democracy the independent media endured many difficulties and finally set the stage for the regime change in October 2000.

For the last couple of years, various books and studies (sociological, historical, political and communication) have been published on the topic of the independent media in Serbia and their activity during the decade of Milošević's rule. It has been argued on several occasions that the independent media were the most serious opposition to the undemocratic regime, even more effective than the fragmented official political

opposition whose leaders were often unable to form a consensus about the strategy of political action against the regime. Because Milošević was acutely aware of the strength of the independent media, he used all available methods of repression against independent journalists. Consequently, a great deal of personal courage was necessary for the job of professional reporting during the most critical periods of political turmoil in Serbia, including the NATO bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999.

This research is motivated by and dedicated to those journalists and media workers who jeopardized their lives and the lives of their families in order to defend the dignity of the profession and help the movement for democratization. Being personally involved in this movement during the first part of the nineties, as a citizen by participating in the street protests and anti-war actions, and in the second part of the decade, as a professional journalist by writing critically intoned articles for the independent press in the Serbian diaspora, I feel a strong moral obligation to contribute my voice to a critical evaluation of the role of the Serbian independent media in the process of democratization. Hence, this thesis is my effort to shed more light on the activity of the independent electronic media, mainly *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B*, in the struggle for democracy and civil society in Serbia.

A key research objective of this study is *to determine major contributions of the independent electronic media to the struggle for democratization of Serbia during the period of Slobodan Milošević's rule*. As previously mentioned, the central object of the study is the activities of the two most prominent electronic media outlets, *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92*. *NTV Studio B* had a significant impact on public opinion in Serbia (mainly in the capital Belgrade) in the early nineties, and *Radio B 92* was crucial for the

fostering of social unrest in the latter part of the last decade. I will also look briefly at the post-Milošević period in Serbia, between the years 2000 and 2004, which is defined by the process of media transition and media democratization that is still underway.

This study consists of three chapters. The first chapter is an overview of the political transition and media transformation in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It examines the practical implications of a theoretical concept of civil society and its (non) realization in the social reality of a post-communist environment. In addition, by reviewing the recent literature on the Eastern European media transition, I attempt to answer the chicken and egg question: *Do media influence social change or is it the other way round?* The last section of the first chapter is a brief look at the derailed transition in Yugoslavia, from the period of national homogenization and civil war to the end of the last communist dictatorship in Europe in October 2000.

The second chapter presents the emergence and early development of the first independent radio and TV stations in Serbia. It covers their activity during the first multi-party elections in 1990 and the role of *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* in the street demonstrations and anti-war campaigns in 1991/92. The second section of this chapter explores the institutionalization and internationalization of the activity of the independent electronic media and, the so-called *Internet Revolution*, which occurred during the mass protests in the winter of 1996/97.

The third chapter focuses on the repression of the independent media by Milošević's regime and the independent media's resistance in the last part of the nineties that intensified particularly after the passage of the notorious Public Information Act in

the fall of 1998 and the NATO bombing campaign in the spring of 1999. It concludes with the appearance of the broad movement of civil resistance and public revolt which culminated in the fall of 2000 with the overthrow of Milošević's regime.

My study of the independent media in Serbia is based on the historiography method. Accordingly, I have used documentary research to obtain relevant facts and information. In my research, I was guided by the fundamental notion of historiography that no social fact can be understood apart from its history or, in other words, any social phenomenon must be understood in its historical context. In the field of communication science, as Schudson pointed out: "Communication must be analyzed with reference to the organization and social uses of technologies in specific historic settings; the technologies themselves must be seen as social and cultural practices" (Schudson, 1991, p. 189). The main question I address in my thesis is how media influence social changes in a specific historical context; in this case – how the independent electronic media have influenced social and political change in Serbia in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Since all historians tend to write narratives that organize data in the cause and effect chain of events, my thesis is written in the form of a story that encompasses major important political and social events in Serbia in the nineties. In fact, these events are analyzed in connection with the independent media in terms of their impact on the media and vice versa. In addition to telling the story of the independent media's struggle for democracy and civil society in Serbia, I will try to answer the following questions: *How did the Serbian independent electronic media maintain their existence in the hostile environment created by Milošević's regime? How did Serbian independent electronic*

media maintain their popular appeal despite the constant denunciation by the regime media? What was the relationship of the Serbian independent electronic media to nationalistic euphoria and war propaganda? What was the relationship of the Serbian independent electronic media to the broader movement of civil resistance in Serbia? What was the relationship of the Serbian independent electronic media with the international government and non-government organizations? and finally, What were the factors that led to the success of the Serbian electronic media under the conditions of Milošević's soft dictatorship?

In addition to primary research into documents and secondary analysis of the published and unpublished materials of other researchers, I have used the oral history method for my research. This type of research differs from documentary research in that it not only locates the evidence, but also generates it. Obtained through interviews with the relevant actors and participants, these direct testimonies also shed more light on the subject of this study. A qualitative approach to communication studies needs also to take into account “how people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of the world” (Creswell, 1995, p. 145) which contributes to a better comprehension of what Raymond Williams (1960) called the structure of feelings of an era. For the oral history part of my research I have used semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which were constructed to initiate an open dialogue with the participants in order to produce not only the recollection of the past events, but their actual interpretation.

A significant number of books have been already published and numerous studies conducted on the subject of the independent media in Serbia, therefore I do not have an unrealistic expectation that my research will produce any revolutionary findings or

observations on the subject. The intention of this thesis is to shed more, possibly different light, on the activity of two electronic media outlets: *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92*. Without the contribution of these stations the civil resistance and oppositional movement in Serbia would have had many more difficulties in toppling the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević. The time lapse of four years since the demise of the regime in October 2000, gives me enough ground for objective evaluation and for a less emotional approach to the struggle for democracy and civil society in Serbia. However, even after the regime change, this struggle is not over. Undoubtedly, the Serbian independent media today are in a much better position than they were during Milošević's rule, but there is still much to be done in forming the enabling environment for their future development.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARD THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY: MEDIA TRANSITION AND DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN EASTERN EUROPE

A discussion about *civil society* as a possible alternative to communism, or to “real socialism” as it was officially called in political theory, gained its momentum in the early eighties. After the failure of leftist student and worker movements in Eastern Europe in the late sixties, it had become clear that the communist system built in Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic could not be reformed. As Pavlović (2001) pointed out: “Real socialism proved to be exceptionally resistant to change; none of the many systematic reforms produced any significant change. Socialism simply could not undergo far-reaching economic modernization and political transformation without being jeopardized” (p. 48). This discussion was fostered by the series of strikes among the Polish workers organized by the *Solidarity* labor union in the early eighties and by the various new social movements in other Eastern European countries. Dissident intellectuals, whose ideas and activities were behind many of these movements, were not satisfied with the replacement of socialism with capitalism, so they offered a concept of a civil society, as a third way in political and economic transformation. The concept of civil society draws from the theoretical foundation of Hegel and the French Revolution, but the opponents of real socialism in Eastern Europe developed it further. However, the transitional period after the fall of the Berlin Wall again demonstrated that realization of any normative idea is never an easy task. Indeed, the outcome of the 1989 *negotiated*

revolutions in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe was far from the outcome desired by the proponents of civil society and did not give them many reasons to be optimistic.

**From Pre-1989 Theory to Post-1989 Practice:
(Non) Realization of the Eastern European Political Opposition's
Ideal of Civil Society**

The concept of civil society as an alternative for the communist system in its modern usage was developed by the Polish intellectual Adam Michnik in the mid-seventies. In his essay *A New Evolutionism* (1976) Michnik outlined a new strategy for reformation of the authoritarian systems that were in power in Poland and in other communist countries of the Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe. By rejecting two main existing opposition's strategies: first, the internal reformation of the communist regime into a democratic one and second, the revolutionary overthrow of the regime and its replacement with a democratic system, Michnik clearly demonstrated his disagreement with the long tradition of Polish workers' strikes and street riots. Instead, he offered building of alternative social structures based on the voluntary associations of citizens. We know from the work of other proponents of the same idea (Parrot, 1997) that these associations may include "religious confessions, charitable organizations, business lobbies, professional associations, labor unions, universities, and non-institutional movements for various social causes" (Cited in Gross, 2002, p. 13).

As a specific realm between state and individual, civil society first, allows citizens to pursue their social and economic interests and second, to keep the power structures of the state accountable to the citizens. In fact, the notion of a civil society had been

introduced in the eighteenth century during the course of French revolution. Later on, Hegel and Marxists developed this concept further, but Gramsci is a theorist who is most often associated with this term. In modern theory today, we can observe some differences in the understanding of this concept. For instance, the following two definitions represent similar, but slightly different concepts of civil society.

A so-called, *poetic* definition of civil society implies that educated, cultured and responsible citizens build

an arena in which modern man legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of the group action, social solidarity and the dependence of his welfare on others, which educate him for citizenship and prepare him for participation in the political arena of the state. (Keane, 1988, p. 364)

This version of civil society, as an idea inherited from the European student/worker movement in 1968, has been criticized for its “remoteness from the real problems of a daily life” (Sparks, 1998, p. 127) and romantic expectation that civil society consists only of nice, civilized people. In addition, Sparks (1998) pointed out that the term is “formulated in such an intellectualized, one might almost say middle-class way, as to have very little purchase on the real lives of the people whose political activity would be essential... in achieving the kinds of change that its proponents desired” (p. 127).

The *idealistic* definition of civil society considers the voluntary associations of citizens as organizations independent from the state and economy. The main goal of these associations is to exercise control over the actions of the upper two power structures:

We understand “civil society” as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-organization. (Cohen and Arato, 1992: ix)

However, this account makes it clear that civil society is not made only of nice, tolerant people. The civil war in Yugoslavia in the nineties is a perfect example that the collapse of the communist system can produce both positive and negative social movements and mobilize different elements of civil society against each other. Consequently, there is no guarantee that the associations or social movements will adopt positive and democratic values.

In Cohen and Arato’s (1992) definition of civil society, public communication is one of the most important elements. Accordingly, in the transition from an authoritarian model of society to a democratic system the question - who controls the mass media, is a crucial one. As Sparks (1998) argued: “If civil society were to match up the claims as to its central role in the construction of democratic society...then this must involve a radically different set of relations between society and the mass media” (p. 118). After the Communist Party’s monopoly of media in the countries of Eastern Europe was eliminated in 1989, all social and political groups got involved in the struggle for control over the media: governments, political parties, ethnic, civil and religious organizations, business groups and companies. In addition, the number of media outlets (TV and radio stations, newspapers and magazines) multiplied. The new political elite formed from the former anti-communist opposition took all the necessary steps to retain control of the mass media, especially, in the sphere of electronic media where the new governing bodies for the regulation of broadcasting took charge. These broadcasting councils were

appointed by the parliaments or governments which elected their representatives to exercise their political will. For example, “in Poland the opposition retreated from the implications of the idea [of civil society] even before they entered into serious negotiations with the regime...Second, the example of Hungary demonstrates that there was no intrinsic link between the idea of civil society and the anti-communist opposition” (Sparks, 1998, p. 128). In Slovenia, one of the former Yugoslav republics, where the civil society movement was very strong, after gaining power in the first multi-party elections, the once-proponents of the idea of civil society abolished the constitutional right (granted by the former communist Constitutional Act) of citizens to express opinion and have it printed in the newspapers.

Unfortunately, neither the *poetic* nor *idealistic* theory of civil society has succeeded in establishing itself in the post-1989 social practice of Eastern European countries. The account of civil society that has prevailed in the period of transition can be defined as *materialistic*. Its theoretical foundation can be found in Hegel’s vision of civil society based on a free and equal economic exchange, or in modern terms – on the market economy. The strategy for the organization of the mass media that draws on this account is to privatize as much of the media as possible. In addition, any kind of control by the state should be eliminated. Most of all, this approach questions the concept of *public service broadcasting* which has a strong tradition in some Western European countries, such as Great Britain and Germany: “At it strongest, this term signifies a broadcasting organization that is both independent of the market and the immediate pressures of the state” (Sparks, 1998, p. 121). *Public service broadcasting* was also a reference model for the former communist countries in the post-1989 regulation of their

broadcasting systems. This model was strongly advertised by the Western advisers and media experts who were hired to help new governments of former communist countries to reform their media systems and to write new media legislation. It is now obvious that motivation for the development of a media system, which will retain a high degree of state control, was not only the resistance to full market domination, but also an intention of the new elite to maintain political power. As Gross (2002) suggested: "Eastern Europe's new democratic elite have repeatedly voiced their support of a strong state role in the media, ostensibly to safeguard democracy from inimical forces, but in reality to safeguard themselves and their parties from the political opposition" (p. 59).

The print media in Eastern Europe were privatized more rapidly than the broadcast media. The foreign media conglomerates' takeover of the national press was especially extensive in Hungary and Czech Republic where only a few newspapers remained in the hands of the domestic owners. For example, it is estimated that by 1994, 80% of all investments in the Hungarian media came from the West (Gross, 2002, p. 64). On the other hand, the privatization of broadcasting did not proceed quickly. In the Czech Republic, commercial television did not appear until 1994; in Hungary private channels began to operate in 1997; in Poland the first private TV channel *Polsat* aired in 1995.

According to Sparks (1998), in addition to the apparent enthusiasm for public service broadcasting there are a few other factors which influenced new Eastern European governments "to think beyond the idea of market-oriented broadcasting" (p. 144). The first factor was the poverty and the second was the small size of the majority of the countries that faced the collapse of their economies and a decline of living standards.

Furthermore, the advertising market, as a main source of income for commercial television, was not developed enough. The next problem was the specific ethnic structure of the Eastern and South Eastern European region. Indeed, the state borders drawn after the First World War did not coincide with the national boundaries, which has always created ethnic tensions. After the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc, strong nationalistic movements emerged again and in some countries, such as Yugoslavia, completely won the battle for social recognition in public discourse. As Bašić-Hrvatini (1994) observed: “Most of the new governments, facing a highly contested fit between the boundaries of their state and various national and ethnic divisions therefore tended to consider television an important instrument in achieving their political goals” (Cited in Sparks, 1998, p. 146). Finally, the last factor for the slow privatization of broadcasting can be seen in the close relationship between the new capitalist class and political parties. Obviously, parties in power were in the position to award their business allies with broadcasting licenses, so the opposition was very keen to prevent such favoritism by having control over broadcasting policy. Therefore, the concept of public broadcasting as a form of public control was strongly advocated in the parliaments of these countries.

Today, in most Eastern European countries *broadcasting councils* are responsible for broadcasting. The members of these councils are appointed by the government, but some of them represent different parts of civil society. Despite wide acceptance of the concept of public broadcasting in the transitional societies of the former communist countries, media scholars generally agree with the conclusion of Slavko Splichal (1994) who sees that the Eastern European media is developing according to the Italian model: “They are under strong state control, they are strongly partisan, their elites are strongly

integrated with the political elites, and their professional ethics are neither consolidated nor shared” (p. 146). He also concludes that media are still organized in accordance with the ideology of a party-state that considers radio and television as the most appropriate means of getting public support.

The fate of civil society in the Eastern European transition from communism to democracy is still unpredictable despite the fact that the materialistic version of civil society has been the outcome so far. However, the history of Western democracy clearly shows that a market economy is not a synonym for a democratic society. It is an interesting paradox that what is seen by some scholars as an obstacle for the democratization of the media in Western societies, is also seen as a prerequisite for democracy in Eastern European transitional societies. Splichal (1994) explained this paradox: “That the non-existence of the marketplace and private ownership of the means of production was one of the fundamental features of *socialist economy* and *socialist democracy* in East Europe – and thus the reason for their failure – may help us understand why privatization is largely believed to be essential for the democratization of these societies“ (p. 87). In addition, privatization is considered the only way to technologically modernize the media in Eastern European countries. Commercialization of the media has also contributed to demonopolization of the media infrastructure, such as distribution and printing of newspapers. As Gross (2002) observed: “Where civil society is not fully formed or powerful, the commercial media add to and represent media pluralism and diversity...Where civil societies, however underdeveloped, exist, the commercial media serve as communication platforms for, and as means of expanding them” (p. 153).

Even though the privatization of the Eastern European media had some positive effects (particularly in the process of the liberation of the media from one party control), the subsequent rapid commercialization of the former state-owned media undermined the actual potentials for genuine democratization. In addition, the recent development of media globalization and the concentration of capital among a few media conglomerates (which “incidentally” became the new owners of a large portion of the Eastern European media) made the prospect for the future democratization of the media in Eastern and South Eastern Europe not very bright. The unquestionable need for the democratization of the media on a global level also raises the question of the potential revision of the media transition in the former communist countries. The unlimited commercialization of the media that turns citizens into buyers is seen by Hackett (2000) as one of the major obstacles to the global media democratization movement: “The culture of consumerism and sheer burdens of daily life militate against all movements for social change, but especially ...media democracy” (p. 68). Due to the fact that the burden of daily life is much heavier for the citizens of the transitional countries in Eastern Europe, it can be assumed that mobilization for the media democratization movement will take more time.

Media Democratization and Political Democratization: What is Forging What?

One of the central questions in the theory of Eastern European transition is whether media can facilitate social change, or in other words, do the media influence democratic change, or is it the other way round? In any event, both of these theses are supported by media theorists and the next section of this chapter will present some of their arguments. Yet, there is also a third possibility “that the media, though somewhat

influenced by society do not directly influence society, but serve as vehicles for political, socioeconomic, and cultural institutions, organizations, associations, and leaders seeking to influence society” (Gross, 2002. p. 134). Undoubtedly, the battle for the media was in the center of the political arena in Eastern Europe in the period after 1989. The key players in that battle were political leaders and parties, governments, different institutions of civil society, and citizens. In fact, the biggest contribution of the media to the process of democratization was their ability to set the agenda for public discussion. In the first phase of transition to the multi-party system and civil society, the media’s agenda was identical to the agenda of the political opposition, a coalition that ultimately resulted in the successful win of the battle for the hearts and minds of citizens. Furthermore, the media also supported the creation of a civil society. As Gross (2002) argued: “Even as their overpoliticization and partisanship alienated some in their audiences, the media also brought to the fore new issues, new parties, new leaders, and political leaders, new ideas and possibilities, and contributed to the creation of varied new nongovernmental groups, which is to say, civil society” (p. 165). For example, in Serbia, the independent media and non-governmental organizations were part of the same coalition working against the authoritarian regime. In addition, the Serbian independent media participated in various forms of civil action including the antiwar movement and a lively artistic scene. Besides this, in recent history we can find many examples of the media forging social change.

As one of the most comprehensive overviews of the relationship between the independent media and social movements, John Downing’s book on *radical media* offers plenty of examples of modern movements for social change and their usage of the radical media. From the *samizdat* publishing in the former Soviet Bloc in the seventies and

eighties to the radical Internet use by the Zapatistas movement in Mexico in the nineties, the radical media created a parallel public sphere challenging the mainstream media and the official truth. As Downing (2001) described: "Radical media in those scenarios have a mission not only to provide facts to a public denied to them, but to explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public's sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change" (p. 16). Indeed, this is a defining point of Downing's radical media concept where the small independent media outlets, such as *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B* can be recognized.

Furthermore, in order to distinguish the radical media (often small in terms of their organizational structure and technical capacities) from the mainstream media, Downing (2001) offered the following distinctions: first, radical media expand the hegemonic mainstream media discourse; second, radical media present the voices of marginal social groups that are often excluded from the mainstream media; third, radical media do not exercise censorship in the interest of the power structure as the mainstream media do, and finally, the radical media are often democratic in their own organizational structure (p. 44). The last feature of radical media is especially important because the democratic structure of the media emphasizes the democracy of the movement for social change, which they support. Downing (2001) further argues that "radical alternative media are of considerable, if varying significance because it is they that typically first articulate and diffuse the issues, the analyses and the challenges of the movements" (p. 30). Social movements not only produce the radical media in order to reach a wider audience and recruit new members, but are also stimulated by the media. For instance, the struggle against the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia was

constantly generated and kept alive by the independent media. In the second half of the nineties, when the Serbian political opposition was in a deep crisis, the independent media continued to motivate and encourage citizens to resist the regime. At the time, the Serbian independent media was internationally recognized as the sole opposition to the regime. In addition, the campaign of the Serbian radical media staged throughout Serbian cities during the September 2000 elections, which subsequently brought down Milošević's regime was a crucial element for the election turnout and the election's success.

Despite the numerous examples of media influencing social change, not all media theorists support this "revolutionary" concept of media: "...whether mass media lead or follow change...and whether they should be conceptualized as agents of social change...are yet to be resolved" (Jakubowicz, 2002, p. 203). From the book on media reform in transitional societies edited by Monroe Price and others, we can conclude that Jakubowicz and some other Eastern European media scholars, such as Rozumilowicz, favor the concept of media democratization as a consequence of social transformation. For instance, based on the analyses of the Polish media transition, Jakubowicz (2002) argues that only consolidation of democratic social and political system can create prerequisites for the democratic media system. With this in mind, he presents the social factors that influence media reform. These factors include the following features: the existence of civil society and independent public sphere; the depoliticization of social life; the acceptance of public broadcasting regulation as serving the public interest; journalistic professionalism, and finally the existence of a free market and economic growth. All these factors can be placed in three groups: political, economic and cultural.

In addition to political and economic changes, a change of the dominant communist culture (individual/ social beliefs and values) is a necessary condition for reform:

Laws alone cannot guarantee media independence. These must be accompanied by a political culture of democracy... Without the emergence of political culture of democracy and civil society (including acceptance of the rule of law, democratic procedures, and market practices) and a different value system (individual freedom rather than collectivism; human rights and civil liberties rather than respect for authority: citizenship rather than submission to authoritarianism), change elsewhere will be incomplete. It is such a cultural change, a change of social consciousness, which takes a particularly long time to develop. (Jakubowicz, 2002, p. 205)

The social consciousness of the general population in the pre-1989 communist societies was made up of different features, such as “hostility to risk to fair competition, to pluralist values, as well as cynicism, contempt for the law, tribal collectivism, general suspicion, fear, double-thinking and double-speaking, endemic hypocrisy, general irresponsibility and distrust of intellectual freethinkers” (Gross, 2002, p. 16). Since these characteristics of mind are not easy to replace with liberal and pluralistic values, it is obvious why the process of the creation of civil society and independent public sphere took so long. Certainly, Jakubowicz (2002) does not deny that media can be an important agent of that cultural change, but he argues that the media cannot be independent from the power structure. He concludes that the relation of *interdependence* between the media and the power structure of any society suggests “the existence of a cyclical process, whereby the original impetus for change comes from some segment of society and is then disseminated by the media which, by affecting their mass audience, secure their informed, active and willing participation in social change” (Jakubowicz, 1995, p. 22). Indeed, considering the process of negotiated revolutions in the Eastern European

countries after 1989, this could probably be the most accurate account of the role of the media in social change.

In order to closely examine the process of media reform and its relationship to political transition, Beata Rozumilowicz (2002) has developed a *theory of stages of transition*. She has determined four main stages of media reform: *a pre-transition stage, a primary transition stage, a secondary transition stage, and a mature transition stage*: “This *stages of transition* model asserts that distinct strategies and approaches are discernible at different stages of the media reform process and within the process of democratization in general” (p. 24). She argues that despite socio-cultural differences among the communist countries, general rules and strategies can be applied to the development of a free and independent media. Hence, her model can be approached as a useful manual for media reformers in post-authoritarian societies.

The pre-transition stage of media reform precedes any political reform. In fact, this stage lays the groundwork for political change. The role of the democratic media in this initial phase of transition is to identify the reformers in the ruling party and give them support. After that, media help in persuading the regime to recognize the opposition and provides the opposition with the access to the media. Furthermore, the media attempt to establish open criticism and to minimize the reprisals. Finally, media recognize and support all emerging sectors of civil society. When these goals are achieved, political transition should follow. However, backsliding is possible, but once the ruling party agrees to share power, the whole society can move to the next stage.

The primary stage brings systematic change of the old authoritarian regime and the Communist Party’s acceptance of sharing power with the opposition. According to

Rozumilowicz (2002), this transition of power can either *structured* or *unstructured*. In the case of a structured transition, the former rulers voluntarily sign an agreement of power transfer with the opposition. However, if they do not reach full agreement, a third party (international community) can be involved, but in both cases it is a peaceful transition of power. On the other hand, if the former regime is forced to step down by a revolutionary overthrow (the cases of Romania and Serbia), the transition is defined as unstructured. During the primary stage of transition important institutional, legal and economic changes occur. The main task of the media reformers is drafting new media legislation. In order to successfully establish a new legal framework for the media, they analyze the democratic media model and call for the assistance of international media law experts. They also analyze new economic legislation and its impact on the media, and lobby the government to pass the most appropriate media laws that can enable the development of a free and independent media system.

The secondary stage should consolidate new political institutions, economic transformation and a new legal system. Media reformers focus on the fine tuning of media laws using the following strategies: organization of seminars; conferences and round tables for politicians and media professionals to discuss a new legal order; training of journalists in investigative and objective journalism; and encouraging foreign investment in the media. The role of the international community in this phase is very important in putting pressure on the new political structures to advance to the next stage of transition.

In the *mature stage* of transition, the main task is to incorporate large segments of society into the restructuring of the media and to create conditions for citizens'

participation in the process. The role of media professionals or journalists in the promotion of the new media system is crucial, so their commitment needs to be assured by the establishment of financial rewards for excellence; by founding training institutes and educational programs in regular schools; by building media libraries; by setting up funds and scholarships; by the exchange of media professionals among countries; and by providing the latest technologies.

Although Rozumilowicz (2002) does not provide a time frame for each of these stages in the transition to a stable democracy, another Polish-American scholar and Cold War politician, Zbigniew Brzezinski, estimates the necessary time for the process of democratization. In Brzezinski's (1994) account of the Eastern European transition that generally matches Rozumilowicz's model (although Brzezinski's model has three stages: *breakthrough; changes take hold; and emergence of stable economic order*), it is determined that the first phase should last one to five years, the second three to ten years, and the last three to fifteen years, which will vary from country to country (Cited in Jakubowicz, 2002, p. 211). Since the media is interdependent with political, economic and cultural structures, this time frame should be applicable to the process of the development of a free and independent media.

According to Monroe Price (2001), without the *enabling environment* that encompasses many features of a legal, political and socio-cultural environment, a development of the democratic media system is impossible. In the book *Enabling Environment for the Free and Independent Media* (2001) written in the cooperation with Peter Krug, besides legal norms and market competition as necessary prerequisites, Price also stresses the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the creation

of an enabling environment: “Non-governmental organizations are important not only as agents for the alleviation of state power and the formation of the structure of the media, but also as a part of the process of creation of the media content in order to promote pluralism in society” (p. 128). In addition, citizens’ education and knowledge of media should be developed to the level of consciousness that independent media are an important segment of society. For example, Price (2001) suggests that drafting of media laws needs to be enacted as a dramatic public debate that educates the citizenry about the values of free speech and the role of the media in their lives. However, legislation itself is not sufficient for the functioning of independent media. It takes also the institutional structure that enforces the laws. Besides media laws, economic legislation, such as tax-policy and state subventions are also significant factors. In conclusion, the balance between political institutions and economic system creates the enabling environment for the development of free and independent media.

Although the arguments support both assertions in examining the question: *what is forging what*, the problem of influence between the democratization of media and democratization of society still poses the chicken and egg problem. Undoubtedly, media played an important role in forging the political and economic transition in Eastern Europe. Negotiated revolutions in former Soviet Bloc countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, described by some theorists (Gross, 2002) as *entangled evolutions*, definitely add to the list of Downing’s (2001) case studies of successful cooperation between radical media and social movements. Indeed, radical media were *spiritus movens* of the civil society movement in Eastern Europe because, as Jakubowicz (1995) pointed out in the case of the Polish *Solidarity* movement in the

eighties “the underground media performed an additional organizational function because the very fact of their creation and dissemination required organizational work and the development of distribution networks and because they could guide the work of underground organizations and mobilize the general public to oppose the authorities and their policies” (p. 34).

In the case of non-negotiated revolution, such as the Romanian revolution in 1989, the media played a direct role in the overthrow of the dictator. A single tape with an interview of an arrested priest, smuggled out and broadcast on Hungarian TV, sparked the protest in Timisoara that shortly afterwards grew into a national revolution. Gross (1990) notes that after the state television was liberated by the people in December 1989 it was transformed into “a community television, with all manner of individuals and groups allowed to offer their recollections of key events during the revolution, to describe newly organized political parties and to argue about the country’s future” (Cited in Jakubowicz, 1995, p. 35). A similar situation occurred in Serbia during the October 5, 2000 uprising, where state TV was one of the main targets of the people’s anger. In addition to the torching of the television building, the angry crowd beat and almost lynched notorious state propaganda journalists. The liberation of the Serbian state television symbolically announced the end of the decade-long Milosević’s rule that was successfully maintained to a great extent by media manipulation. The next part of this chapter will address some particularities of the political transition in Yugoslavia and Serbia in the late eighties.

Derailed Transition: The Case of Yugoslavia

Unquestionably, a civil society was the main objective of the Eastern European social and political movements for transformation and the outcome desired by the majority of political opposition, who were mainly, dissident intellectuals. However, the outcome of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which symbolized the end of the seven-decade-old communist system, in some countries was very different from the optimistic expectations of the time. Political pluralism, finally achieved in 1989, created a fertile ground for different kinds of social movements and political agendas that were suppressed in the era of authoritarian communist rule. Without a doubt, *nationalism* was one of the most vital ideals that has survived for more than a century or, as Tismaneanu (1998) pointed out: “No political dream has proved to be more resilient, protean, and enduring in the century than nationalism. A comprehensive and potentially aggressive constellation of symbols, emotions, and ideas, nationalism can also offer the redemptive language of liberation for long-subjugated or humiliated groups” (p. 65). In truth, post-communist nationalism appeared as an unexpected phenomenon only for those who did not understand the structure of popular consciousness in the communist countries. In his analysis of communist practice, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1989/90) finds a link between a communist ideology and nationalism

though it proclaimed itself to be a doctrine of internationalism, communism in fact intensified popular nationalistic passions. It produced a political culture imbued with intolerance, self-righteousness, rejection of social compromise and a massive inclination toward self-glorifying oversimplification. On the level of belief, dogmatic communism thus fused with and even reinforced intolerant nationalism; on the level of practice, the destruction of such relatively internationalist classes as the aristocracy and the business elite further reinforced the populist inclination toward nationalistic chauvinism. Nationalism was therefore nurtured,

rather than diluted, in the communist experience. (Cited in Tismaneanu, 1998, p. 70)

The most obvious example of this type of thinking and the rebirth of nationalism is the dissolution of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite many political and economic advantages that Yugoslavia had in comparison with countries of the Soviet Bloc in the seventies and eighties, after 1989, power elites and political opposition in six Yugoslav republics did not choose to take the right steps in the process of further democratization and economic transformation. On the contrary, they decided to use emerging nationalism to remain in power, which was the case in Serbia and Montenegro, or to gain power, as in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to some extent in Macedonia. Furthermore, “nationalism appeared as the most accessible source of identity not only to the new political leaders and elites, but also to the masses, who were suffering a crisis of collective identity” (Pavlović, 2001, p. 59). By the mid-eighties, long-term disputes over the republics’ and nations’ sovereignty in Yugoslavia became the main issue in the public sphere and shortly after the new nationalistic political parties were formed, movements for national liberation (especially in Serbia and Croatia) gained their momentum. The result of the emerging tensions among broad national movements was a bloody civil war, which finally produced the collapse of SFR Yugoslavia. Indeed, the fifty-year-long communist practice of intolerance, self-righteousness, rejection of social compromise, and self-glorifying oversimplification (Brzezinski, 1989/90) applied by the leaderships of six republics contributed to the deepening of conflict and later military confrontation. In her analysis of the nationalization of the Yugoslav public sphere Snježana Milivojević (2000) accurately observed: “The war which brought about the collapse of SFR Yugoslavia revealed the non-existence of social institutions for

mediation, as well as the lack of appropriate communication strategies for conflict resolution” (p. 608).

The rise of nationalism and civil war that followed are certainly the key reasons for the *derailed transition* of Yugoslavia. Because of the ethnic conflicts among its republics, Yugoslavia (or more specifically Serbia, which is the object of this study) was the last country to exit communism. Ironically, as we already mentioned, before 1989, Yugoslavia was the most advanced in political and economic reform among all other Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Polish, Hungarian or Czech negotiated revolutions accomplished through extensive round table discussions between parties and the emerging opposition, the Yugoslav political elite has led the country and its citizens into a political confrontation and economic destruction which has not yet been overcome. Some political scientists, such as Rupnik (2000) have tried to explain the recent Balkan catastrophe and the difference between Central Europe and Southeastern Europe in a quite sarcastic, but accurate way: “The major difference between Central and Southeast Europeans is not that the former are more tolerant and pluralistic, but their ethnic cleansing was completed half a century ago, whereas in the Balkans the process of homogeneous nation-state building is still under way” (p. 21). In his account of Eastern Europe media transition, Splichal (1994) stresses the same, but offers a more analytical observation on the difference between Western Europe’s nineteenth century nationalistic movements and late twentieth century nationalism in Eastern Europe: “...West European national homogenization in the age of transition to industrialism...was based primarily on economic integration, whereas the contemporary national homogenization in East Europe (the former Yugoslavia is certainly the best exemplification) is based on cultural

differentiation and/or disintegration – secession...The former communist myth of social harmony in a classless society has been replaced with the myth of national harmony and nation-state sovereignty” (p. 122).

After the introduction of political pluralism and the multi-party system in Yugoslavia in 1989, the emerging oppositional parties used nationalism to maximize their power, such as the cases of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Serbia, the ruling communist party adopted a nationalistic agenda and successfully created a massive nationalistic movement (poetically called *a happening of the people*) by using the controlled print and electronic media. Consequently, the ethnic tensions and resentments successfully produced in the media were rapidly transformed into the armed conflict with other republics that finally destroyed the seventy-year-old multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia.

Political analysts place a great deal of responsibility for the civil war in Yugoslavia on the media: “The task of the war propaganda of the conflicting parties was to mobilize and intimidate, glorify and demonize, justify and accuse, and that gives ground to the assumption that the media are largely responsible for the outbreak and tragic course of the war in former Yugoslavia” (Simić, 1994, p. 1). This assumption can be generally accepted, but it is certain that warmongering propaganda has found a fertile ground in long-term national tensions. Rising ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians in the autonomous province of Kosovo generated a national mobilization in Serbia that gave birth to the strong nationalistic movement at the end of the eighties. This movement was generated by the successful media strategy of the ruling Serbian

communist elite led by Slobodan Milošević, who was promoted as an undisputed leader and the saviour of the Serbs.

In the first phase of the movement, the media created a strong injustice frame with the aim of producing public anger within the Serbian population. The image of the Serbs as victims was presented through individual stories in TV and in the press, but the political program for “national liberation” was created among the Serbian intelligentsia. In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Science and Art published *Memorandum*, a paper aimed at proving that Serbs did not have equal political and economic rights in the SFR Yugoslavia, despite the historical fact that they contributed the most to its creation. Starting from this document, the media set the tone for the nationalization of the public sphere. After the nationalistic wing of the Serbian communist party took charge in the 1987 purge, it imposed absolute control of the mainstream media. *Politika*, the leading newspaper, introduced new columns for a public debate on important national questions, such as, the most notorious, *Echoes and Reactions*, where readers and “experts” expressed their opinions on the current political crisis in Yugoslavia. Nenadović (2000) argues that: “The pseudo-patriotic and chauvinistic pamphleteering offensive, not only against political opponents and those within Serbia with different opinions, but also against whole nations outside Serbia, lasted almost three full years - from July 1988 to March 1991” (p. 541).

The press was important in forming a consensus for the national uprising among the educated and urban populations, but the electronic media was crucial for the mobilization of the rural population. By the end of the eighties, the Serbian state television RTB had an absolute monopoly on broadcasting with the average audience of

2.5 million viewers of the *Evening News*. Not only was the news saturated with national issues, but also other programs, such as those dealing with cultural and educational issues, were completely constructed through a nationalistic discourse. Special coverage was given to the populist *rallies of truth* organized by Milošević's party, where the anger of Serbs from Kosovo was transformed into an open request for political reform. Pictures of "national heroes from the glorious past", carried by the crowd, were accompanied by pictures of a new leader, Slobodan Milošević. On June 28, 1989, the six hundred year anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo³ was an excellent opportunity for Milošević to demonstrate the strength of the national movement and to send a message to the leaders of other Yugoslav republics. He addressed the crowd of several hundred thousand Serbs, gathered on the legendary Blackbird Field, from all over the world: "Again today, we are engaged in battles and facing battles. They are not armed battles, but such things cannot yet be excluded" (Cohen, 2001, p. 100). Indeed, this was an announcement of the forthcoming civil war that started only two years later. Live broadcasting of the celebration and Milošević's speech had great impact on the audience in Yugoslavia, especially in Serbia. Undoubtedly, this was the high point of the Serbian ethnocentric populist movement. Thanks to the comfortable position of insiders⁴, Milošević and his party allies created a very successful movement media strategy. By possessing absolute control of the media and with the help of a significant number of journalists who deliberately participated in the manufacturing of propaganda, Milošević mobilized the nation's majority for the war. However, reasons for Milošević's success in achieving the

³ In 1389, the medieval Serbian army faced the Ottoman Turks on their way to conquer Europe and, according to the popular history, sacrificed themselves in the defense of Christianity.

⁴ According to Ryan (1996), insiders have everything that outsiders do not: resources, organizational connections and the easy legitimacy given to the institutional carriers of a dominant ideology.

control of the media could be found in the broader socio-political context “the one-party system, state ownership... the absence of media autonomy, a lack of professional standards among journalists...the undeveloped market...and the level of (il)literacy among the population” (S. Milivojević, 2000, p. 608). Still, despite a successful propaganda strategy in the mobilization of the nation, the goals of the movement could not have been achieved without a high degree of public consent. In fact, a great deal of responsibility rests on the citizens of Serbia and Yugoslavia who behaved as irresponsible and aggressive masses rather than responsible citizens. As Reljić (2001) pointed out: “The homogenization of the nation by nationalist media is to some degree a two-way street. It rests upon mutual interests and an unspoken contract between political and other centers of power, associated journalists and part of a general public” (p. 59). An additional important factor in favor of the Milošević’s movement media strategy was the absence of an independent journalistic voice.

The first independent newspapers and electronic media outlets in Yugoslavia started to appear in 1989/90 when the nationalistic movements in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia had already fully developed their identities and their goals. In 1989, a process of privatization was introduced by the federal government, which opened the door for the establishment of the private media. Before this, the main newspaper and electronic media were founded only by the Socialist Alliance of Working People that comprised trade union, youth, student, women’s and war veterans’ associations in each republic, under the political “guidance” of the republican League of Communists. Journalists were defined as “socio-political workers” and the content of media was strictly controlled by editorial councils in which representatives of the ruling party were appointed. Broadcasting

frequencies and licenses were distributed by the federal government. The first privately owned magazine *Republika* was established in March 1989 by a few sociologists from Zagreb and Belgrade, as a voice of the civil opposition. It was followed by *Vreme* magazine, owned and published by pro-Yugoslav and pro-European group of journalists and based on the ideals of journalistic objectivity and civil society. The daily, *Borba*, was privatized in 1991, but it had started with independent and professional reporting two years before. *Borba's* stocks were shared among the federal government, a few large banks, private business and its own employees. *Borba* strongly opposed the emerging nationalism and promoted the reformist policy of the federal government led by the Prime Minister, Ante Marković. Its journalists were among the best professionals and its readers were the most educated, urban citizens of Serbia.

Even though transmission was limited to the Serbian capital and its suburbs, another source of information trusted by the Serbian urban population was *Radio B 92*. Founded in May 1989, *Radio B 92* had been operated by a liberal and youthfully open-minded staff with the idea of promoting political and cultural alternatives. As the democratization process in Serbia developed towards the introduction of the multi-party system, *Radio B 92* grew into a strong advocate of democratic transformation and civil society. In addition to unbiased daily reporting on current political events, this media outlet took an active part in the anti-war movement by organizing peace rallies in protest to the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the next three chapters of this thesis, I will present a short history of *Radio B 92's* radical engagement in the struggle for democracy and an open society. As probably the most important and influential independent electronic media in the decade-long Serbian political drama, *Radio B 92* also

offers a perfect example of the successful cooperation between the radical media and a broader social movement.

The first independent TV station in Serbia was *Nezavisna Televizija (Independent Television) Studio B* that started broadcasting in November 1990. In fact, the first TV program of *Studio B* was created by the staff of *Radio Studio B*, the most popular radio station in Belgrade originally established in 1970. The idea of its own TV channel dated back to the seventies, but despite all efforts, an official broadcast license was never obtained. In the fall of 1990, *NTV Studio B* was the first public arena where the opposition parties and their leaders presented their programs and challenged the ruling Communist Party. It played a crucial role in the opposition's election campaign for the first multiparty election held in December of 1990. Furthermore, *NTV Studio B* became a sort of "school for democracy" for the audience and politicians as well. For the first time after the five decade-long supremacy of the Communist Party, citizens of Serbia were able to witness a dialogue between opposition representatives and the members of *nomenklatura*. Accordingly, journalists of *NTV Studio B* become aware of the importance of the independent media and their historical mission in the democratization of the country. By applying rules of professional reporting, they counterbalanced the bias and propaganda of the government media tracing the path for further development of an independent public sphere in Serbia.

The following chapters of this thesis will present an analysis of the role of the Serbian independent electronic media (mostly *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B*) in a decade long struggle with the regime of Slobodan Milošević. This research attempts to answer the next question: *How significant were the Serbian independent electronic media in the*

movement for democratization and final overthrow of the authoritarian regime? In fact, the harsh repression of independent journalists and the media especially in the second part of the last decade makes a strong impression that Milošević at least, took the independent media very seriously. Every time his regime faced a crisis of legitimacy, he and his allies imposed legal and extra-legal measures to limit or to obstruct the operation of the independent newspapers, radio and TV stations. On many occasions, these actions were nothing less than a demonstration of raw power. Similar to South American dictatorships, Milošević's police forces and secret police did not hesitate to arrest, kidnap, beat and even kill independent journalists. However, despite different forms of oppression, the independent journalists continued to employ the codes of professional reporting and more significantly to contribute to the movement for democratization. Closely tied to the opposition movement in Serbia, the independent media set the stage for the overthrow of Milošević's regime in October 2000. A decade long-struggle for the hearts and minds of the Serbian citizens finally paid off. The severe consequences of the civil war among the former Yugoslav republics including destruction of the economy followed by the rapid decline of the standard of living, NATO military intervention, and internal repression had resulted in the complete apathy of the Serbian population by the end of the nineties. Thanks to the persistent activity of the independent electronic media (especially local radio and TV stations in the second part of the last decade which had organized themselves into a powerful association) and the popular youth movement *Otpor (Resistance)* political apathy changed into a strong expression of resistance and a withdrawal of consent for Milošević's regime in the September 2000 elections.

Certainly, the independent media played an important role in changing the opinion of the population during the decade long political and social drama in Serbia. The next chapters of this thesis will demonstrate how the small media outlets, such as *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B*, maintained their popular appeal and existence in an extremely hostile social environment. In the beginning of political crisis in Yugoslavia, Milošević's regime had wide support for its national policy among the Serbian population. As a result of the intense propaganda and successful promotion of the injustice frame, every voice of resistance to that frame was considered unpopular, even unpatriotic. Since the independent media never supported that policy, it was not easy at all to gain the wider attention of the audience. Labeled as unpatriotic and traitorous by the state-controlled media, independent journalists fought this negative image with the simple practicing of the codes of professionalism and with adherence to basic principles of human rights. In addition, poor and outdated equipment, limited financial resources, and economic sanctions imposed by the international community were a serious disadvantages to the media in Serbia. Under these conditions, the external support given to the independent media by various international non-governmental and journalistic organizations was vital for their survival. By the end of the nineties, as Milošević's regime approached its demise and the oppression of the independent media grew, even some western governments donated money to the independent media outlets. It is certain that without this financial help, many of these small stations would have ceased to exist, but it is also certain that without the personal courage of independent journalists and their strong commitment to the principles of democracy, the final goal of political change in Serbia could not have been achieved, or more precisely - it would have been achieved with more difficulty. For

more than ten years, small independent radio and TV stations spread the truth about the undemocratic character of the Serbian regime in an attempt to raise the critical awareness of the citizens and liberate them from fear. Finally, the independent media, in cooperation with the parties of political opposition, non-government organizations and different social movements, succeeded in channelling public revolt to the popular uprising that occurred on October 5, 2000.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM A RADICAL MODEL OF MEDIA TO A POWERFUL ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERBIAN INDEPENDENT ELECTRONIC MEDIA BETWEEN 1990 AND 1996

Before any further analysis of the emergence and development of the independent media in Serbia in the nineties, it is necessary to explain the meaning of the term *independent*. In common usage, it refers to journalists and media who are not under the influence of the authorities or any other center of power in society. Indeed, this definition can be applied to the Serbian independent media, which were not under the direct control of the Serbian regime and the ruling party of Slobodan Milošević. However, in order to understand the independent position of some Serbian media in specific socio-political settings, some additional explanations are needed.

The process of transition from a one-party to a multi-party system in Eastern Europe was subsequently followed by the transformation of the state-controlled economy to a market economy, which opened a space for media transformation in Yugoslavia and Serbia. However, as described in the previous chapter, the Yugoslav transition did not take the same route as in other communist countries. After the Socialist Party of Serbia (formerly The League of Communists of Serbia) had imposed strict control over the existing media in the latter half of the eighties, journalists in Serbia, who opposed the nationalistic movement and who were dedicated to the idea of professional reporting, had two options. First, to establish privately-owned media outlets or, second, to initiate a

transformation of the existing state media into private companies and, by so doing, liberate them from state control. Despite all efforts to privatize the state controlled media, only a few were successfully transformed into stock companies. Among them were the former daily newspaper of the federal League of Communists, *Borba (The Struggle)*, and two capital radio stations: *Radio Studio B* and *Radio B 92*. Together with the newly established and privately owned magazines *Vreme (Time)* and *Republika (The Republic)*, these media outlets would become a nucleus for the independent media struggle for democracy in Serbia in the first part of the nineties.

Intellectual Basis of Independent Journalism in Serbia

A genuine struggle for freedom of the press and professional journalism in Yugoslavia has its roots in the period of the one party system and can be observed in the early eighties. After the death of Tito in 1980, the undisputed leader of the League of Communists and the lifelong President of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, a wave of political and social criticism began to appear in public. Demands for the reformation of the communist system, coming primarily from liberal intellectuals, encouraged some journalists to write critically inclined articles in the press. For instance, in December 1981 in *Naša štampa (Our Press)*, Dušan Bogavac published his critique of bureaucratic structure and censorship in the Yugoslav information system. He was immediately suspended from his job as an editor of *Komunist (The Communist)*, which later inspired his colleagues to sign a public petition for the establishment of *Fond solidarnosti (Solidarity Fund)*, with an aim to financially help all journalists who were fired and persecuted as a result of their criticism. In the previous year, two hundred Belgrade intellectuals publicly demanded the abolition of Article 133 of the Criminal

Code, which served as a legal basis for the persecution of, so-called verbal offences. In October 1980, a group of Belgrade university professors submitted an official request for the establishment of the oppositional journal, *Javnost (The Public)*, and were immediately denied by the authorities. In November 1984, another group of Serbian writers and intellectuals formed *Odbor za odbranu slobode misli i izražavanja (Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Opinion and Expression)* dedicated to the protection of persecuted and imprisoned political activists. Undoubtedly, the Serbian and Yugoslav capital was the center of the liberal movement in the eighties. Particularly, the youth press was open for all kinds of social and political criticism and frequently were issues of *Student*, *NON*, *Književne novine (Literature Gazzete)*, *Knizevna reč (Literature Word)* were censored and prohibited for distribution. It would be correct to say that a liberal spirit of student and youth press had been cultivated from the student protests in 1968, the only one of this kind occurring in communist countries. We can conclude that: “Thus, with the exception of Poland, it can be argued that in the eighties probably only Hungary had a political opposition which can be compared with Serbia in its numbers and diversity” (Antonić, 2002, p. 61).

Accordingly, independent journalism in Serbia in the nineties did not emerge out of the blue, but was the direct offspring of the liberal movement in the eighties or even seventies, when the liberal wing in the League of Communist of Serbia (so called *liberals*) attempted to introduce serious political and economic reforms. This internal movement of the Serbian communist nomenklatura was accompanied by the artistic movement or *Black Wave*, which received international acclaim especially in the cinema. Authors like Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, Živojin Pavlović and others earned

many international awards for their “black movies” in which they portrayed (mostly in dark colours) the reverse side of the “socialist paradise”. However, some of them also earned a dismissal from their tenures at the Film Academy or a prison term, which was the case with the young student-director Lazar Stojanović. In fact, his major sin was mocking Tito in his graduation movie *Plastični Isus (Plastic Jesus)*.

The movement for political reform and liberalization in the seventies was especially strong at Belgrade University, where the seven most distinguished professors in the Faculty of Philosophy were dismissed from their tenures in 1974: “Humanist philosophers gathered around such magazines as *Praxis*, *Naše teme (Our Topics)*, and *Filosofija (Philosophy)* challenged such basic Marxist assumptions as the belief that socialism automatically solves all problems of alienation, that self-management principles contradict market relations, and that the cult of the personality interferes with the democratization of government” (Robinson, 1977, p. 121). As Antonić (2002) had observed for the eighties, Robinson (1977) argues that even in the seventies “the extent and range of political criticism [in Yugoslavia] is considerably larger than in any of the other Eastern European communist states” (p. 122).

In this climate of constant criticism in academic and artistic circles and partially as a result of underground political opposition in the seventies and eighties, the desire of journalists to open public debate in the press on social and political issues grew stronger. Furthermore, the economic and political crises of Yugoslav society which surfaced in the mid-eighties also forged the liberalization of the media, or in other words, influenced a shift in the journalistic profession from the “socio-political role” of journalists who serve the interests of the Communist Party to professionals committed to the objective

reporting of truth. Zdenka Milivojević (1995) pointed out that: “The liberalization of information in the mid-eighties, although it started as the individual initiative of highly respected reporters, was Yugoslav in scope [encompassing all six republics] with a tendency toward institutionalization. However...in the second half of the eighties, it was suppressed in favor of reporting national truths” (p. 376).

Unfortunately, this wave of media liberalization in the mid-eighties did not last long. By the end of the eighties, political elites in Serbia and other Yugoslav republics, like Slovenia and Croatia, imposed a tight control of the media and mobilized them for the goals of their nationalistic movements. Nationalization of the public sphere successfully created a new type of journalism, which established national interests as the only criteria of reporting. *Patriotic journalism* was born. On the other hand, independent journalistic voices did not cease to exist and the creation of independent media outlets became a reality.

The Emergence of the First Independent Media Outlets: *Radio B 92 and NTV Studio B*

Soon after the privatization and market economy were legalized by federal law in 1989, the first privately owned magazines started to emerge in Yugoslavia. In March of 1989, a group of sociologists from Zagreb (the Croatian capital) and Belgrade began publishing *Republika (The Republic)* magazine, as the voice of civil opposition, or as it says in the sub-title: *Voice of the Civil Self-Liberation*. The magazine was “devoted to political commentary and analysis, not news, and to active support of the individuals and movements resisting the war...It was the first to feature criticism of the Serbian authoritarian regime and to promote antiwar ideas, groups and movements” (Torov, 2000,

p. 254). Together with *Vreme (Time)* magazine founded eighteen months later, *Republika* was the voice of the suppressed civil society and liberal thought in Serbia throughout the nineties. From the beginning, *Vreme* was designed like the famous Western magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek* with the idea of promoting Yugoslav federalism, transformation towards a market economy, politics of democracy, human rights, and civil liberties in the liberal and European tradition. The members of the editorial board were among the best Yugoslav journalists and political analysts. For a very short time, *Vreme* had established itself as the most respected Serbian magazine, especially abroad where it was used as a source of reliable information and good analyses of the Serbian political scene. In addition, *Vreme* was among the rare publications that “openly discuss the war crimes, the role played by the Yugoslav army in the war, and human and material cost of the war to the civilian populations on all sides” (Torov, 2000, p. 252). However, a limited circulation of the magazine (around twenty thousand in the early nineties) was not sufficient to secure regular publication. Therefore, *Vreme* received financial help from the *Soros Foundation*, particularly in 1993 when the Serbian economy collapsed.

Borba (The Struggle) was the only Serbian newspaper successfully transformed from the mouthpiece of the Federal League of Communists to a shareholder company. Among the 3,200 shareholders were federal government, banks, insurance agencies, private entrepreneurs and finally readers (who owned 7% of the company shares). By the end of the eighties, *Borba* was the only media in Serbia which instead of joining nationalistic euphoria started to develop a liberal view and a strong critical stance toward Milošević’s nationalistic movement. It supported reforms of the federal state and introduction of a market economy. In 1994, the Federal Court (under pressure from

Milošević) annulled the legal transformation of *Borba* into a shareholder company and authorized the government of newly formed SR Yugoslavia (consisted of Serbia and Montenegro and controlled by the ruling parties of these two republics) to take control of the newspapers. The editorial board and journalists of *Borba* did not accept this abuse of the judicial system and continued to publish the newspapers under the new name *Naša borba* (*Our Struggle*). Without a doubt, the three publications, *Republika*, *Vreme* and *Borba* were the most important independent print media in Serbia in the nineties.

The first independent electronic media outlet was *Radio B 92* founded on May 15, 1989 as a youth radio station. The editorial board of *Radio B 92* was formed from the student radio program *Index 202* broadcast on the government owned *Radio Belgrade* and *Rhythm of the Heart* broadcast on *Radio Studio B*. The first one was more conventional, but the second one was very radical: “In its own anarchic, free-flowing, sometimes amateurish way, *Rhythm of the Heart* covered nightlife, experimental art, theatre and fashion...but it also attempted to deal with the changes that were happening in the communist system and provide a forum for alternative, dissident voices” (Collin, 2001, p. 15). Despite the original intention of the founder, Belgrade’s Communist Youth organization, that it be an experimental radio for only two weeks, *Radio B 92* continued its broadcasting by using an old, low-powered transmitter able to cover only the metropolitan area of Belgrade. In fact, *Radio B 92* maintained its semi-legal status throughout the entire period of Milošević until the end of the nineties.

The formation of *Radio B 92* coincided with the culmination of mass rallies as a main strategic weapon of Milošević’s nationalistic movement. Only a month after *Radio B 92* was established, Milošević delivered one of his “historical speeches” during the

celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of The Battle for Kosovo in which he announced future armed conflicts in Yugoslavia. The political climate in Serbia began to be very unpleasant for any kind of criticism directed against Milošević and his movement. Nationalization of the public sphere was completed and patriotic journalism proclaimed in the media sphere. Any dissonant journalistic voice was immediately labeled as unpatriotic. Veran Matic, editor-in-chief of *Radio B 92*, described it in the following terms: “True information become provocation, dialogue was labeled a sign of weakness, attempts at conflict resolution and compromise were tagged as cowardice, attempts to represent the interest of minorities were seen as sign of genetic defects, to be normal meant to be subversive” (Collin, 2001, p. 23). The way the news was presented on *Radio B 92* in which the main political actors were mocked and “serious issues” were given an ironic approach was something completely new and radical for the audience. From its inception, *Radio B 92* gained a cult status among the urban, mostly youthful population of the Serbian capital. Particularly, radical music played on the airwaves (a mixture of the actual *grunge* sound of Seattle and hardcore *hip hop*) appealed to the urban listeners, a population that was considered subversive by Milošević. Consequently, the character and content of music played on *Radio B 92* demanded from the audience not only listening, but thought and engagement. Therefore the official slogan of *Radio B 92* at that time was: *The radio you listen, watch, read, touch ... radio that lives.*

Undoubtedly, the radical music policy did not appeal to the mainstream audience, but the editors of *Radio B 92*, Veran Matic in particular, were aware that if they really wanted to develop an alternative medium, there was a need to be alternative in every respect. This policy was contested by some editors at the station, but Matic’s radical

concept prevailed because it was supported by the majority of the staff. From the beginning, the internal structure of *Radio B 92* was democratic and all decisions were made by the majority, which is also known as an important feature of radical media. In Downing's model of radical media organization, which recognizes two types of structures - *agitprop* and *self-management*, the internal and decision-making structure of *Radio B 92* can be easily recognized in the second. As Downing further argues (1996) the self-management model of media is more likely to be found in the small-scale media and "it is indeed vital for their internal democracy to be constantly responsive to the democratic trends and movements in society at large" (p. 70). In particular, this feature is another aspect (which will be described later in this thesis) of the small local station, *Radio B 92*, which proved its democratic orientation. Asked about the internal structure of the station, its editor-in chief, Veran Matić had no doubt about it: "The democratic structure of *Radio B 92* made functioning of the station very complicated, but also a unique media organization. Today, I am asked by my colleagues, journalists from other countries in transition, how could they copy our organization? Certainly, it is impossible to copy, but our media strategies could be useful for them" (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003). As a *primus inter pares* (the first among equals), Matić never interfered too much in the creation of the station's program. He had the image of an easy-going and trustworthy person "who knows how to make people believe in him...Matić was an unpretentious, stocky character...most comfortable in jeans and casual shirt, who preferred to conduct his discussions over a beer or two" (Collin, 2001, p. 25). Nevertheless, he soon became the person around whom the whole movement of urban resistance would revolve.

It took a year and a half after the inception of *Radio B 92* to witness the birth of the first independent TV station in Serbia - *Nezavisne Televizije Studio B (Independent Television Studio B)*. In fact, *Studio B*, started its broadcasting as a local Belgrade radio station in 1969, as the first station operating out of the system of *Jugoslovenske Radio Televizije (Yugoslav Radio Television)* that served as an umbrella organization for all electronic media. The establishment of *Studio B* was a direct result of the liberal movement in the seventies when the Serbian communist leadership tried to introduce some serious political, economic and cultural reforms. An informal and entertaining approach to the presentation of news and local community information contributed to the wide popularity of its program among listeners. The idea of a local TV program also dated back to the mid-seventies, but the license was never obtained from the federal communication authorities. In 1990, *Studio B* had 180 full-time employees who owned 86% of the company shares. The employment policy of the management had always been to train young journalists instead of recruiting them from other media, which lent an image of freshness and enthusiasm to the station. In addition to the private ownership, *Studio B* was financially independent from the state since the total revenue was collected from advertising and sponsorship.

In terms of its internal structure, *NTV Studio B* was not entirely democratic, at least not in the same way as *Radio B 92*. After all, *TV Studio B* emerged as a section of *Radio Studio B*, which had operated on the principles of any other mainstream media for two decades. In fact, programming produced by this media outlet was definitely not mainstream, but the station's internal structure was. However, the positive feature of *Studio B* was that after its transformation into a stock company, journalists themselves

owned the majority of stocks and had a strong influence on the decision-making. For example, an attempt of the general manager to monopolize the decision-making process in 1993 (described on pp.72-73 of this thesis) was radically opposed by the majority of journalists and editors,

In spite of the introduction of privatization at the beginning of the nineties, the example of *NTV Studio B* proved that political climate for independent media in Serbia had not yet ripened. The first attempt by *Studio B* staff to start TV programming on March 28, 1990 was not successful, after only 70 minutes of broadcasting the inspectors of the Federal Broadcasting Agency shut it down. Finally, seven months later, on November 16, 1990, *Studio B* started its broadcasting “with only one direct transmitter and four relays, reaching no more than 3.5 million [potential] viewers in the radius of about sixty miles” (Torov, 2000, p. 255). Since the first multi-party elections in Serbia were scheduled for December 9, 1990, the news programming of the *Independent Television Studio B* was, from the start, almost completely dedicated to the election campaign. Indeed, this was an excellent opportunity for *NTV Studio B*'s journalists to attempt to introduce a new type of reporting based on the principles of objectivity.

The Independent Media's Introduction of Open Political Debate and the Politics of Journalistic Objectivity to the Serbian Public

The significance of *NTV Studio B* to the first multi-party elections in Serbia in 1990

The first multi-party elections in Serbia were not only the last scheduled amongst all communist countries, but were very different in their social context. Unlike in Poland or Hungary, the main topic was not the transition from the communist system to

democracy, but the ethnic conflicts among the republics of Yugoslavia and the disintegration of the federal state. Moreover, the institution of round-table discussions between the ruling communist party and emerging opposition parties had not yet been introduced. This resulted in election conditions being completely in favor of the ruling communist party, which in July 1990 changed its name to the Socialist Party of Serbia. Furthermore, Serbian opposition parties did not form a united front against the ruling party, which will subsequently be shown to be as one of their major disadvantages. Finally, the superior position of the ruling party was demonstrated most clearly in its absolute control of the major media; *TV Belgrade* covered the whole country and the regime newspapers, such as *Politika* and *Večernje Novosti*, had the largest circulation. Primarily through the personal changes in the management and editorial boards by the end of the eighties, Milošević's government preserved the state-party model of media and used it to communicate its political messages to the public. It was estimated that at the time of the elections in December 1990 "every day audience of the *Evening News* program on the state *TV Belgrade* was more than 50% of the inhabitants of Serbia" (J. Matić, 2002, p. 13).

Under these conditions, journalists of the independent *NTV Studio B* were faced with the difficult task of competing with the state TV and trying to "steal" some of its viewers. With its out-dated equipment and limited coverage *NTV Studio B's* struggle was a David versus Goliath battle, but it was not without certain advantages. For example, the time for the promotion of the Serbian opposition on the state TV was very limited to only one hour of prime time for the presentation of each party (the news on the opposition activities were rarely included in the *Evening News*). Therefore, *NTV Studio B* had a

unique opportunity to fill its prime time with a program never seen before. Indeed, Serbian citizens did not have any experience or knowledge of open public political debate. For the first time after forty-five years the representatives of the political opposition were able to present their views publicly without the risk of being persecuted. In addition, they got the long-awaited chance to face the members of communist nomenklatura and to debate the main political issues in live television broadcasting. Inevitably, the *NTV Election Parcel* prime time talk show became some kind of “course for democratic dialogue” both for the participants and the audience: “These lessons of democracy often transformed into a verbal fight, but for the first time in fifty years, citizens had an opportunity to witness the existence of different political opinions. It was very important to liberate the citizens’ mind and show that somebody else also shared their own secret thoughts. As in the early days of television, Belgrade residents who were not able to receive *NTV Studio B* signal used to go to watch it at their friends or relatives” (Interview with Lila Radonjić, January 17, 2003). Another *NTV Studio B*’s innovation in TV broadcasting was *Viewers Interview*, a live talk show where viewers had a chance to call the studio during a live broadcast and ask questions without censorship. Undoubtedly for the audience, this show exemplified a real media revolution, but for the members of the Communist Party not accustomed to direct public communication with people, participation in the *Viewers Interview* was often embarrassing. “The original idea for the *Viewers Interview* was to invite a guest and let him face the cameras and the viewers alone, without a studio host, but we realized that nobody would be crazy enough to come. Finally, I agreed to act as a mediator between the audience and the guest and to channel the dialogue. It turned out that the most important government officials, leaders of the

opposition and church representatives accepted the challenge to face the audience in a live broadcast. Simply, people were hungry for a democratic and open debate” (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003).

**Two media realities:
Journalistic objectivity vs. A one party model of reporting**

In addition to live political debate in its election prime time program, *NTV Studio B* journalists also made great efforts to apply fair presentation of the political parties and their candidates in a daily news program. In contrast to the state *TV Belgrade* biased reporting in favor of the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia and its presidential candidate, Slobodan Milosević, *NTV Studio B* news reports were balanced and based on fact. Certainly, this type of journalistic practice has a long established tradition in the Western press and is known as *journalistic objectivity*. This concept of journalism is recently strongly contested among critical media scholars as an important vehicle for reinforcing the existing capitalistic power relations, so its main features and the reasons for a critique will be briefly presented. As a method of reporting based on *accuracy, fairness, balance* and *impartiality* in presenting information through the media, objectivity has been and, is still considered, a normative ideal - a set of goals that journalists should achieve. In their study on the regime of journalistic objectivity (the term *regime* implies a connection between journalism and power structures), Hackett and Zhao pointed out four main goals: “the negation of journalists’ subjectivity, the fair presentation of each side in a controversy, balanced scepticism towards all sides in dispute, and the search for hard facts that can contextualize a dispute” (1998, p. 82). In other words, journalists are narrators of the *news stories* for which they need to use neutral language and to separate

hard facts from any personal opinions and values they might have on the subject or event they are reporting.

In their research, these two scholars argue that journalistic objectivity draws back to the nineteenth century commercial press: “In the commercial press, the democratic perspective provided not only the foundation for the emerging concept of journalistic objectivity, but also the ideological framework for telling news stories” (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, p. 31). Thus, the following basic principles of liberal capitalism create the ideological framework for reporting on political and social events in the Western press from the nineteenth century until today: *the idea of individual rights, a competitive pursuit of self interest in the marketplace, and the notion of a state as a representative democracy based on free elections*. In the economic and social relations of a capitalistic society based on the principle of consumer sovereignty, the role of the press had always been to act as *a public watchdog* in controlling the government. According to this approach, the freedom of the press had been generally interpreted as a freedom from a government control. Even though we accept that the Western press is free from government, it is not hard to prove that different interest groups based on economic power have a strong influence on the media. Therefore, “objective journalism reinforces existing power relations... It rarely challenges the image-making and agenda-setting power of political and business elites...The media inescapably make choices, consciously or otherwise, over which events to report, sources to quote, language to describe, and frames to interpret in the daily routines of news reporting” (Hackett and Zhao, 1996, p. 5). In conclusion, the regime of objectivity naturalizes the values of liberalism, such as

individualism, ethnocentrism, social order, responsible capitalism, strong leadership, consumerism, and politics as a spectacle.

Since Serbian society in the early nineties was still based on a socialist economy, without private property in the sphere of economic production (except small private manufacturers and craft shops), and with the largest media tightly controlled by the government, it would be fair to observe that the attempt to practice a method of objectivity in the emerging independent media did not have the same kind of negative impact as was previously argued in the case of the Western media. In the light of these circumstances, Zdenka Milivojević (1995) pointed out that: “The relation of *independent* journalism [in Serbia in the early nineties] towards the public is not the one of *seller* towards his *buyers* [as in the Western media market], but rather a relationship of respect for an important political factor - *the citizen*. Informing citizens on important political and cultural events, instead of transmitting party attitudes to its subjects, marks a qualitative shift away from the one-party model of reporting” (p. 384). Hence, a more useful argument for this thesis would be the question: *How successful were the independent journalists in their attempt to introduce a journalistic practice very different from the traditional state-service journalism?* In fact, journalists interviewed for this research and some media analysts have slightly different answers to this question.

Inevitably, with its program filled with opposition representatives and their election activities, *NTV Studio B* immediately created an image of the “opposition media”. In addition, this image was strongly supported in the government-controlled media, particularly *TV Belgrade*, where independent journalists were constantly accused of being partisan and labeled as opposition supporters. There is no doubt that these

accusations were an attempt to create a false picture of equality in bias and to justify the glorification of the ruling Socialist Party in its own programming. Zoran Ostojić, creator of the *Viewers Interview*, the most watched and media-revolutionary program on *NTV Studio B*, accurately observes that: “It was not difficult for us to be objective, because no other medium was. Therefore, the simple fact of being objective at the time meant that we supported the opposition. However, at the same time, we were absolutely aware that we were participating in a historical mission of the democratization of Serbia and Yugoslavia and that the best way to contribute to that process was to do our job in a professional way” (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003).

Another interviewed *NTV Studio B* journalist, Lila Radonjić, editor-in-chief of the news program and host of *Election Parcel*, has similar recollections on the birth of independent journalism in Serbia: “We fought for the ideal of objective and independent journalism, but we were also personally motivated to give our contribution to democratic changes. We expected that the noise of the fall of the Berlin Wall would be heard in Serbia, but it did not happen in the way we wanted” (Interview with Lila Radonjić, January 17, 2003).

Snježana Milivojević, the media scholar interviewed for this research, supports two previous arguments:

The concept of objectivity in the Western press is founded on the normative ideal of social responsibility of the media to maintain the stability of a social order that is believed to be democratic. Unlike the Western media that presumably operate in a democratic society which enable journalists, despite all challenges, to practice professional and objective reporting, the Serbian independent media operated within an authoritarian society without any developed civil institution on its way to a democratic transformation. Therefore, the independent media in Serbia were concerned not only with the struggle for professionalism, but also

with the struggle for the basic political freedoms. The independent journalists were aware that the freedom of the press could be achieved only by advancing the principles and codes of professionalism. Under these conditions, the political opposition and the independent media were natural allies, but the most important ally of the independent journalists was the Serbian public who acknowledged journalists' intentions to introduce the politics of objective reporting previously unknown in public communication. This will become obvious later in the Nineties, especially after the regime's repression on the media intensified. (Interview with Snježana Milivojević, January 15, 2003)

Since the common practice of many radical media rejects objectivity in reporting, (seeing themselves as voices of the people and advocates for social justice), it can raise the question - *were the Serbian independent electronic media really radical?* As I am sure, even the simple fact that *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* for the first time rejected the one-party model of reporting and gave an opportunity to the political opposition to be heard in the airwaves placed them in a radical position, so the answer to this question is positive. This question can be also answered with the question: *What can be more radical in the practice of NTV Studio B and Radio B 92 at a time when the Communist Party's absolute and unquestionable position on power in Serbia was seriously shaken than to open their program for the ruling party's political enemies or the proponents of a civil society?* Not to mention that the members of the political opposition and their supporters were often called "the forces of chaos and insanity" by the regime media. Hence, simply by being objective and professional in reporting on the activities of "the forces of chaos and insanity" Serbian independent electronic media clearly demonstrated their advocacy of the political change in Serbia in the early nineties. As Ostojić cleverly describes "...being objective at the time meant [already] that we support the opposition". (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003).

Besides the controversial regime of objectivity, the feature of professionalism is also infrequent in the practice of the radical media, which prefer citizen participation in the creation of their programming. This approach was often used in the production of *Radio B 92's* programming (though *NTV Studio B* mostly relied on trained journalists), for example during the Bosnian war and the siege of Sarajevo when ordinary citizens reported on events, or during the draft-dodging campaign in Belgrade in 1991 when listeners provided information about the actions of army recruiters.

To conclude, a combination of professional and radical reporting defines the journalistic practice of *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* in the early nineties. The regime of journalistic objectivity, as an existing model of Western journalism, was a desired ideal not only for Serbian, but for Eastern European journalists, who were obliged to present only one party's version of reality. As S. Milivojević suggested (2003), the desire for objective journalism was based on the assumption that "the Western media presumably operates in a democratic society" (Interview with Snježana Milivojević, January 15, 2003) and, of course, a democratic society was the final objective. Certainly, all the shortcomings of the regime of objectivity, exposed by critical media scholars, such as Hackett and Zhao, raise a great concern that the Serbian independent media will not reach the expected ideal of democratic media in the application of this model. Just as in the case of the "necessary" privatization of the media in Eastern Europe for the purpose of their liberation from state control (discussed in the first chapter of this thesis), there is still the hope that objectivity is just an unavoidable phase in the further democratization of the Serbian media. A bitter medicine that needs to be taken, but every medicine is a cure and a poison at the same time.

The first multi-party election campaign in Serbia created two opposite media realities: *the regime* and *the opposition*. The main carrier of the regime propaganda was *TV Belgrade*, which successfully determined the main issue of the elections: the protection of Serbian national interests. On the other hand, the independent media emphasized the importance of political transformation and civil rights, but these messages did not have the desired impact on the election debate. In the regime media reality these messages were interpreted as unpatriotic and an integral part of a conspiracy between the internal (Serbian opposition) and foreign enemies (international community), which echoed the well-known ideological language of the Cold War. In fact, the national interest was the focus in both media realities, although in the regime media the ruling party was proclaimed as the only protector of this interest and the opposition was its enemy. Furthermore, as another media analyst, Jovanka Matić (2002), points out in her analysis of the role of the media in the 1990 election campaign: “In a setting dominated by state-controlled television with rules that allowed this television to determine the format of the election programming and journalistic standards which fostered the ruling party’s definition of social problems, the audience had little chance of understanding real differences between the platforms offered by election participants” (p. 25).

It can be observed that the consensus created by the end of the eighties between the majority of the Serbian citizens and the party of Slobodan Milošević, where the regime media such as daily *Politika* and *TV Belgrade* played a crucial role, was successfully preserved and even reinforced during the 1990 election campaign. As Zdenka Milivojević argues: “Journalism as a political function turns *reporting* into a one-way process, the purpose of which is *one-party public opinion*, while political pluralism

becomes no more than a stage set which serves the purpose of additional legitimacy for the regime” (p. 385). According to Milivojević, the two media realities in Serbia had also produced two types of public opinion: *democratic* and *authoritarian*. The latter, which encompassed the majority of the population of Serbia, served as a foundation for the regime’s survival throughout the nineties. A democratic type of public opinion was generated only in the areas where the independent media were able to reach their audience, such as the areas of Belgrade, the urban centers in Central Serbia and the northern province of Vojvodina. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the opposition candidates were elected in almost all of Belgrade’s electoral ridings where the voters had been able to watch *NTV Studio B* programs and listen to *Radio B 92*. Zdenka Milivojević (1995) described the authoritarian media reality as “an unprincipled coalition between the interests of the charismatic authoritarian authorities and confidence of the politically ignorant majority that was created through a media swindle and the denial of frequencies to the independent media, lest they be able to cover the entire country” (p. 385). Interestingly, in terms of objective reporting of the Serbian independent media Z. Milovojević (1995) is less convinced about the absolute unbiased presentation of the political opposition’s activities since “*apolitical journalism* is impossible during the process of transition as there is neither sufficient leeway nor underpinning outside either of two current ideologies - positional and oppositional. Any act is necessarily ascribed a certain political connotation, and efforts to act outside these ideologies have no chance of becoming properly transparent” (p. 383). As the repression on the independent media grew throughout the nineties this statement became more and more prophetic. The implementation of the ideal of journalistic objectivity to the Serbian public was soon

replaced with the *balance of mistrust* between two media realities in Serbia. This conflict in the media sphere was the cause of the real confrontation on the streets of Belgrade.

Street-Fighting Men In Live Broadcast

In order to completely marginalize Serbian political opposition, already seriously demoralized after the December 1990 election defeat, unscrupulous regime propaganda was continuously aired on *TV Belgrade*. Contrary to regime expectations, however, media attacks on the opposition parties and their leaders caused a counter-effect in the public mind. A commentary broadcast in *TV Belgrade's Evening News* on February 16, 1991 in which the leader of the largest opposition party, Vuk Drašković, was accused of “plotting with the enemy” raised an anger not only amongst members of the opposition, but amongst ordinary citizens. Public protest was scheduled for March 9 in the center of Belgrade. It is estimated that more than 100,000 protesters gathered in the Republic Square and surrounding streets demanding the resignation of *TV Belgrade's* main editors and general manager. After the police used tear gas and water guns to disperse the crowd, the quiet protest transformed into violent riots which took the lives of two people: a policeman and a young student. Not surprisingly, the most heavily guarded building was *TV Belgrade* (which the author of this thesis personally witnessed, being employed there at the time) and from that day it gained its notorious nickname *TV Bastille*. Finally, after the protesters led by the leaders of the opposition broke into the Parliament building, Milošević and his political allies sent tanks into the streets. Fortunately, the Tienanmen scenario did not occur because the majority of protesters had already left the battlefield, but in addition to the two dead victims, more than a hundred people were arrested and an unknown number injured.

The March 9 demonstrations were broadcast live on *Radio B 92*: “Veran Matic, seeing the ruckus unfold beneath his window, grabbed a microphone, leaned out of the window and began describing the bloody scenes below as if he was commenting on a particularly confrontational football match...” (Collin, 2001, p. 38). Yet, this live reporting did not last long and in the evening, police entered the station shutting it down under the charges of “provocation of unrest”. However, instead of news program, *Radio B 92* was allowed to play music which turned out to be a very careless decision by the police. As already pointed out, music was not only an important part of the *Radio B 92*’s program, but a special code for sending messages to the audience. This time the message was clear – *resistance*, and the many songs were available to send it, such as: The Clash’s *White Riot*, Thin Lizzy’s *The Boys Are Back in Town*, The Rolling Stones’s *Street Fighting Man*... A Public Enemy’s song *Fight the Power*, which contained the most appropriate lyrics for the occasion: “Our freedom of speech is freedom of death – we got to fight the powers that be”, was played over and over again. Coincidentally, this Afro-American rap band was also involved in the production of the student radio show in New York in the eighties. Again, music proved to be as effective as the news: “Our music section always argued that their music was the counterpart, in the subversive sense, of what we are doing in news. This proved it” (Collin, 2001, p. 41).

The main office of *NTV Studio B* was in the highest downtown highrise where a live broadcasting camera was set up on the roof. As the tanks rolled under the building the police broke into the studio interrupting live broadcasting. The *NTV Studio B* program was banned under the warrant of the Interior Ministry. Despite the brutal action, of the police, journalists were not intimidated. They were aware of their responsibility to report

on the event: "We were able to watch the street clashes from our studio windows, so we simply could not close the blinds and pretend that nothing was happening" (Interview with Lila Radonjić, January 17, 2003). In the streets, the protesters were chanting the names of *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* that finally proved the importance that people who belonged to the "democratic media reality" gave to these two independent media outlets.

On the other side of the Serbian media spectrum, the biased reporting of the regime media triggered another wave of protest. The *Evening News* report on the state TV showed only images of the destruction without explaining the real causes and defining the protesters as the "forces of chaos and insanity" and the Sunday morning issue of *Politika* accused *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* of "inducing the rebellion" (Antonić, 2002). This type of reporting provoked the students residing in the big complex of the so-called Student City to break the police barricades and gather again in the main Belgrade street, where the *Student Parliament* was established the same night. In addition to student demands for the release of the arrested protesters and disclosure of all responsible for the bloodshed of the previous day were the demands to "end the monopoly of the ruling party of the mass media and a guarantee that *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* be allowed to work unhindered" (Glenny, 1993, p. 53). Both stations got back on air very shortly after and the prisoners were released the very next day. In the next few days, students succeeded in transforming the protest from the danger of another Tiananman or Romanian scenario to a *velvet revolution*, as had happened in Prague in 1989. Besides the resignation of the Interior Minister, general manager and five editors of *TV Belgrade*, the major achievement of the March protests was the live broadcast of the

Serbian parliamentary sessions, which would become regular practice from that moment on. Finally, for the first time, viewers in the entire country were able to hear representatives of the political opposition. Indeed, this was the beginning of the end of Milošević's regime media and political monopoly in Serbia.

Rimtu Ti Tuki:
Antiwar Activism of the Serbian Independent Media

In many studies it is argued that the media played an important role in forging the civil war in Yugoslavia by spreading the “enemy all around us” type of messages: “It is absolutely clear that the mass media in the entire territory has fundamentally contributed to the beginning of the war and its brutalization” (Dimitrijević, 1994, p. 9). In her analysis of hate speech, which was deliberately used in the Serbian state-controlled media for the purpose of war propaganda, Branka Mihajlović (1994) pointed out a few methods for creating a war-mongering atmosphere in the news reports of *TV Belgrade*⁵: “By carefully selecting information, by serving direct lies, rewriting the news, aggressive commentaries, cutting out of the program any other political opinions except those supported by the official version of the *truth*...In this way media creates enemies, friends, traitors, heroes, as well as unsuitable individuals” (p. 21). Indeed, as an *Evening News* editor Mihajlović⁶ was able to witness all of this firsthand.

On the other side of the Serbian media reality, the independent electronic media took an active role in the antiwar campaign, which made journalists of *NTV Studio B* and

⁵ In 1991, *TV Belgrade* changed its name to *Radio Television of Serbia*.

⁶ Branka Mihajlović was among the most prominent *TV Belgrade* journalists who were purged from the station in the early nineties. The others were: Milica Lučić, Mihailo Kovač, Vlado Mareš, Milica Pešić, Milorad Petrović, Milorad Jovanović, Nebojša Janković, Ivan Brzev...The last two emigrated to Canada shortly after.

Radio B 92 easily recognizable as “traitors and unsuitable individuals”. “This reality did not match the official version of reality”, observed Jovanka Matic (2002) in her analysis: “The Bosnian war topic was structured around the problem of a solution to the Bosnian conflict. The second major story was the risk of international military intervention against the Serbs as the chief guilty party for the war. Serbian politics was estimated [by the independent media analysts] as the one that leads country and the whole Serbian people into the catastrophe” (p. 53).

In order to report on the development of the war in Bosnia as directly and objectively as possible after telephone lines had been cut off, *Radio B 92* with the help of radio amateurs maintained direct communications with the people of the besieged city of Sarajevo. In addition, the programming with Sarajevo’s *Radio Zid (Radio Wall)* was exchanged on a daily basis, so the audience was able to get firsthand information on the suffering of people in the Bosnian capital. After the beginning of the war in Croatia in 1991, an unofficial draft was imposed on young people in all Serbian towns. Both *NTV Studio B* and *Radio B 92* immediately launched a campaign for draft dodging. For instance, *NTV Studio B* broadcast special spots with the message that no man can be drafted into the army against his own will, but *Radio B 92* went even further by broadcasting the information obtained from listeners about which area of Belgrade army recruiters had been spotted. It turned out that this anti-draft propaganda was pretty successful since “only an estimated 13% of those eligible for mobilization in the city actually made it to the army” (Collin, 2001, p .48).

However, journalists of *Radio B 92* did not limit their activity to antiwar propaganda and coverage of the civil peace initiatives. The connection they had already

built with the growing civil society movement started to appear during the first antiwar protests. On April 22, 1992, in cooperation with the *Center for Antiwar Action*, 1992 *Radio B 92* organized a *Don't Count On Us* peace rally in Belgrade. The main event was a rock concert at Republic Square, which gathered more than 50,000 protesters, but even before the main show the musicians had also been playing throughout the day by being driven on a large truck all over the city. In addition, a special war-mocking anthem was composed by the most popular Serbian rock musicians, who for this occasion called themselves *Rimtu Ti Tuki Band* (a jargon almost impossible to translate in English, but containing a very obscene message to the regime). A song *Slušaj 'vamo* was published as a record by *Radio B 92* and was distributed freely to the protesters. In fact, this marks the beginning of *Radio B 92*'s music and book publishing activity, which will later on play a significant role in their strategy of civil and cultural resistance:

From the beginning we understood that our power did not originate from broadcasting...We understood that we need to take our power from different sources, so we organized the whole cultural scene around us. For example, we started to publish a literature magazine *Reč (The Word)*. We even established our cultural center [in the renovated *Cinema Rex*] where the young artists held exhibitions. *The Cinema Rex* became a safe place for the public discussions and debates. We also organized a women's movement with fifteen women's organizations behind us. We also started to publish the first woman's liberation magazine *Pro Femina*. We supported young rock musicians and published their first records. Furthermore, we built the base for the future TV station by producing movies. In short, we got a whole generation of artists behind us who made a strong statement in favor of the urban generation. (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003)

After the UN economic sanctions were imposed on Serbia and Montenegro⁷, the political and economic isolation of the country was complete. Suddenly, citizens with the

⁷ The two remaining republics of SFR Yugoslavia, which in 1992 formed the internationally unrecognized Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

highest standard of living and political freedoms in Eastern Europe found themselves living in ghetto. The young urban population was especially affected by the change, so the external ghettoization influenced the emergence of the internal ghettoization. Under these conditions, the independent media, critical intelligentsia, artists, rock musicians, students, women and other alternative movements slowly started to build not only the oasis of a free thinking and cultural activity in the ghetto (such as: *Cinema Rex, Belgrade Circle, Center for Cultural Decontamination, Women's Studies Center...*), but a strong social movement of resistance to the regime which had brought isolation, war and impoverishment. Inevitably, *Radio B 92* became the center of this movement.

Beside the *Don't Count On Us* rally, *Radio B 92* was behind the various other peace protests held in 1992 such as: *The First Belgrade Barricade* in March 1992, *Black Ribbon: Mourning for Sarajevo* in May 1992, *The Last Bell* in June 1992, *Yellow Ribbon: Against Ethnic Cleansing* in July 1992. All these protests were staged with various theatrical elements, using a strategy of the radical media like the street theaters in the US and Western Europe during the Vietnam War protests or the *Boal's Theater* in Latin America, which were “the direct fusion of political, media, and artistic activity” (Downing, 2001, p. 139). For instance, more than 100,000 people joined the ceremony of carrying a hundred meter-long black paper ribbon symbolizing the mourning for the dead in the Sarajevo siege. The *Yellow Ribbon* action was reminiscent of the persecution of the Jews during the WW II where the citizens expressed their protest against the ethnic cleansing by wearing a yellow ribbon around their arms. During the *First Belgrade Barricade* performance, journalists and staff of *Radio B 92* staged a barricade in the downtown Belgrade parodying the real Sarajevo barricades: “Traffic was gridlocked and

Veran Matic lampooned the war mongers, patrolling the barricade in a military uniform topped with a beret and dark glasses” (Collin, 2001, p. 51). Indeed, this street performance was in the best tradition of Boal’s radical theater and “its conviction that although some can act better than others, everyone can actwith a goal to engage the audience existentially and politically within the physical space of their everyday terrain and preoccupations” (Downing, 1996, pp. 135-137). For example, one of the most successful of *Radio B 92*’s theatrical action was the *All the President’s Babies* performance when young mothers were invited to bring their babies to the front of the Presidential building in the center of Belgrade and offered their offspring to President Milošević for adoption since they were not able to feed and raise their babies due to the high cost of living. Surprisingly, this action had an immediate effect: the tax on baby food was reduced shortly after.

Institutionalization of the Serbian Independent Electronic Media: Formation of ANEM

In addition to the various radical antiwar performances, *Radio B 92* conducted a broadcast experiment in 1992. Fearing another closure by the authorities, *B 92*’s journalists created a fake program with the regime media type of news reporting and terrible turbo-folk music pretending that the station had been converted into Milošević’s party radio. Shortly after the start of the program, the studio telephone was jammed with the calls of angry listeners protesting “the change of editorial policy”. The panic among the faithful *Radio B 92*’s audience was reminiscent of the panic created by the famous Orson Welles’s Martian invasion radio program in 1938. The angriest listeners even smashed their radios. Veran Matic explained later “that was the point when both we and

listeners realized how much the station meant to both of us and it also averted the ban, because we showed how strong we were” (Collin, 2001, p. 57). Despite the exodus of young and educated Serbian citizens toward Western countries, the support of the urban population for the independent media and antiwar civil initiatives were still sufficient to defend the oasis of free thought and civil action which found its recognizable symbol in *Radio B 92*. It is estimated that ”300,000 to 400,000 people, aged 25 to 40, have left since 1991, 35,000 holding university degrees” (Cohen, 2001, p. 208). Undoubtedly, for the urban segment of the Serbian population that stayed in the country, *Radio B 92*, *NTV Studio B* and other independent media were more than sources of information. As sociologist Eric Gordy (1999) observes in his study on the destruction of the civil society in Serbia, the independent media had a special emotional effect on the citizens. First of all, a sense of connection ”alternative information presented in professional style ...allowed people who doubted the veracity of the information presented in state media to feel that they were not alone in their doubts. Furthermore, the independent media provided tools by which people were able to develop a strategy of self-presentation...” (p. 98). As an example of this, the author describes the pride and satisfaction of the Belgrade woman who uses her loudest voice when asking for *Naša Borba* newspaper on the newsstand. Finally, realizing the importance that people belonging to the democratic media reality gave to *Radio B 92* and other independent media in Serbia and the necessity of getting organized in a strong network of independent electronic media, Veran Matić initiated the formation of *Asocijacija Nezavisnih Elektronskih Medija (Association of Independent Electronic Media)*. The first members of ANEM: *Radio B 92*, *NTV Studio B*, three radio stations from Serbia and two radio stations from Montenegro signed a

founding contract on October 14, 1993, where they defined the main objectives of the organization. Article 1 of the *ANEM's Founding Contract* (1993) outlines: *maintenance and development members' technical basis; exchange of news and other programs; professional training for staff and the offering of legal and other technical assistance to members*. In addition, Article 3 provides a precise definition of the term *independent media*: “Independent radio and television broadcasting medium implies an electronic public medium whose operation is independent from any level of state government and any political party and whose operation promotes the principles of independence and professional attitude in the work of its journalists and other associates” (*ANEM's Founding Contract*, p. 2, art. 3).

By the end of 1996, the membership of *ANEM* grew to 18 TV and 33 independent radio stations located all over Serbia. Finally, in March 1997, Serbian authorities, pressured by the international community, agreed to officially recognize *ANEM* and register it as a legal unit in the form of a business association. Due to its activity in the promotion of professional journalism and cooperation among media independent from state control in the South-Eastern Europe region⁸, *ANEM* gained strong international recognition and support. This became a crucial factor for the later survival of the Serbian independent electronic media, especially in the period after 1998 when Milošević's government unleashed unrestrained repression of the independent media. Certainly, on the list of factors which enabled the independent electronic media in Serbia to survive the conditions of Milošević's soft dictatorship, *institutionalization* and *internationalization* should be placed at the top.

⁸ *ANEM* was a member of *SEEMO* – South East Europe Media Organization, *SEENAPB* – South East European Network of Associations of Private Broadcasters and *SEENPM* – South East Network for Professionalization.

Primarily by organizing a network of small, privately owned electronic media outlets located in cities in inland Serbia, *Radio B 92* succeeded in breaking the monopoly of the regime media in the distribution of the relevant picture of reality to the Serbian citizens who did not have the opportunity to listen or watch the independent capital radio and TV stations, such as *Radio B 92* and *NTV Studio B*. For instance, in order to create an alternative news program at the national level, tapes with *Radio B 92*'s news program were distributed to *ANEM*'s members by regular bus lines and then broadcast at the same time making the impression of a direct transmission from one studio.

With the creation of the alternative network of local media connected in a singular system of information we opened a space for the other social and political movements, such as political parties of the opposition and non-government organizations, to send their messages to Serbian citizens. This network had functioned very successfully and with extreme discipline and vitality. In fact, our main goal was to transform every *ANEM*'s member into a replica of *Radio B 92*, so the local stations could become a main force for the media and political democratization in the area. (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003)

While *ANEM* established itself as an important organization in the future development of the independent media in Serbia, one of its founders, *NTV Studio B*, suffered a major crisis. In December 1993, during the early parliamentary elections the management of the station sold a significant amount of airtime for promotion of the extreme right wing party led by the suspected war criminal Željko Ražnjatović Arkan. This desperate act to save the station from financial breakdown caused a bitter conflict between the management and the editors, like Lila Radonjić and Zoran Ostojić: “Where in the world you can buy airtime to promote national hatred? Even in the most commercialized media markets you have certain moral codes and rules” (Interview with Lila Radonjić, January 17, 2003). A majority of the distinguished *NTV Studio B*

journalists and editors resigned and left the station realizing that the principles they stood for had been betrayed and that the station was not independent anymore. One of the leading journalists, Zoran Ostojić not only left *NTV Studio B*, but the country and emigrated to the USA: “Advertising money received from a war criminal was blood money and the general manager Kojadinović did not succeed in selling us the story of equal market competition in a society that was governed by anarchy” (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003).

After this affair *NTV Studio B* was never the same again. In the following years it was slowly transformed into an “apolitical” and entertainment oriented station and finally was taken over by the government in February 1996 on the grounds of so called “previous illegal transformation into a stock company”. Furthermore, the same year had brought new challenges to the independent electronic media in Serbia where the above mentioned processes of institutionalization into a strong association and the internationalization of the media activity would show in all its significance.

Internet Revolution of 1996: Internationalization of the Serbian Independent Media’s Struggle for Democracy

In November 1996, the opposition coalition *Zajedno (Together)* won the local elections in Serbia. Astoundingly, citizens of 41 municipalities, including the largest industrial cities, voted against Milošević’s party. This was a shock for the Serbian dictator who had been praised at the time by the international community as an “important factor of stability” in the Balkans. In December 1995, Milošević signed the Dayton Peace Accord that ended the war in Bosnia, which gained him respect from the

West and a reason to be celebrated in Serbia as a “peacemaker”. As usual, the regime-controlled media had continued to build his “heroic figure” especially after the economic sanctions on SR Yugoslavia were lifted. The state TV screen was full of fantastic images of “a thriving Serbian economy with fast rails and modern communications”.

However, the reality was completely different: half a million refugees, poverty (average monthly income was around 100 USD), unemployment, corruption, crime, and heavily armed police in the streets. The majority of people could not identify with the state media’s picture of society as Snježana Milivojević observed “because they would look through the window and see something entirely different. I am not saying that media in any society reflect whatever the external society is. I am saying that the general picture of reality that is accepted within a society is a consequence of negotiation. And this was not the case in Serbia” (Cited in Franz, 2001, p. 22). Thus, a surprising regime defeat in the local elections in 1996 can be explained by the absence of this consensus and as Cohen argues “an opportunity to abuse Socialist Party leaders who did not have Milošević’s political stature” (Cohen, 2001, p. 205). Finally, Milošević decided not to accept the election results which provoked the largest protest ever seen in Yugoslavia. The protest started at the University of Belgrade, but soon after, students were joined by the citizens from almost every social stratum, including Milošević’s most ardent supporters – pensioners. A peaceful civil rebellion was soon transformed into a big carnival. By using the already proven strategy of the radical media, people created different forms of collective street performances and protest actions: “The spirit was that of carnival, of a collective high, where new forms of peaceful, irreverent challenges to the regime were being invented day after day. The unfolding street burlesque, nutty, loud

and brilliant, showed, among other things, how starved people had become in the years since the war had started for a chance to let go and plain play” (Torov, 2000, p. 264). Similar to the antiwar protests in 1992, Belgrade students were the most creative in performing all kinds of theatrical actions, such as: *Condoms for Cowards*, *Disinfection of the Parliament*, *Washing the Rectory Building and Wrapping it in Bandages*, *Blowing Away the Police Cordon* (with the help of the jazz musicians), *Walking Pets...* Endless protest walks throughout the Belgrade streets, and the streets of other Serbian cities lasted for 122 days during the cold winter of 1996/97. “The competitive and imaginative spirit was upheld among the demonstrators: citizens and students. The students won by the number and inventiveness of their actions⁹, but the citizens won in those actions where scale was required - the traffic blockade, *Uniform VS. Uniform*, the 7:30 PM noise, the St. Sava procession” (Kazimir, 1997, p.16).

Certainly, one of the most effectively staged radical actions was *Noise is in Fashion* where residents appeared on their balconies everyday at 7:30 PM banging kitchen pots in order to silence the regime propaganda broadcast in the *RTS's Evening News*. “Tactical use of noise consists of attempts to symbolically topple the repressive discourse of the governing ideology and its media by simple deafening, the destruction of meaning and negation of any sense, where the noise served as a major agent...It would be utopian to believe that noise could empirically deconstruct the discourse practiced by the governing ideology, but it can, as a genuine voice of protest, signal that something is wrong with the media and the way in which we receive the messages” (Sretenović, 1997, p. 89). Naturally, grasping the significance of the *Noise is in Fashion* performance, *Radio*

⁹ Rough estimates say that the students launched over ninety original ideas.

B 92 broadcast the noise live every evening. By broadcasting a radical action *Radio B 92* acted as radical media again, but as Sretenović (1997) further explains: “it was not just media transmission of noise, but an attempt to promote noise into something really present, as a genuine sound event in city “ (1997, p. 93).

On December 3, 1996, fifteen days after the beginning of the protest, the signal of *Radio B 92* was suddenly cut off. The government’s official explanation was that “water entered the transmission cable”, but the ridiculousness of this excuse was obvious because the independent student *Radio Index* was also shut down. However, radio transmission was not the only way to disseminate the information. In November 1995, *Radio B 92* established the first Internet provider in Serbia called *Opennet*. Dražen Matić, a professor of mathematics at the Belgrade University, who was also a part of *Radio B 92* team, persuaded the telecommunication ministry to grant him a permit for the Internet link. This turned out to be a brilliant idea. There were not more 10,000 people who had Internet access in Serbia, but the creative team of *Radio B 92* realized that the Internet link could be used for bypassing the regime ban on transmission. With the cooperation of the *XS4ALL* provider based in Amsterdam and a Serbian language programming at *BBC*, a unique rebroadcast system was set up: “Every day, four hours of *B 92* and *ANEM* news programming were sent via the Internet to Amsterdam and then to London. The *BBC* then uplinked the *B 92* and *ANEM* news broadcast to its satellite, from which *ANEM* local radio stations would download them and then rebroadcast them across Yugoslav airways (Pantić cited in Franz, 2001, p. 29). Ironically, because of the government ban more people in Serbia could hear *Radio B 92* than ever before. The idea of *ANEM*, as a strong umbrella association of the Serbian local independent electronic media finally paid off. In

addition to the success in breaking the media silence that had been imposed during the 1996/97 winter of civil protest, the Internet operation gained wide international attention.

Western media praised the creativity and bravery of the small Serbian radio station calling its action an *Internet Revolution*. Indeed, *Radio B 92* was one of the first media in the world to use the Real Audio format for broadcasting an event. Besides international recognition of the Serbian independent electronic media, the *Internet Revolution* enabled the establishment of the worldwide solidarity network, consisting of NGOs, independent media organizations and individuals: “People all over the world came into contact with our productions, our style and our spirit, and they began to recognize themselves in what we were doing and thus became part of the creative resistance to the totalitarianism of Slobodan Milošević” (Matić and Pantić cited in Franz, 2001, p. 32). Undoubtedly, the introduction of the Internet in Serbia in 1996 created a completely new communication platform for civil and political movements for democratization, primarily because the state did not have any control over the Internet. The government had also underestimated the democratic potential of the Internet as a new channel of public communication and mediation. In fact, *Radio B 92*’s experiment with the Internet was one of the first examples of whether it could undermine government censorship and open up a new space for the democratization of the public sphere.

Finally, the attention that the international media paid to this action definitely contributed to the internationalization of the protests and political crisis in Serbia. Thus, under pressure from Western governments, Milošević allowed *Radio B 92* and other banned radio and TV stations to go back on air. On the streets of Belgrade and other cities people continued the protest against the election fraud. After the international

community began to show an interest in Serbia, the flags of Germany, France, Japan and other countries were carried by the demonstrators. Among the countries' flags, *Ferrari*, *Jack Daniels*, European soccer and *NBA* teams banners were also noticed sending a simple message: *Beograd je svet (Belgrade is the World)*. Of course, this was immediately used in the regime media as proof that the protestors and students on the streets were paid by Western governments and another argument for the old thesis about journalists as foreign mercenaries. After Milošević's recognition of the opposition victory in February 1997 and the end of civil protest in March 20, 1997, things in Serbia would never be the same.

As Cohen (2001) pointed out: "The 1996/97 civic protests did accelerate the process of political awareness in Serbia, and thereby enhanced the potential for future democratization. The Milošević regime remained intact, but its legitimacy had been considerably weakened. Moreover, new and potentially significant organizations had been established outside the control of the regime i.e., the development of an association linking independent media outlets." (p. 217). Indeed, in acknowledging his first political defeat, Milošević also recognized the significance of the independent media in the struggle for democracy in Serbia. Consequently, in the following years, he would attack the independent media in Serbia with all the legal and illegal means at his disposal.

CHAPTER THREE

OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: THE SERBIAN REGIME'S CRACKDOWN ON THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA FROM 1998 TO 2000

After the winter protest in 1996/97 and its political achievements, the development of civil society in Serbia gained momentum. As Kazimir (2001) suggests: "Having won power in some forty largest cities in Serbia the democratic opposition, despite all its differences, inconsistencies and mistakes, managed to expand the space for freedom and resistance all over the country. Belgrade of 1996 is no longer the single strongest point of resistance" (p. 21). By liberating of the largest cities from Milošević's party domination and by the formation of the *Alliance of Free Towns*, the local media finally obtained a long desired freedom to practice objective and professional journalism. For instance, in addition to *ANEM*, Serbian regional independent newspapers formed their association called *Local Press*. Another important moment in the development of a civil society in Serbia was a sudden blossoming of various non-governmental organizations. Until 1996, NGOs were concentrated in the Serbian capital and just a few of the largest cities, but after the opposition took over 33 cities all over Serbia, the whole infrastructure of the NGO sector was built. Since the emergence of the first NGOs in the early nineties, the struggle for a civil society in Serbia had gone through several phases where "the NGOs covered a long way from small alternative informal protest groups, through half-organizations, to well organized nongovernmental organizations.... The NGOs awakened and set society into motion... Thus, invisible actors have become visible

and the NGO's went all the way from illegals and enemies to important actors of social changes" (Paunović, 2001, pp. 61- 63).

In conclusion, it can be observed that with this fast development of the civil sector in Serbia after 1996, a sort of *parallel society* was constructed and prepared to be in full function once the democratic forces took over. However, the Serbian political parties of democratic opposition were still not ready to take power and overcome their differences, mainly due to the vanities of their leaders. In the fall of 1997, the coalition *Zajedno*, (*Together*), which won the local elections in 1996, fell apart while Milošević strengthened his hold, after surviving the winter 1996/97 civil protests. In June 1998, in order to tighten control over the university and prevent another student rebellion, his government imposed the new University Act, which completely abolished the autonomy of the university and put it under state control. After the pacification of one of the sources of discontent with his regime, Milošević made another crucial move to destroy the second - the independent media.

Bankrupting the Independent Media: 1998 Public Information Act

Since the independent media had become the only genuine opposition in Serbia, the passing of the new Public Information Act in October 1998 was not surprising. "The independent media was the only constant factor of resistance in Serbia. Political parties had made various coalitions, which did not usually last long, and during certain periods of the decade their power completely faded out, so the independent media were left as the only real opposition to the Milošević's regime" (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003). In fact, a new Public Information Act was created as a "legal" mean, which would serve to destroy the financial basis of the independent media. Accordingly, the Act

proposed draconian fines for the journalists and the publishers for “improper media coverage” or in other words - for public insults to state officials. Beside the severe financial fines, the Public Information Act proposed the seizure of the property and technical equipment of the disobedient media. According to the *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights* in Serbia, during the two year enforcement of the repressive Public Information Act, the Serbian media paid fines to the tune of 2.5 million German marks (around 2 million CAD)...and several journalists were sentenced to heavy prison terms - one was even convicted of espionage (*Human Rights in Serbia 2000*, p. 66). The print media were under attack by the special regime committee, which monitored the media coverage. This committee consisted of representatives of the municipal and republican prosecution, the Justice Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the Information Ministry, financial police and inspection officials. As a result of their work, from the introduction of the Public Information Act in October 1998 until the beginning of July 2000, a total of 66 trials were conducted on the independent media. For example, since October 1999, the Kikinda-based weekly *Kikindske novine (Journal of Kikinda)* was brought to court seven times under the Public Information Act and consequently resulted in four exorbitant fines totaling 880,000 dinars (around 23,000 CAD) (*Human Rights in Serbia 2000*, p. 73). Finally, many newspapers were bankrupted and ceased to exist, including the leading independent daily, *Naša Borba*. In addition, the main independent newspaper printing company *ABC Produkt* was bankrupted after being taken to court more than 50 times and fined 10 million dinars (around 250,000 CAD). As already noted in the cases of the independent daily *Borba* in 1994 and *NTV Studio B* in 1996, the regime-controlled Commercial Court also annulled the legal privatization of this company and seized

equipment worth 3 million CAD (Antonić, 2002, p. 298). Finally, an additional pressure on the independent newspapers was the limitation of paper delivery, since the only paper factory, *Matroz*, was still owned by the state. Due to all these factors the independent press in Serbia faced a total collapse.

However, for the independent electronic media Milošević had prepared a different strategy. In February 1998, the Federal Telecommunications Ministry announced a public competition for the broadcasting licenses. This action was officially intended to create order in the Serbian airwaves and to legalize the operation of the several hundred radio and TV stations. Among the 247 stations which were assigned temporary licenses, only two *ANEM* stations *Radio B 92* and *TV 5*¹⁰ were granted licenses. Evidently, it was only a trick to close the stations, which did not obtain licenses or more precisely - *ANEM*'s stations: "In the list of 247 stations which were assigned temporary licenses we can see that those stations broadcast mostly entertainment or regime propaganda type of news" (J. Matić, 2002, p. 97). Despite being denied the licenses, the independent stations, members of *ANEM*, continued to operate and were prepared to be closed down anytime the regime decided to do so. A public statement made by the Federal Information Minister, Goran Matić, in June 1998, clearly showed that the operation of those stations would not be tolerated any more: "There are the media outlets in Serbia which are the extended hands of foreign interest groups. These media exist only because of the help of those foreigners, they present unrealistic picture of our society, and they openly invite NATO intervention in our country, but we will not allow them to finish this job" (Cited

¹⁰ Local TV station from Niš, the largest city in the southern Serbia.

in Djorić, 2002, p. 99). Indeed, very soon these words would be turned into practice and lead to severe repressive measures against the independent media.

Independent Media as Collateral Damage: 1999 NATO Intervention

On March 24, 1999 NATO launched air strikes on Serbia after the failure of political negotiations on the political status of Kosovo and the Albanian minority living there. However, the bombing campaign was counterproductive for the side NATO intended to protect, but beneficial for Milošević. As Cohen (2001) observed: “He [Milošević] further calculated that his domestic hold on political power which had been severely undercut by the spring of 1999 in comparison to earlier years would actually be enhanced by rejecting a foreign ultimatum on the matter of Kosovo’s status” (p. 272). Indeed, public opinion was suddenly unified in its opposition to the bombing: “Both the state media and independent media presented a patriotic message during the bombing campaign, although the former had a nationalistic and jingoistic tone, while the latter focused on resistance to aggression” (Cohen, 2001, p. 285). The international community and NGOs, engaged in human rights, criticized the Serbian independent media for acting against the international community, which was certainly another proof of the Western misunderstanding of the political situation in Serbia. As Kazimir (2001) pointed out: “Those who expected and demanded that the representatives of democratic political parties and especially the civil sector should support the bombing of their own country in the name of universal human rights acted utterly cynically” (p. 29).

Reasons for the misunderstanding between the Western network of NGOs protecting human rights and the civil sector in Serbia could possibly be traced to the

ambivalent nature of some global NGOs. A left wing critique of NGOs claims that the real purpose of some global non-government organizations is the promotion of neo-liberal vision of the world (this issue will be addressed on p. 96 of this thesis) and the building of a moral ground for military intervention around the world. The 1999 NATO military intervention in Serbia was declared by Western leaders to be “humanitarian intervention” aimed to prevent “genocide” of the Albanian population in the southern Serbian province of Kosovo. As the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair expressed: “The new generation draws the line where the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated” (Cited in Chomsky, 2000, p. 1). In fact, the international NGOs protecting human rights, such as *Doctors without Borders* and some others, were in the forefront of the demand for humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, which prepared the stage for NATO intervention. This scenario can be also recognized in the US led intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 and Somalia in 1992. According to the left oriented critique, by giving a moral identity to these interventions, international NGOs declared themselves as a moral arm of modern imperialism. As Johnstone (2000) observed: “Based in the rich NATO countries, operating in poorer countries, the direction of their [NGOs] interventions is the same as that of NATO acting as policemen of New World Order. Such NGOs risk playing a role similar to that of Christian missionaries as pretext and justification for military expeditions in earlier imperialist conquest” (pp. 15-16). By its moral support of the 1999 NATO intervention in Serbia, international NGOs created a misunderstanding with the representatives of the Serbian democratic movement, civil society activists and independent journalists. This misunderstanding was especially evident in the NGOs’s expectations that the Serbian civil movement and independent

media should also back up the bombing of their own country for the sake of the universal human rights. Instead, this “new military humanism” (Chomsky, 1999) mobilized the whole population of Serbia to stand in the defense of the country, unintentionally backing up Milošević’s arrogant stand and his directed police brutality in Kosovo.

Yet, Milošević did not rely only on the patriotic feelings of citizens, so Martial Law was imposed. In addition, the Ministry of Information enacted further measures of the Public Information Act and ordered all radio and TV stations to stop the transmission of foreign programs such as *BBC*, *Voice of America*, *Deutsche Welle* and *Radio Free Europe* and to start to service war propaganda. Nevertheless, even this was not enough for the Serbian dictator.

**Independent journalists as “foreign mercenaries”:
The regime’s takeover of *Radio B 92***

Only a couple of hours after the first bombs fell on Belgrade and other Serbian cities, police entered the premises of *Radio B 92* and shut down broadcasting. Editor-in-chief, Veran Matic, was arrested and taken into custody. Already accustomed to this type of situation, *Radio B 92* news staff immediately switched on to the Internet operation. Similarly, as during the 1996/97 protests, the news was posted on the *B 92.net* website where the first pictures of the bombings immediately appeared. However, instead of government propaganda, information on how to behave during the air raids and where to find the nearest shelter was distributed to the citizens. It turned out that *B 92.net* web site had over a million visits per day. Again, as during the 1996/97 protest, friends of *Radio B 92* in Holland formed a coalition of Internet providers and journalistic associations, such as *XS4ALL*, *Hackers from Hell*, *Press Now*, *Next 5 Minutes*, *Digital City*, *De Ballie*, *ITXS*

and *Real Network* that started a media campaign - *HELP B 92*. The international fame that *Radio B 92* had gained through ten years of its activity proved crucial to its survival. Yet, despite the international solidarity of the non-governmental organizations, journalistic associations and friends, people from *Radio B 92* lost faith in the good intentions of the Western governments. After being released from custody, the very next day, Veran Matić gave his first public statement full of anger and disappointment with Western policy: “Perhaps someone out there would prefer to see us removed completely – as the final proof that Serbia is home only to nationalism, war-mongering and sheer brutality and to destroy all alternative democratic voices and peace initiatives in order to make Yugoslavia a European Iraq for the next ten years” (Cited in Collin, 2001, p. 147).

On April 2, the Serbian regime carried out the last attack on *Radio B 92*. The final hour of the station is vividly described by Collin (2001): “A deputation of stern-faced men arrived at the studio: court officials, uniformed policemen, the head of the Youth Council of Belgrade and about ten beefy, crew-cut minders wearing black leather jackets, the unofficial uniform of the Eastern European thug. They entered the office of managing director Saša Mirković and told him that he had been dismissed and was to be replaced by the new director, Aleksandar Nikačević, who immediately sat down in Mirković chair. The Internet broadcast was instantly halted and the journalists ordered to leave the building “ (2001, p. 152). In fact, the regime used the unclear legal ownership situation of *Radio B 92*, which was established by the institutions of former Yugoslavia, to claim the legal right to control the station. Not surprisingly, the entire staff of *Radio B 92* (including the janitor and the coffee maker) refused the offer of the new management to stay and keep their jobs. Consequently, almost instantly the news and music programs

were changed into the government programs, which contained mostly hysterical propaganda attacks on the international community and patriotic songs.

In frantic reports and comments on the state *RTS* news, leaders of the NATO countries were compared to Nazi war criminals, but the pictures of the bombings were rarely presented on the screen. Still, this policy was changed after the bombs started to hit civilian targets like bridges, trains and hospitals and those images were used as a proof of the immorality and hypocrisy of the international forces. Finally, provoked by the anti-NATO propaganda on April 23, NATO leaders ordered the bombing of the *RTS* building in downtown Belgrade killing 16 employees who were on late night duty. Undeniably, this incomprehensible bombing of the Serbian state TV building was a direct violation of the Geneva Convention's provisions that protect "persons taking no active part in the hostilities" (Retrieved November 23, 2004 from <http://www.unchr.ch/html>). In the end, it turned out that these two and a half months of bombing were the darkest period for journalists in Serbia, whose lives were threatened both by the NATO bombs and by Milošević's assassins. The worst case of the journalist sacrifice was the assassination of Slavko Ćuruvija, the owner and publisher of *Dnevni Telegraf (Daily Telegraph)* and *Evropljanin (The European)* magazine. In the state media, the long-time Milošević regime critic, Ćuruvija, was accused of supporting the NATO attacks and his killing was justified in the government mouthpiece newspapers, *Politika Ekspres*, under the ironic title: *Ćuruvija has finally got his bombs*.

Undoubtedly, in addition to anti-NATO propaganda, another major priority of the regime media was the attack on the independent media. Independent journalists were openly called foreign mercenaries and traitors who had betrayed their country. Therefore,

the state of war was an excellent opportunity for the Serbian regime to finally get rid of the independent media, by a simple and effective tactic - extermination. A couple of months after the NATO campaign was finished, a public statement of the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the extreme-right wing Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, showed the seriousness and determination of the regime to physically eliminate the last independent journalistic voice: “Take heed of these warnings! You are working against your state. You are paid in US dollars to destroy your state. You are traitors! You are the worst breed of people. You are worse than ordinary criminals... You journalists think that you are some kind of sacred cows. Some of you are cows, but not sacred” (Djorić, 2002, p. 132).

In truth, one has never denied that the independent media and the other non-governmental organizations in Serbia received financial support from abroad, but the funds were used (at least by the small independent media outlets) primarily for the purpose of economic survival or technological advancement, not to “destroy the state”, as Šešelj suggested. Certainly, it can be argued that the bottom line of some of the international government and non-government donors was the change of the regime in Serbia, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter. Still, a general feeling of many independent journalists, such as Lila Radonjić and Zoran Ostojić, who were interviewed for this research (their statements on this matter are quoted on pp. 93-94 of this thesis), was that even the accusation of “working against the state” could be accepted as legitimate because in the social and political context of Serbia in the nineties, Slobodan Milošević himself was responsible for identifying the state as representing himself and his regime. Therefore, no matter how paradoxical the following statement

sounds, “working against the state” was the first priority for all responsible citizens of Serbia who were concerned about their own present and future.

Recipe for survival: Independent media in Serbia and foreign financial help

In the early nineties, the independent media in Serbia were mostly independent as regards financial status. The main source of income for the small electronic media outlets like *NTV Studio B* or *Radio B 92* was advertising, but the market economy in Serbia was still in its early stage of development, so the limited market was not sufficient to maintain the existence of the media. In addition, state controlled companies were not permitted to advertise in the independent media, which additionally limited the media’s potential income. The managements of the independent media outlets were also under pressure from the editors and journalists to keep their distance from the regime controlled companies or the companies collaborating with the regime. As already described in the previous chapter, *NTV Studio B* was in a deep crisis in 1993 when the general manager, Dragan Kojadinović, decided to sell a large amount of air-time to the Serbian Unity Party, led by the suspected war criminal Željko Ražnjatović Arkan. After the editors resigned, the station never recovered, first losing its aura of independence and then in 1996 being finally taken over by the government.

NTV Studio B was one of the first independent media outlets in Serbia to receive help from abroad. In December 1992, the *International Fund for Media* sent two trucks full of equipment worth 236,000 USD (Thompson, 1994, p. 114) for *NTV Studio B* to be used for the election campaign. Both trucks were seized after crossing the border, but the authorities denied any involvement in this action though it was obvious they were responsible. Undoubtedly, the most important organization providing help for the

independent media, NGOs, and other civil initiatives in the first part of the ninth decade was the *Soros Foundation*, established by the Hungarian-American multimillionaire, George Soros. Inspired by the concept of the *open society* developed by the philosopher Karl Popper, Soros established a network of offices in almost every post-socialist country in Europe and Central Asia. Based on Popper's idea that "each attempt to realize a complete concept of society [such as communism for example] was destined to failure and would lead to the loss of freedom - to a closed society: the attempt to create heaven on earth produces hell instead" (Cited in Arns & Broeckmann, 1997, p. 8), the *Soros Foundation* supported projects and organizations with the aim of the development of a civil society. The *Soros Foundation* was registered in Serbia in 1991, but despite helping not only the Serbian independent media and NGO's but also hospitals and schools, it was banned by Milošević's government in 1995. After 1995, it had been registered under the new name - *Open Society Fund*. Another important donor in the early nineties was the Dutch organization *Press Now*, based in Amsterdam. Arns and Broeckmann (1997) described the structure of this NGO: "*Press Now* bases its work on the contacts between individuals and small groups, and it's such personal contact that also provides motivation for many of the invitations, trips and projects" (p. 9).

After the internationalization of the Serbian independent media struggle for democratization in 1996, other international non-governmental and governmental organizations started to actively support the independent media. The list is long, but the most prominent among them were: *Swedish Helsinki Committee*, *US Agency for International Development*, *Canadian International Development Agency*, *United Kingdom Department for International Development*, *Council of Europe*, *German*

Marshall Fund, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Swiss Mediahilfe, IREX, Norwegian People Aid, Freedom House... In spite of the existing documentation, it is difficult to calculate the precise amount of money invested in the Serbian independent media by all the donors from 1991 to 2000. This is more because of donors' choice to remain discrete than the recipients' unwillingness to divulge contributors. The editor in chief of *Radio B 92* and executive director of *ANEM*, as one of the key players in these transactions, was very comfortable in answering a direct question with the following reply: "Financial help received by the foreign independent media and the others up to the year 2000 was dedicated to the survival of the media, and not to the bringing down of Milošević's regime. None of us journalists got rich from that money, because foreign donors were not fools who did not take care of the ways in which their money was spent. The most important thing in that situation was the position we had built with the donors, and that from the beginning of each project funded by the foreign donors we had requested to be in a full charge of it" (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003).

In spite of *Radio B 92*'s generally positive experience with foreign government and non-government donors, the above-mentioned leftwing critique of NGOs should be definitely taken into account. The critique argues that some NGOs are part of a neo-liberal agenda and the globalization process. For instance, Petras and Veltmayer (2001) suggest that in reality those NGOs are not non-governmental organizations:

They receive funds from overseas government, work as private subcontractors for local government and/or are subsidized by corporate-funded private foundations with close working relations with the state...NGOs emphasize projects, not social movements.... they undermine democracy by taking social programs and public debate out of the hands of local people...creating dependence on non-elected overseas officials and their appointed local officials. (p.132)

The basic assumption of the leftwing or class struggle oriented critics is that some NGOs undermine class political action and social movements by transforming class solidarity into collaboration with the neo-liberal movement of globalization. According to leftwing critics, the civil society promoted by many NGOs is also divided to classes confronted in the class struggle. To partially answer a critique that the whole action of financing the independent media and civil society projects in Serbia was nothing other than an integral part of the major agenda of the Western governmental and non-governmental organizations to promote the market economy and neo-liberalism, Snježana Milivojević suggested that all global concepts of civil initiatives need to be de-ideologized:

The entire country today exists on foreign donations, for example the health system. Therefore, if the foreign money goes through the government it becomes legitimate, but if the money goes to the NGO's or the media, it is disputable. This type of political and ideological reading of the media emerges from the context in which the media are seen as a political institution. Today, non-governmental organizations are organized in the global networks enabling the formation of associations and interest groups of people who are thousands miles away from each other. Even without the financing of the independent media in Serbia from abroad it was obvious that a people's revolt would erupt sooner or later similar to Romania in 1989. Therefore, we cannot accept the argument coming from the former Serbian regime advocates that the social and political change in Serbia was orchestrated from the abroad. The best proof for supporting my view is the winter protest in 1996/97, when the citizens, deprived of objective information, invented their own media and communication techniques for expressing their disagreement with the regime, such as banging kitchen pots and pans during the state news broadcasting. (Interview with Snježana Milivojević, January 15, 2003)

As Milivojević suggested, thanks to the global networks of information, support for the independent media in Serbia was not only expressed by formal organizations, but also by informal citizens groups, which supported democratic movements around the world. Thanks to its international fame, *Radio B 92* was supported by donations from

ordinary citizens' groups, such as *The Dordrecht Balkan Committee* from the Netherlands or clubs like *Friends of B 92* from London and New York.

When asked the same questions about foreign support, former *NTV Studio B* news editor-in-chief, Lila Radonjić, was very emotional in denying the regime's "foreign mercenaries" accusations: "Milošević was supported by China, the Russian Communist Party of Zjuganov, and Saddam Hussein, but nobody had ever questioned that. Their business with foreigners was always clear, but our business with the foreign donors was dirty. I really do not have nerves to discuss that anymore, but I repeat that as a journalist you can still stay independent even if you are supported by somebody else. If a journalist is not objective – he/she is not a journalist. If you respect the criteria of professionalism nobody can take it away from you. No one can buy you if you are not for sale" (Interview with Lila Radonjić, January 17, 2003).

It is obvious that the independent media in Serbia could not have been able to survive the difficult economic and political circumstances in which it emerged and operated throughout the nineties without financial help from abroad. As already described, the existence of *Radio B 92* and other small radio/TV stations or independent newspapers was deeply threatened after the introduction of the Public Information Act in 1998, which was specifically designed to destroy their financial basis. The dilemma to stay pure and cease to exist or to receive the money from the international donors and being accused of "treason" was a false dilemma, as the journalists interviewed for the purpose of this research agreed, that it was not only the individual existence of the independent journalists that was at stake under the Milošević regime, but the interests and future of all citizens of Serbia. Accordingly, Zoran Ostojić was very clear when

discussing the issue: “Even if we accept that the bottom line of foreign help was the overthrow of the regime, I do not see any problem with that. There was nothing more important for the sake of the nation other than bringing down Milošević” (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003). As noted above, Slobodan Milošević had a completely opposite view on that aim, and he would demonstrate it in the spring of 2000.

Violence as a System: The Culmination of the Regime’s Oppression on the Independent Media in the Spring 2000

In his traditional New Year 2000 interview for the largest government-controlled daily, newspaper *Politika*, Milošević announced further repression of the independent media: “The Public Information Act is literally re-written from the Western media laws [sic] and it is designed to protect the truth and dignity of the state and our citizens. However, recently the Act has not been applied appropriately and we are again in a state of media irresponsibility similar to the previous years” (Cited in Djorić, 2002, p. 128). Undoubtedly, this was a clear message sent to the “irresponsible media”.

In March 2000, a new crackdown on electronic media was launched. This time, the measures for “making the media responsible” included physical force. On the night of March 5, unidentified assailants attacked the *NTV Studio B* transmitter crew located on a nearby hill in Belgrade. The attackers disassembled the equipment and beat up two technicians. It was obvious that the transmitter was disabled by government experts. On March 8, employees of the Telecommunication Ministry raided the premises of *Radio BOOM 93* [one of the founders of *ANEM*] in Požarevac [Milošević’s hometown] and seized the equipment on the grounds of non-possession of a license (*Human Rights in Serbia 2000*, p. 72). By the end of the month, *TV Nemanja*, *Radio Tir*, *RTV Požega*, *TV*

Pirot, TV Kraljevo, TV 5, TV Lav, Golf Radio, TV Mladenovac and many other local independent stations met the same fate. On March 14, 2000 at a press conference, the Federal Minister of Telecommunications, Ivan Marković, stated that 168 radio stations and 67 TV stations were operating without licenses and that they owed the state a total of 120,836,280.35 dinars (more than 3 million CAD): “God will not save a single transmitter. We will take down each and every one if the fees are not paid and licenses issued” (*File on Repression*, No. 2, 2000, p. 9). The fines imposed on the independent media by the Public Information Act only in March and April 2000 totaled 1,906,000 dinars (around 50,000 CAD). In spite of the repression, the ratings of the *ANEM* stations and other independent local stations were increasing. According to the research of *Strategic Marketing Agency* in May 2000, 12.3 % of the population between ages 10 to 70 watched the *ANEM* TV stations, which was around 1.3 million viewers (Retrieved on April 23, 2002 from http://www.anem.org.yu/eng/medijska_scena/saopstenje1.html). Compared to 1.5 million viewers of the technically advanced government funded *RTS*, this number was an enormous achievement (in fact, the main source of *RTS* income was the subscription that was automatically deducted from the every hydro bill). At the same time, the number of readers of the independent press reached that of the regime newspapers.

From the emergence of the independent media in Serbia, the regime of Slobodan Milošević had recognized them as the enemies and treated them accordingly. Being aware of the important role that the media had played in his rise to political power, Milošević also never underrated the potential of the independent media in undermining his position. As we discussed in previous chapters, the independent media were identified

in the Serbian public as the voice of the political opposition, and furthermore, in certain periods of crisis as the only genuine opposition to the authoritarian regime. As in any other soft dictatorship, Milošević had never attempted to completely eliminate the independent media. Nevertheless, in the spring of 2000, when he realized that his power was seriously threatened, the Serbian dictator took off his velvet gloves and began to settle accounts with the “foreign mercenaries”. Cohen (2001) accurately explained this Milošević offensive: “Politically challenged as never before, the safety valve function of the independent media, which had been tolerable in a soft dictatorship, was now regarded by Milošević as threatening the regime’s survival” (p. 349).

In the early nineties, the media’s “safety valve theory” was introduced in a public discussion by some journalists and media analysts as a possible explanation for the existence of the independent media. It was argued that Milošević allowed the independent media to serve as a safety valve for the tensions accumulating in Serbian society. It was believed that without the independent media, dissatisfaction with the regime would have erupted much earlier. Thus, the existence of *Radio B 92*, *NTV Studio B* and other small media outlets were also used as a cover for the simulation of the pluralistic media system and political freedom. Since the real influence of these stations on the wider population was limited by their signal coverage, the advocates of the safety valve theory argued that Milošević did not recognize them as a serious threat.

Journalists and media analysts interviewed during the research for this thesis were divided on the validity of the safety valve theory. The former editor and general manager of *NTV Studio B*, Zoran Ostojić, supported it: “I would not say that the theory is without any sense. We were some kind of safety valve and we were aware of that. The regime

was able to destroy us at any time, but they recognized that we had served their purpose. The international community also played a part in that farce” (Interview with Zoran Ostojić, January 13, 2003). On the other hand, *Radio B 92*'s editor-in-chef, Veran Matić, had a different opinion: “I don't think that Milošević ever needed the independent media to serve him for any purpose. He deeply hated us and tolerated us only because of the pressure from the international community” (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003).

Same as the author of this thesis suggested in the beginning of this chapter, the media analyst, Snježana Milivojević, argued that “Milošević had always been aware of the independent media's importance in articulation and self-identification of the alternative social forces. Without any doubt, those forces and groups would have been more isolated without the information obtained from the independent sources. Finally, in the second part of the nineties when the repression of the media reached the point of physical extermination of the independent journalists, the regime showed its real face” (Interview with Snježana Milivojević, January 15, 2003).

Various forms of repression on the independent media: A short overview

The assassination of Slavko Ćuruvija, the owner of *Dnevni Telgraf* (*Daily Telegraph*) and *Evropljanin* (*The European*) magazine, during the NATO bombing campaign in April 11, 1999, revealed that Milošević in his struggle for survival would not hesitate to use any possible method to destroy his critics. From the “legal” measures used to silence the independent media in the beginning of his rule, the Serbian dictator had finally moved to the most effective – physical elimination of journalists who he considered as the most serious threat to his regime. The next few sections will give a

short overview of all kinds of measures and repressive actions used against the independent media in Serbia during the rule of Slobodan Milošević. In fact, these measures are outlined in three major groups: *legal and paralegal measures*; *economic pressures*; and *psychological and physical attacks on journalists*. However, instead of presenting a list of all numerous examples where the journalists were harassed, threatened, beaten, arrested and kidnapped during the nineties in Serbia, just a few extreme cases will be mentioned.

Legal and paralegal measures

- *Prefixed competitions for the assignment of frequencies*: the independent media were denied licenses without any explanation and despite having the proper documentation. The regime's aim was to shut down the independent media on the "legal" ground of not having licenses.

- *Bureaucratic confusions*: in order to obtain a broadcasting license from the Ministry of Telecommunications a company needed to be registered for broadcasting, but in order to be registered it needed to have a license, which was an absurd circle, impossible to break.

- *1998 Public Information Act*: draconian fines were imposed to financially destroy the independent media. All fines were collected immediately without a chance for any appeal. Thus, the Act was one of the most severe media laws in modern history.

- *1999 War Laws*: during the NATO bombing campaign various special war decrees were passed proscribing strict censorship. The media were obliged to maintain permanent contacts with state bodies and to use specific language in reporting on events.

Among the numerous arrests of journalists (Veran Matić, Stevan Nikšić, Miroslav Hadžić, Nebojša Ristić), the most drastic attack on the freedom of the press and personal freedom was the military court trial for espionage, where Miroslav Filipović, *Franss Press* correspondent for Kraljevo, was sentenced to seven years in prison. He was accused of revealing military secrets in his reports on the war in Kosovo.

- *Takeovers by the regime*: as in the cases of *Borba*, *Radio B 92*, *NTV Studio B* and *Večernje Novosti* the regime influenced the Commercial Court which consequently annulled the ownership transformations of this media, declaring them illegal.

Economic measures

- *Taxes and dues*: by contrast to the state media, the independent media were not relieved from taxes and dues.

- *Limited advertising*: the largest state controlled companies were forbidden to advertise their products and services through the independent media. It was also impossible for the independent media to advertise on the regime media.

- *Limited newsprint supply*: the only manufacturer of printing paper was in the hands of the state, and so the price of the paper for the independent newspapers was 200-300% higher than for the regime press and the payment terms were highly unfavorable. In addition, importation of the newsprint was directly controlled and restricted by the authorities.

- *Limited printing*: Independent newspapers with a large circulation could only be printed in the large printing shops controlled by the regime; the independent newspapers were blackmailed and had to pay much higher prices than the state newspapers. On many

occasions printing of the independent newspapers was cancelled without explanation. Some of the independent papers were printed in neighbouring countries, but the delivery trucks were seized at the border.

- *Limited distribution*: The largest press distribution companies were also state controlled and refused to sell the independent press. Whenever copies of the independent papers were sold payment was postponed and the control of the numbers of copies sold was not allowed.

- *Limitations on the infrastructure*: it was very hard to lease the appropriate premises for the independent media and to obtain phone lines from the state service provider. Even the distribution of the mail was uncertain.

- *Financial police*: inspectors controlled the independent media every day putting additional pressure on the independent media adding to the difficult operations in an environment of high inflation and chaotic markets.

Psychological and physical attacks on journalists

- *Public accusations* for “ treason and unpatriotic behavior” by the high state officials were commonplace.

- *Numerous court trials, arrests, interrogations and police harassments*

- *Inprisonings*: Miroslav Filipović, *Franss press* contributor from Kraljevo, sentenced to seven years for “espionage” and Nebojša Ristić, editor-in-chief of *TV Soko*, was sentenced to one year prison term for posting a *Free Press - Made in Serbia* poster on the office window during the NATO air campaign.

- *Killings*: The assassination of Slavko Ćuruvija

To record the attacks on independent journalists and all repressive actions towards the media in March 2000 *NUNS - Nezavisno Udruženje Novinara Srbije (Independent Journalists Associations of Serbia)* started publishing the *Files on Repression* bulletin. The bulletins were originally designed as bimonthly reports on media repression, but due to the intensity of the regime attacks on the independent media they became monthly publications. Because the *Files on Repression* contains every single case of attacks on media and journalists in the Spring of 2000, they are today a unique source for researchers and also valuable documents on the last months of the dictatorship in Serbia.

***Otpor - the resistance to oppression:
The final closure of Studio B and Radio B2- 92***

The crucial step in the spring campaign of media repression was the police takeover of *Studio B*¹¹ in the night of May 16, 2000. The police action was justified by the accusation that the station was calling for the overthrow of the government: “The measure taken within the framework of the struggle against criminality, terrorism, *Studio B*-staged incitement to revolt and its attempts to provoke a civil war in Serbia” (*Human Rights in Serbia*, 2000, p. 78). In fact, *Studio B* premises in *Beogradjanka*, a downtown high-rise, hosted three other independent media outlets: *Radio B2-92*, *Radio Index* and the daily newspaper *Blic*, and those operations were also terminated.

After the takeover of *Radio B 92* in April 1999, the station had been operating under the new name *Radio B2-92* using one of the *Radio Studio B*'s frequencies and its equipment. It is a fact that in 1999, *Studio B* was under the control of the Serbian

¹¹ The adjective *nezavisni* or independent was erased from the station's title back in 1996, when *NTV Studio B* was re-claimed by its founder Belgrade City assembly, at that time controlled by Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia.

Renewal Movement.¹² Its independence was lost in 1996, but the original editorial staff of *Radio B 92* accepted the arrangement with *Studio B* only under their conditions of complete independence in the program creation. The reappearance of the most popular capital radio station in August 1999 was a sign that the resistance in Serbia had not been defeated and the independent media was again assigned the role of lighting the spark of resistance. The social and political depression in Serbia at the time was well described by Collin (2001): “The conclusion of the NATO bombing left Belgrade in its worst ever psychological state. Disillusioned, angry, impoverished and downtrodden, its social life, like many of its public buildings, in ruins, its independent media crushed, its political opposition cowed and impotent” (p. 170). The latest attack on the independent media was another clear message that the regime was waging a war for survival according to Machiavellian principles that the objective of preserving the rulers’ power justifies the means used.

The brutal closure of *Studio B*, *Radio B2-92*, *Radio Index* and *Blic* drew 10,000 protesters to the front of *Beogradjanka* building and the same day the news was read from the Town Hall balcony. The opposition leaders joined the gathering in delivering speeches, but the police intervened and violently clashed with the crowd. Despite the violence, the protests and the public readings of *The News at Seven* from the Town Hall continued for the next ten days. In addition to the daily demonstrations of police violence, the regime announced another piece of legislation to justify its actions. The euphemistic Law on Terrorism had never been officially passed in the Parliament, yet it was designed

¹² The majority party in the Belgrade City Assembly at the time.

not only to punish “media terrorism”, but also to pacify a new threat - the student’s movement *Otpor (Resistance)*, which grew stronger every day.

The student movement *Otpor* was founded on October 10, 1998 by the student veterans from the 1996/97 protests, as a reaction to the new University Act, which abolished the autonomy of the University. The first *Otpor* public protests were organized a year later in November 1999, but the first activists were arrested for painting a symbol of a clenched fist on the wall in the center of Belgrade on November 4, 1998. The clenched fist visualized a basic strategy of the movement - *a non-violent resistance*. In fact, it was a parody on the Bolshevik’s fist and a subtle reference to Milošević’s communist background. As *Otpor* activist Vladimir Stojković pointed out: “We grew up watching a clenched fist on monuments and films about partisans from the Second World War” (Cited in Ilić, 2001, p. 69). This symbol shortly became the logo of the movement posted not only on walls, but also on banners, posters, stickers, leaflets, badges, and T-shirts. The idea of resistance became the state of mind of the *Otpor* activists who in April 2000 in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, received a special training in non-violent action from the retired US colonel Robert Helvey.

In the spring of 2000, the student movement *Otpor* grew to 100,000 activists, organized in more than a hundred cities all over Serbia. *Otpor*’s application for registration as a political organization was refused by the authorities who treated the movement as a terrorist organization “which became an obsession for Mira Marković (Milošević’s wife) and her allies in the secret police. They saw future guerrillas in it - urban guerrillas. It was a brand new formula of resistance and struggle” (Matić cited in Collin, 2001, p. 211). Surveys conducted in the summer of 2000 showed that about one-

third of the Serbian citizens did not trust political parties and politicians, but *Otpor*'s non-leadership strategy attracted more and more supporters. As a result "opposition leaders quickly began to associate themselves with *Otpor*. For example, rally on May 15, many party leaders including Zoran Djindjić, wore *Otpor* T-shirts" (Cohen, 2001. p. 356). Because of its decentralized structure and grass roots character, the *Otpor* movement had many similarities with the Polish *Solidarity* movement of the early eighties, which awakened the Polish society and finally wiped out the communist system.

Undoubtedly, Milošević and his allies were very well aware of the danger if *Otpor*'s popularity continued to grow; therefore they were particularly intent upon curbing its activists. It is estimated that until September 2000 about 6,000 activists were arrested and interrogated, spending 36,000 hours in jail (*Human Rights Watch World Report*, 2000 retrieved August 17, 2002, from <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k>). *Otpor*'s media strategy consisted of the different forms of radical actions, such as the use of *graffiti* and *street theatre*. In these street performances, so-called *mind bombs* designed to shock the public were used to mock the regime and the dictator. As Downing (2001) explained, mind bombs have a purpose to "disrupt settled patterns of thought...aimed to make a potent statement in one short space and thereby to lodge themselves in people's conscious memories" (p. 159). The main objective of these radical street actions was to free people from fear created by the regime's media, war, inflation, crime and repression. Contrary to the regime's intention, the frequent arrests and harassments of the *Otpor* activists only increased the movement visibility and as a result it recruited more members. In cooperation with the independent media, the documentation containing evidence of the arrests and mistreatments were regularly presented to the international

human rights organizations. After *Otpor* distinguished itself internationally, it started to get financial support from the international NGO's and some government organizations, such as *USAID*. Thus, beside the independent media in Serbia, the students' movement *Otpor* was recognized as an important factor in the struggle for democratization.

It is Time: Mobilization for Democratic Change

It is argued in numerous studies that the key reason for the success of the election campaign and the final victory of the Serbian political opposition in the September 24, 2000 elections was "the creation of a wide coalition of the NGOs, movements and trade unions, as well as independent media" (Kazimir, 2001, p. 30). Without a doubt, we can accept this as a crucial factor, but it is also certain that another significant moment of the elections was the strategy of the opposition's campaign, which was designed not around media promotion, but around the individual voters. Accordingly, an army of *Otpor* and other NGOs activists were visiting the voters in their homes in order to encourage them to go out and vote for the change. All the surveys of the Serbian electorate body conducted at the time showed a big number of abstainers. Citizens of Serbia had lost faith in elections, because in the first place, they were disappointed with the impotent political opposition, and in the second, they were frightened by the regime media and police repression. As expected, those who suffered the worst repression – *Otpor* activists, were the most active in the door-to-door campaign of persuading "the silent majority" to go to the polls.

Otpor designed its campaign in two directions: *positive* and *negative*. The negative campaign was directed at Slobodan Milošević personally, condensed in the simple message - *Gotov je (He is Finished)*. Five tons of posters and stickers with this

message were delivered for just a few weeks of the campaign. “The words *He is Finished* were the most spoken words in Serbia in the Fall of 2000” (Gruden, 2001, p. 241). The positive campaign was centered around the slogan *Vreme je (It is Time)* and was addressed to the voters. This campaign was organized in cooperation with the independent media: *Radio B2-92* and *ANEM* members, local radio and TV stations across Serbia. They were joined by rock bands, which performed rock concerts entitled *Get Out and Vote* in 27 cities, thus encouraging young people to take part in the upcoming elections. These concerts were promoted by the local media and attracted around 150,000 visitors: “This was the biggest tour in the history of Serbian rock music. It was a combination of artistic and social activism – it was not based on political propaganda, but on seduction” (Ambrozić cited in Collin, 2001, p. 209). Small local radio and TV stations organized in *ANEM* network played a crucial role in informing the citizens about the promotional activities of the political opposition organized in the coalition of 18 political parties and called themselves *DOS – Democratic Opposition of Serbia*. “All across Serbia there was an extremely active network of local independent media that proved again - when the conquered space of freedom becomes an integral part of the collective experience - it is impossible to deny it” (S. Milivojević cited in Gruden, 2000, p. 217). After being evicted from its premises, *Radio B2-92* was working underground by producing the news program on personal computers in individual apartments, similar to radio broadcasts during the NATO bombing. *Radio B2-92*'s news was retransmitted through the local stations or from the transmitter on the Majevisa mountain in neighboring Bosnia that covered a part of the Serbian territory. In addition, a few illegal transmitters were erected in Belgrade; wireless communications were established

between the production premises; and part of the journalistic team was ready to escape across the border if necessary.

Despite all the disadvantages, the independent media were again in the center of the mobilization for democratic change. It was obvious that the future and very existence of the independent media were at stake in the elections: “No other area of public life, and no other profession faced so high a danger of complete ruin and loss of identity in the event of the regime’s victory, as did journalism. This could be felt in every article or program item broadcast on radio or television. No matter what the topic was, it was charged with anti-regime messages” (Kazimir, 2001, p. 33).

Certainly, besides the independent media and the *Otpor* movement, the coalition of non-governmental organizations in Serbia was a crucial factor for the success in deposing the Milošević’s regime. For the first time, all democratic forces were organized around one clear objective: *victory of the Serbian opposition*. More than a hundred non-governmental organizations took part in the election campaign. One of the most important among them was *CeSID - Centar za slobodne izbore i demokratiju (Center for the Free Elections and Democracy)*, which trained several hundred thousand election observers in order to control the voting process and eliminate election fraud. In addition, *CeSID* printed and distributed one hundred thousand *Voters’ Guides* brochures, where basic information about the voting procedure was presented. Another significant NGO was *G 17 Plus*, which gathered mostly economic experts, who traveled across the country explaining the economic program of the opposition and distributing *The White Book*, where the numbers and graph icons showed the economic damage created by the Milošević’s regime for the last decade. Certainly, the most effective *G 17 Plus* radical

action was the *Thousand Drums Campaign* - a rock drummer, Dragoljub Djuričić, gathered as many tin drums and drummers as he could and led the drummers throughout the main streets of the Serbian cities creating a carnival like atmosphere and drumming as the sign of the future victory of the democratic opposition of Serbia.

The main characteristic of the Serbian NGOs campaign for the September 24, 2000 elections was that it was completely decentralized, but very well synchronized. As many Eastern European civil sector activists agreed, when compared with the campaigns in the other transitional countries in the nineties, the Serbian civil sector election campaign was unique - the most creative, esthetically and technologically advanced: "The job that Serbian NGO sector performed was the best accomplishment of the decade in the Central and Eastern European countries. For that reason Serbia should be used as a classroom for the others" (Demeš cited in Gruden, 2001, p. 230). Despite everything, it is clear that the burden of the victory was carried out by the *Otpor* movement, which in the dawn of the election cleverly transformed itself from a student organization into a popular movement. *Otpor's* strategy of non-violent resistance and radical media campaigns gained it a wide acceptance among the ordinary citizens. Specifically, a clear message that the main objective of the movement is not political power, but the urgency for social change added to the movement's moral superiority and popularity. The personal bravery and endurance of the *Otpor* activists maintained under the harsh police beatings and harassments showed to the ordinary citizens that fear and repression can be overcome. As one of the *Otpor* activists pointed out: "You need a lot of time to produce massive fear, but the pyramid of fear collapses much faster than the time you need to build it" (Interview with Srdja Popović in York, 2000). Undeniably, the main task of the

whole civil sector in Serbia in the September 24, 2000 election campaign was to reinforce confidence among the citizens that an opposition victory was possible. Obviously, the election result showed that this task was successfully accomplished.

After Milošević denied the victory of the *Democratic Opposition of Serbia* and refused to recognize its candidate, Vojislav Koštunica, as the new President, public revolt erupted throughout the country. Almost everything stood still for a couple days before the general strike, which was scheduled for October 5, 2000. It was clear that this would be the long-awaited “protest of all protests”. On the “D-day” several hundred thousand people gathered in front of the Federal Parliament, asking for the official acknowledgment of the opposition victory. In the early afternoon, the crowd broke into the Parliament and set it on fire. Police retreated, as they were aware that Milošević and his regime were finished: “It was clear that it was not opposition against regime any more, but people against Milošević” (Interview with Zoran Djindjić in York, 2001). In the late afternoon of the same day, the *Radio Television of Serbia* building was also set on fire and the notorious journalists and anchors were beaten up by the angry crowd. All three channels of *RTS* were off the air and some other pro-regime media like the state agency *Tanjug* and daily *Politika* suddenly changed sides and started to report on the events objectively. The protesters occupied the old *Radio B 92* premises in the *House of Youth*, and the station was back on the air on its original frequency 92.5 FM. When the original director of *Radio B 92*, Saša Mirković entered his office after a year and a half of absence, he found an unfinished cup of coffee on the table: “It felt like somebody had been wearing my underpants” (Mirković cited in Collin, 2001).

On October 5, 2000, after eleven years of struggle for freedom of the press and a democratic society, independent journalists were finally in the position to do their job without any fear of persecution. The regime-controlled media, such as daily *Politika* and *Radio Television of Serbia* were liberated from government control, which resulted in an immediate change of editorial policy. Indeed, this was one of the first noticeable results of the political change; state and quasi-state broadcasters and the print media were suddenly open for the representatives of the political opposition and the NGO sector.

No Privileges for the Independent Media Veterans: Independent Media in Serbia after October 5, 2000

Shortly after the official transition of power, independent media organizations and associations put pressure on the new government to include media reform and new media legislation in the package of primary reforms. However, this did not go as smoothly as expected. Despite the new Broadcasting Act being drafted with the cooperation of the *Council of Europe*, *OSCE* and some leading European media experts, almost two years passed before it was accepted in the Serbian Parliament. The new Public Information Act and Telecommunications Act were passed as late as in March 2003 during the state of emergency introduced after the assassination of the Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjić. Four years after the change of power, as of this writing, the media picture in Serbia is still far from clear. A so called, *moratorium* on broadcasting licenses was established immediately after the transfer of power in October 2000 and it is still valid. It is estimated that the number of the broadcasters currently operating in the Serbian air waves is more than 1,200 and among them 90% still do not have a valid license. The formation of the *Broadcasting Agency Council*, as an independent body in charge of granting frequencies

and licenses, was conducted under great controversy breaching the procedure for the election of its three members. The formation was followed by the resignation of two other members, the representatives of the media associations and NGOs. Furthermore, despite the original proposal for the *Broadcasting Agency Council* consisting of fifteen members, where the representatives of the media professionals and civil society had a majority over the political representatives, the Serbian Parliament adopted the reduction of that number to nine members, thus swinging it in favor of the government representatives. The illegal appointment of the *Broadcasting Agency Council* and its blockade also delayed the transformation of the state TV into the public service broadcaster, as originally drafted in the new Broadcasting Act. The new democratic government officials' threats on journalists, especially during a month-long state of emergency in March 2003, proved again those old habits die-hard.

The lack of appropriate rules and regulations in the media sphere preserved an environment in which the untouchable privileges of the old regime media had been maintained. As Veran Matić (2002) pointed out: "The media moguls who built their empires on their close links to the Milošević-Marković family have retained their broadcasting licenses for national coverage; they have become close to the new people in power and thus maintained the lion's share of the advertising market, the main source of income for radio and television operators". (Retrieved on April 23, 2002 from http://www.anem.org.yu/eng/medijska_scena/veran.html). In its famous statement given in November 2001, the later assassinated Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjić, made an ironic remark that "the independent media veterans who were courageous during the Milošević era could be given the medals, but not television channels, which is in fact the mainstay

of democracy and the market economy” (Retrieved on August 21, 2002 from http://www.anem.org.yu/eng/medijska_scena/saopstenje4html). Unfortunately, this statement of the ill-fated Serbian Prime Minister became the paradigm of the post-Milošević media situation in Serbia. The neo-liberal vision of society and the recent developments in the process of economic transition in Serbia do not leave much hope that the reforms will create a desired enabling environment for a free and independent media.

The observation of S. Milivojević also supports the previous judgment: “The only form of media research practiced in today’s Serbia is market research. The only question asked in the research is what can be sold on the market and for what amount? What we have today in Serbia is a rapid commodification that prepares citizens to become good consumers” (Interview with S. Milivojević on January 15, 2003). As a part of this process the media is expected to become a consumer representative and that suits the neo-liberals the best. According to the neo-liberal vision of media’s role in society, a commercial media system is the best media system because it serves “consumer sovereignty” as one of the basic principles of a market economy. However, according to Hackett (2001) there are three problems with this argument:

First, it assumes that media audiences are primarily consumers rather than citizens. ...Citizens in a democratic state are in principle equal; consumers in market economy are unequal, since their ability to consume commodities depends upon purchasing power. Second, the ‘consumer sovereignty’ does not work even in its own terms... In reality, many structural factors refract or undermine the expression of consumer preferences in commercial media content...Finally, the consumer sovereignty argument ignores the crucial role of advertising. Economically, the commercial media’s bread is buttered not by audiences as such, but by advertisers who pay for access to audiences of right kind (pp. 206-207).

Indeed, serious consideration of the commercial media system's flaws imminently raises a question concerning the Serbian independent media's role in the future development of Serbian society. Accordingly, one of the important roles would be a promotion of possible alternatives to the market driven media system. Unfortunately, the global trend of media conglomeration and commercialization does not give many reasons for optimism, but the chances for the democratization of Serbia seemed also dull in the early nineties when the main characters of this story started their adventure. Their successful story and other encouraging examples of the grass roots social/media movements resisting globalization reveal a glimmer of light at the end of tunnel.

CONCLUSION

Since the main objective of this thesis was to present the contributions of the Serbian independent electronic media to the struggle for democratization during a ten-year period of Slobodan Milošević's authoritarian rule, I considered it necessary to use the narrative form to document the events of this unfolding drama. A drama, in fact, that has its beginning in the late eighties when the face of Europe began to change. After the Berlin Wall crumbled and fell, the fresh winds of a long-awaited desire for political freedoms began to blow in the countries of Eastern Europe. The period of the one-party system and the Cold War were over and several generations of Hungarians, Poles and Czechs, born after the Second World War, finally had an opportunity to vote in multi-party elections. Moreover, East Germans, for example, for the first time had a chance to travel to the West. As one of the leading experts in the modern history of Eastern Europe and eyewitness of its change, Timothy Garton Ash (2001) describes: "Everything seemed possible. Everything was hailing a *new Europe*. But no one knew what it would look like" (p.xiii).

Unfortunately, in former Yugoslavia, instead of winds of freedom, a hurricane of civil war brought enormous destruction. Nationalism, historically rooted in the Balkans, created regressive political movements in the former Yugoslav republics, which finally clashed in bloody armed conflict. The former communist elite in Serbia, led by Slobodan Milošević, supported by the church and a nationalistic intelligentsia, set the stage for the separatist movements of other republics that claimed independence from the federal state.

By using hate speech, the state-controlled media played a massive role in spreading national hatred and forging armed conflicts among republics. On the other hand, a newly emerging independent media (at least in Serbia) were one of the key opposition forces to the war. However, the independent media did not have the same technical capacities to counter the propaganda of the state-controlled TV and the press. After the civil war in Yugoslavia ended in 1995, Milošević and his political allies established a soft dictatorship in Serbia. This authoritarian system was masked with multi-party elections (that his Socialist Party of Serbia always won) or with the existence of the independent media (being closed down whenever necessary). Despite state oppression and an undeveloped market, the independent media succeeded not only in surviving, but also in playing an important role in the struggle for democratization and the creation of a civil society.

From the first multi-party election campaign in 1990 until the elections in September 2000 (which Milošević finally lost), the independent journalists were not only trying to apply professional reporting to events and to promote an open political dialogue, but also to cooperate with the various social movements in building the foundation for a civil society. In spite of the difficult conditions of the market and a claustrophobic social environment, *Radio B 92*, *NTV Studio B* and the other independent radio and TV stations in Serbia created a space where the embryos of a civil society emerged. In fact, the most valuable lesson that can be learned from the Serbian independent media engagement in the democratization movement is that radical media can be effective if supported by a wide coalition of different social movements, so “the first line of defense can be far from the center of the media” (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16. 2003).

At the same time, the Serbian independent media contributed to the development of these movements, or directly created them as was the case in *Radio B 92*'s creation of an alternative cultural environment where "subversive" ideas were expressed. In addition to this horizontal foundation, the vertical organization of the small electronic media outlets in the strong association, *ANEM*, was another crucial factor for their survival. Moreover, this well-organized network of local stations turned out to be important in the final media campaign for regime change in September 2000.

Because international pressure on the Serbian regime always played a very important role in political developments in the nineties, the independent media cleverly used it as a support in their struggle with Milošević. Despite some misunderstandings with the international NGOs during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, international support enabled not only the independent media, but also the whole democratization movement in Serbia, to be recognized as a legitimate force. With this example in mind, it can be concluded that in order to get international support, any of today's social movements for democratization needs to develop a strategy for a global presentation of its struggle.

Another lesson that can be learned from the Serbian independent media struggle is that state repression increases resistance and becomes counterproductive for the oppressors. As one of the main actors in this story, *Radio B 92*'s editor-in-chief, pointed out: "Being under constant repression was beneficial for us. First, we had to work three times more than we would in a normal environment. Second, we had to be extremely creative. Third, we had to look and work for the future, at least three to four years in advance. Fourth, every oppressive action by the regime was in fact a chance for us to

score points and gain international support“ (Interview with Veran Matić, January 16, 2003). Although the coalition of the Serbian independent electronic media with other movements, the institutionalization of the Serbian independent media, and the internationalization of the media struggle were important factors, the personal bravery and sacrifice of independent journalists were also significant components for final success in confronting the authoritarian regime. They should be recognized for their contribution, particularly those who lost their lives, such as Slavko Ćuruvija. Others who were luckier than he invested the best years of their lives and careers in the development of a democratic society and the practice of professional journalism. All of these journalists were inspired by the vision of a pluralistic society, where the media would be free of censorship and open for all citizens willing to engage in the public communication process.

Being a journalist myself, I simply could not have resist presenting the last two chapters of this thesis (primarily designed to be a communication research) in the form of a story that has its exposition, climax and catharsis. However, I was aware of the necessity to include in it an analysis of the role that independent media played in the dramatic social and political events in Serbia in the nineties and to give answers to a few questions that the topic raised. In the first place, *can media influence social change?* I believe that the case addressed in this thesis gives enough facts and arguments for a positive answer to this question.

It is obvious that a hundred pages is not enough to cover the decade in which the Serbian citizens experienced more historical and social turmoil than citizens of some other normal countries do in a century. Yet, even if I have partially succeeded in

shedding more light on the contributions that the Serbian independent electronic media made to the transformation of the Serbian society from an authoritarian to a democratic one, I will consider my work a worthwhile endeavour.

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