Mass Communication and the 'Nationalisation' of the Public Sphere in Former Yugoslavia

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Introduction

The definition of nations as *imagined communities* is not new, especially as the work of Benedict Anderson has been extremely influential among students of nationalism (Anderson, 1983). 'Imagining' communities is a lengthy process of forging links between social groups, of inventing community and suppressing differences, of establishing the context in which the members of the community under construction can develop common experiences, and interpret past experiences in similar ways. It involves the organization of collective memory - and thus, of collective forgetting - and of the rituals and institutions that support such projects (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, Billig, 1990). Indeed as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) - and before them Foucault (1972) have suggested, any manifestation of the 'social', is the product of this process of imagination, or of discursive construction. In other words, *imagination* involves creating economies of truth, processes of making sense of the raw material of social experience or, in fact, creating this very social experience through discursive practices.

Historically, mass communication has played a crucial role in these processes of imagination of national communities; it has enabled the formation and maintenance of public spheres roughly coextensive to modern nations and been central in the homogenisation and creation of national cultures and identities. The role of mass communication in these processes of imagination has been complex; it ranged from constituting frames of shared interpretation, public debate and collective action, to standardising cultural resources and publicising definitions of the situation which reified and naturalised national communities. However, the contribution of mass communication to the *construction* or *imagination* of national communities, has also another, negative aspect, that of *destruction* and *forgetting* of alternative frames of interpretation, debate and action and of alternative versions of community. Nationalism is characterised by a closure in processes of identity formation, by setting in motion processes of exclusion as well as membership, of suppression as well as of expression of notions of community (Jenkins and Sofos, 1996).

This paper attempts to assess the role of the mass media and cultural institutions in the process of the fragmentation and 'nationalisation' of the public sphere of former Yugoslavia focusing primarily on their contribution to particular ways of imagining the nation which posit and celebrate the difference and particularity of the Yugoslavian nations at the expense of their common accomplishments.

I. Yugoslavia: Political and Cultural Background

The establishment of the *People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, just as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which preceded it, was an ambitious but precarious poli-

tical project. Even before the end of the Second World War, the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) had realised, that if post-war Yugoslavia was to survive, it needed to deal with *the politics of ethnicity* which had been unleashed in the inter-war period and exacerbated during the occupation, and to invent a *collective imaginary* - a new version of *Yugoslavism* that would be sustained by a *social contract* which would not only achieve the economic development of a destroyed, underdeveloped and differentially developed country but also sustain economic and social progress and a vision for the future. It was these areas - the national issue, the identity of post-war Yugoslavia and the task of economic development - which became the main battlefields on which the political struggle for hegemony over Yugoslavia and its destiny was to be fought throughout the postwar period.

The People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was premised on the principle of federalism within the context of a supranational Yugoslav socialist order. Although political power resided with the CPY, the republics were endowed with their own republican administrative - and later, political - and cultural institutions and were allowed to promote the distinct identities of the nations they were supposed to be 'homelands' of, within the limits, however, of the official policy of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity). In this sense, post-war Yugoslavism was developed not as antagonistic, but rather as complementary to the other identities of former Yugoslavia, as a form of civic-socialist identity. During the first two decades of post-war Yugoslavia, the regime attempted to stress similarities and to suppress divisive factors among the South Slav ethnic groups. Efforts to reinforce Yugoslav unity such as the official backing of the 1954 *Novi Sad declaration* of Croat, Montenegrin and Serb linguists, regarding the 'oneness' of the Serbo-Croat language, the promotion of official versions of 'Marxist' Yugoslav history and the support of attempts to establish and sustain a Yugoslav 'cultural space', especially in the sphere of 'high culture', were officially sponsored or encouraged. In addition, there have been rather rare instances of collective action that transcended republic borders; as Ramet points out 'pressure from below [has been]... geographicaly and ethnically defined in [former] Yugoslavia' (1991, p. 289). Efforts to develop federation-wide frames of debate and collective action were largely confined to the relatively small milieu of the urban intelligentsia, and the 'Yugoslav cultural space' that had developed in the artistic and literary fields and, to a considerably lesser extent, in the field of mass communication,[1] was rather fragile and did not lead to the formation of an all-Yugoslav public sphere which would provide a social space for citizens from all republics to introduce issues in a federation-wide public debate and to engage in federation-wide collective action. Rather, the public sphere of socialist Yugoslavia was effectively partitioned along republic borders.

The combination of the inability of Yugoslavia to promote effectively and to sustain a political imaginary, to resolve the problem of an increasingly unequal differential development between the republics,[2] and to cushion the economy

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1 Only a handful of media organisations were operating as *Yugoslav* rather than republic media: the daily newspaper *Borba* - organ of the LCY, the more recent broadcasting experiment of *YUTEL*, a federation-wide television station that was systematically undermined by republic governments and the Yugoslav news agency *TANJUG*.

2 Plestina (1992) points out that in 1960s dependency of Less Developed Republics had increased: difference in GMP between Slovenia and Kosovo from 1:3 (1950) was 1:5 (1960), pp.133--34.

from the effects of the international economic crises of the early 1970s clearly marked the end of the post-war economic boom and threatened to undermine the post-war social contract. The Yugoslav experiment was under strain as early as in the late 1960s, when a mixture of discontent with the economic situation, demands for political reform and awakening nationalism gave rise to a chain of political protest: the 1968 'Kosovo riots', the 'Belgrade Summer' of the same year, the Croatian Spring of 1971, the campaign of Bosnian Muslims to redesignate Bosnia a 'Muslim Republic' in the late 1970s and the Albanian-Macedonian dispute over the 'national status' of Muslims in the Republic of Macedonia were the key protest events of the period. Despite the purge of the nationalist and liberal opposition and the crackdown on the protest movements that ensued, the 1974 constitution sanctioned many of their demands, changing radically the centre/republic balance of power within the federation: it offered the republics extensive economic and political powers and virtual sovereignty and rendered the autonomous provinces almost equal in status to the republics and, finally left limited authority and jurisdiction to the federal authorities. Due to a complex system of rotation premised on the principle of republic (and often ethnic) representation throughout the federal government and administration, federal officials were effectively primarily, or even exclusively, loyal to their republic. In fact, the central characteristic of the post-1974 federation was the recognition of the so-called 'constitutive nations' as holders of supreme power to such an extent that the federal government retained only nominal sovereignty. A consequence of the new constitutional arrangements was the *reification* of republican and, by extension, ethnic and national identities and, therefore, the reduction of the social diversity of Yugoslavia and its constituent units to ethnic and religious diversity. Ethnicity was thus progressively rendered the primary form of differentiation within Yugoslavia, through its legal recognition and *'naturalisation'*, at the expense of other social and political identities which remained suppressed, or at least excluded from the universe of political debate. Accordingly, Yugoslavia's artificial and arbitrary internal, administrative, borders were 'upgraded' to national or 'civilisational' faultlines (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden 1992, pp. 3-6); the federation was set on a course of fragmentation as a result of the 'ethnicisation' or 'nationalisation'[3] of its republics and autonomous provinces and the pursuit of essentially monoethnic policies.

The post-1974 period saw also the progressive 'confederalisation' of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and most other federation-wide organisations in a way shadowing the confederalisation of the country. These political developments gathered pace as the political dynamics unleashed by the constitutional and party changes were complemented by the dramatic deterioration of the economic and social conditions during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s (Sofos 1996b). This process did not leave the media unaffected, especially as the political élites of the republics saw in them a valuable political and cultural

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3 In this paper I use the term *'nationalisation'* (in inverted commas) to refer to the process of 'prevalence of nationalist logic' in social life (when referring to republics or provinces) or in the operation of media and cultural organisations. In the case of the media, this demarcation of the term is important as in former Yugoslavia the transformation of mass communications has been marked by the *nationalisation* of media organisations (in the more conventional, economic sense of the term as well as in the former sense). Admittedly, *'nationalisation'* and *nationalisation* have often, but not always, been inextricably linked - I therefore use the latter term only when I refer to the assumption of ownership and control of an organisation by the state.

resource in a period of rapid transformation of Yugoslavia. As political, economic and cultural powers resided with the republics and provinces, commercial, cultural institutions and the mass media became primarily or entirely 'republican' as far as their *framework of reference* and, progressively, their control structures were concerned. Despite the pluricultural and multi-ethnic composition of Yugoslavia's constituent units, virtually each republic and province progressively provided a framework for the promotion of the national identity and attainment of sovereignty of a specific ethnic group. In this climate, the transformation of the mass media, facilitated the fragmentation - and eventually 'nationalisation' - of the already precarious Yugoslav public sphere.

Even before the 1974 constitution the majority of the Yugoslav press was primarily republican in character, focusing on news of regional and local importance and presenting news from other parts of the federation, or about the federal government and institutions from their particular republican standpoint. The development of radio and television followed the same path of decentralisation and 'republicanisation' as the print media. Reflecting the political antagonisms among the leaderships of the Yugoslav republics and provinces, by the end of the 1970s, Yugoslav Radio-Television (*Jugoslovenska Radio-Televizija*) was only nominally a *Yugoslav* (i.e. federation-wide) institution; it had progressively become an effectively coordinating network of republic broadcasting organisations which '[could not] even agree on the desirability of fostering a "sense of national unity" among their people' (Robinson, 1977, p. 50). Thus, by the end of the 1970s each of the republics and autonomous provinces had its own broadcasting system and its own press with at least one daily newspaper as its official or semi-official publication (such were the dailies *Vjesnik* in Croatia, *Oslobodenje* in Bosnia, *Politika* in Serbia, and *Delo* in Slovenia). It should also be emphasised that the media of each republic or province, despite being formally controlled by their own employees in line with the principle of *self-management*, were effectively under the control of republic and province League of Communists leaderships and were used to promote their particular positions and policies. Finally, the separate Radio-Television licence fees set and collected by each republic and the fact that each federal unit subsidised part of its press established an economic link between the media and the federal units in which they were based.

It was in the 1980s, after the death of the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, one of the last factors of cohesion within Yugoslavia, that the weakening of the already loose ties among federal units and their institutions reached its climax and the official discourse and system started to break down. The political vacuum created by Tito's death and the struggle for power and legitimation that ensued at the federal and republic level, set in motion the process of disintegration of the Federation as a result of the intensification of the 'ethnicisation' or 'nationalisation' of its constituent units and their institutions.

By the late 1980s the federal authorities were well in the process of becoming mere caretakers of a transitory political structure, while the republics were being transformed into nation-states (Sofos, 1996b). Slovene and Croat communists - the party of Democratic Renewal, and the party of Social Reform as they had been renamed - paid the price of their reluctance to confront Milosevic's constitutional *coups* by loosing in the first multi-party elections in their republics to more uncompromising nationalists untarnished by participation in the federal government. In the same year, the Serbian Socialist party (SPS, formed by the Serbian Communist party and the Socialist Alliance) won 40 per cent of the votes and 77.6 per cent of the parliamentary seats, while its leader, Slobodan Milosevic, got

two-thirds of the votes in the second round of the presidential election. What is more, his Montenegrin allies, the LC of Montenegro won an impressive 66.4 per cent of the legislature seats, and its leader, Momir Bulatovic became president of the republic. In Macedonia, despite a majority electoral system during the elections of 1989, a hung parliament led to the formation of a coalition government of communists, Macedonian and Albanian nationalists, and the election of the reform communist Kiro Gligorov as president. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the legalisation of multi-party competition led to the formation of ethnic parties - Muslim (Party of Democratic Action - SDA and the more secular Muslim Bosniak Organisation - MBO), Serbian (Serbian Democratic Party - SDS), and Croat (the Bosnian branch of the Zagreb-based party of Franjo Tudjman, Croatian Democratic Community - HDZ) which defeated the communists and federalists in the 1990 elections; the three ethnic parties formed a shortlived coalition government, before the outbreak of the war in March 1992.

Republics increasingly behaved as sovereign states by concluding international agreements, seeking credit in the international markets and by opening diplomatic representations abroad; at the same time, they became more introspective. What is certain is that interaction at the economic and cultural level among members of the Federation decreased rapidly. By 1987 intra-republic communications and commercial transactions had reached 76 per cent of total activity, compared to 69 per cent in 1970 (Ocic, 1990, p. 10). In addition, the educational system increasingly became fragmented and by the mid 1980s it could be argued that there were effectively eight distinct curricula for primary education in different republics and provinces of Yugoslavia.

In this process, the mass media played a very significant role by actively supporting, publicising and amplifying definitions of the situation produced initially by the League of Communists leadership of each republic, and later by nationalist élites. This development, apart from generally reinforcing the significance of ethnic and national identity referred to above, also allowed and institutionalised the fragmentation of Yugoslav society by creating republican/ethnic constituencies and publics. In addition, throughout the 1980s, as the debate on the future of the mass media (as well as that of Yugoslavia) intensified, the right to communicate was increasingly interpreted not as civic right but as a collective (national) right (Radojkovic, 1994, p. 139); the media were not seen as social spaces in which citizenship would be enhanced through public debate, but as tools for the 'nationalisation' of public life.

II. The Nationalisation of the Mass Media and the 'Nationalisation' of Public Life

In a desperate attempt to resuscitate the remnants of the Yugoslav cultural space and counter the effective takeover of the remaining non-'nationalised' media by republic leaderships, the last federal government, led by Ante Markovic, attempted to set rules for the privatisation of the Yugoslav media by introducing a Federal Media Law in 1990. Markovic also attempted to create a new Yugoslav broadcasting institution YUTEL that would constitute an alternative to the failed experiment of Yugoslav Radio-Television. On both occasions, the federal government confronted insurmountable obstacles. The new Federal Law was largely ignored as most republics were preparing for formal secession from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and were clearly not intending to concede precedence of federal legislation, while broadcasting licence applications or requests to use buil-

dings, facilities and to purchase equipment by YUTEL were declined by republic governments, forcing the last all-Yugoslav broadcasting organisation to close down in May 1992.

In the countdown to independence, the decentralised character of Yugoslav Radio-Television made the process of 'nationalisation' of its components fairly easy. In fact, the republics assumed control of the republic stations. What is more, 'nationalisation' was not confined in the legal and organisational domain; it extended to the domain of semantics as the stations of Yugoslav Radio-Television, previously named after the cities they were based in (*RTV Beograd, RTV Zagreb, RTV Skopje*), were renamed to reflect their affiliations to particular republics and nations (*RTV Srbije* [Radio-Television of Serbia], *Hrvatska TV* ÜCroatian Radio-Television], *RTV Makedonije* ÜRadio-Television of Macedonia] and so on). A similar process of 'nationalisation' took place in the field of the press, initially in the case of the former semi-official press of the republic Leagues of Communists, but soon affecting the whole spectrum of the printed media.

As the new nationalist republic élites linked their nationalist projects with the dismantling of the last vestiges of 'communism', they identified social ownership and self-management as undesirable institutions that had to be abolished. Thus, broadcasting and press organizations which used to be - at least formally - socially-owned and self-managed - came, or are in the process of coming, under the more or less direct control of republic governments. Although, as it has been pointed out above, self-management rights were most often formal and only rarely exercised, they nevertheless constituted a legal right of media employees and, especially during the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, often inspired attempts to resist the take-over of media organisations by nationalist republic governments. This has been clearly illustrated by the cases of the Bosnian media employees' protest against the proposed 1991 Information Act which provided for the appointment by parliament of the top managerial and editorial staff of the state-controlled media which were formerly elected by the employees, of the employees of *Borba*, the former official paper of the LCY, who resisted, albeit unsuccessfully, the take-over attempts of the Serbian government during 1994, or of the staff of the Croatian regional daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*. Indeed, in the case of Borba, staff published a parallel edition of the daily, and later counter-edition under the title *Nasa Borba* (Our Borba), expressing in this way their sense of attachment to their paper.[4]

However, the combination of the deteriorating economies of the former Yugoslav republics, the impact of the war and the relatively small publics that the disruption of inter-republican communications which marked the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, entailed a financially hostile environment for the inde-

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4 The Serbian government attempted to reverse an earlier decision of the Federal Assembly to transform Borba from a publicly owned into a share-holding company. Thus in December 1994, the Belgrade Court annuled the privatisation of the daily and determined that it constituted a publicly owned (federal) company. The government of the rump Yugoslav Federation appointed the federal minister of information Dragutin Brcin director and chief editor. See 'Serbie: Le coup de force de Slobodan Milosevic', *Le Monde Radio-Télévision*, 12-13 February 1995, pp. 36-37. Similar pressures have been applied to other media such as the political review *NIN*, the newspaper *Svetlost*, radio *B92*, as the government has initiated the process of reexamination of their privatisation, while in February 1995, the Belgrade municipal authority has reclaimed its share of the independent Belgrade television station, Studio B in an attempt to facilitate a government take-over of the station.

pendent media and facilitated their takeover by republic governments or their closure as, in the current situation, only the new state governments have sufficient resources to support financially the post-Yugoslav media.

In this climate of economic dependence of the media from the governments of the new states, of the cultivation of national antagonism and mobilisation of nationalist mythologies among the peoples of former Yugoslavia, the mass media underwent considerable changes. As a result of this process of transformation of the field of mass communication, the mass media played a very significant role in the *'nationalisation'* of the public sphere and public debate by actively supporting, publicising and amplifying nationalist definitions of the situation.

III. Mass Media, Moral Panics and Populist Definitions of Community

The Serbian media were the first, although by no means the only, media which played an overtly central role in the process of defining the Serbian nation as a *community under threat* in a variety of ways. Throughout the 1980s but especially since late 1987 Serbian state- and Church-controlled media published and broadcast materials which stressed 'the victimisation of Serbs in Yugoslavia' and 'the danger faced by the Serbian nation if the Federation continued to ignore its plight'. By focusing on and promoting specific interpretations of the systematic war-time persecution of Croatian and Bosnian Serbs by the Croatian Ustasa, and of other similar historical experiences, as 'genocide', state-controlled media transposed these historically specific instances of persecution to the present and attempted to (re)construct nationalist versions of history marked by the continuous subjection to 'genocide' and 'suffering' of the Serbian nation by numerous enemies. 1987 marked the beginning of an intensive process of identification of enemies of Serbia and the threats they represented. The press featured articles in which Albanians, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, the Vatican and the USA were identified, individually or in various combinations, as mortal enemies of the Serbian nation; Serbian Radio-television soon followed suit. This process of selection, stereotyping and demonisation of 'enemies' and the societal reaction it entailed could be analysed as a *moral panic.*[5]

Central in this process was the campaign against the 'Albanisation' of Kosovo which started in 1987, shortly after the Serbian League of Communists leader,

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5 Stanley Cohen defines *moral panic* as a process whereby

[a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to... Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal or social policy or even in the way society conceives itself (Cohen, 1987: 9)

Although Cohen's definition refers to the study of societal reaction to (mainly youth) deviance, it seems to me that the concept of moral panic can be fruitfully used in the study of mobilisation of nationalist movements in general and of the Serbian nationalist movement in the mid- and late 1980s in particular. Here, I shall focus on the emergence and eventual predominance of the issue of the 'Albanisation' of Kosovo in the public debate during this period.

Slobodan Milosevic, while visiting Kosovo, pledged to protect the members of the Serbian and Montenegrin minority of the province from 'persecution by the Albanian majority'.[6] Realising the power of nationalism, he put himself in the centre of the emerging nationalist movement by adopting a nationalist rhetoric, allying himself with the Serbian Orthodox church, mobilising aspects of folk and popular culture,[7] a variety of elements of popular concern such as the ever-widening perception that Yugoslavia was undermining 'Serbian rights' or the emotional ties of Serbs with Kosovo. In this climate of antagonism between Serbs and Albanians, the nationalist movement and the Serbian mass media initiated a process of scapegoating Kosovo Albanians. Although anti-Albanian prejudice was not an invention of the time (narratives of antagonism between Serbs and Albanians and suspicion have been deeply embedded in Serb folk and popular culture and memory), never before had the Serbian nationalist movement enjoyed virtually unimpeded access to the mass media of the Republic of Serbia with the approval of the leadership of the Republic.

The influential and loyal to the Serbian government dailies *Politika* and *Politika Ekspres* set the example by publishing news, reports of rumours and historical accounts of the 'suffering' and 'glory' of the Serbian nation. Soon, they were imitated by the government-controlled Serbian Radio-Television (RTS), the weekly *Duga* and the daily *Vecernje Novosti*. These media increasingly relied on ultra-nationalist definitions of the situation regarding the Kosovo issue and interpretation of events in the province. In addition, in this context, 'rumours' acquired significant news value and were often treated as 'facts' that needed no further investigation: Albanians were invariably described as primitive, backward, illiterate (Radoncic 1990, p. 21), and were implicated in thefts, robberies, murders and rapes that took place, or were rumoured to have taken place in Kosovo. Allegations of Albanian criminality became a permanent or reccurent theme of newsreports from the province and triggered a series of responses of political, religious and cultural leaders as well as of the public.

However, what is significant in Serbian media representations of the Albanians and in the societal response to them is the convergence of hitherto unor-

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6 Although in modern-day Kosovo the Albanian population outnumbers the Serbs and Montenegrins nine to one the province still occupies a central position among the markers and symbols of Serbian identity: Serbs consider Kosovo to have been the spiritual cradle of Serbian Christendom, the centre of the medieval Serbian Empire which was eventually destroyed by the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. The modern Serbian nation-building project was premised on the promotion of a collective memory associated with the sanctity of Kosovo, and the significance of the Serbian sacrifice there. A collective memory of the battle survived in local oral tradition and folk songs, while the Serbian Orthodox church invested the defeat and death of prince Lazar with a mystical dimension. Such is the power of the history and mythology of Kosovo that the head of the *Association of Serb Writers*, Matija Beckovic, stated that Kosovo would be Serbian even if not a single Serb lived there, while in 1986, members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, in their *Memorandum* presented the situation in Kosovo as equivalent to a national defeat.

7 The regime encouraged revived Serbian-Orthodox rituals while other instances of mobilisation of popular culture were the revival of a *Cetnik* subculture, as uniforms, insignia, flags and other aspects of the dress code of the *Cetniki* became popular among the youth of the fringe of the nationalist movement (the Radical Party of Vojslav Seselj, the ultranationalist circle of Belgrade politician and warlord Zeljko Raznjatovic (Arkan) as well as the Serbian Renewal Movement - the main opposition party under Vuk Draskovic). Finally, the revival of Serbian folk, or the emergence of the popular *turbofolk* (neo-folk), music was also linked to the nationalist movement.

ganised prejudice, stereotypes, allegations, rumours and testimonies and their articulation into an aggressive populist discourse. This discourse posited the relationship between Kosovo Albanians and the Serbian nation in terms of an irreconcilable opposition. In the context of the moral panic about the 'Albanisation' of Kosovo therefore, alleged Albanian criminality was not important per se; it was seen as merely a part of a broader Albanian 'conspiracy' to drive Serbs and Montenegrins out of Kosovo and to erase any signs or memories of their presence there, as proof of the total opposition between Serbs and Albanians.[8]

In this context, the printed and, a little later, broadcasting media interpreted the situation in Kosovo as *genocide* against the Serbian people. The identification of Albanians as the main enemy of the Serbian nation was further used to reinforce the nationalist definition of the Serbian nation as a *community under threat* by linking other 'enemies' to the former. A quite common strategy of the government-controlled media was to establish a linkage between other 'enemies' and Albanian separatism. In October 1990, for example, the Belgrade daily *Politika* carried reports of 'Croatian specials speaking Albanian' in an attempt to link the special forces of the Croatian Republic which was on its way to secession from the Yugoslav Federation with Albanian separatism.

In Croatia, the nationalist and irredentist orientation of the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* - HDZ) and its leader Franjo Tudjman, combined with the war against the Croatian Serbs and the JNA, and the determination of the Krajina and Slavonian Serbs to secede are some of the factors which have led to the exacerbation of an already virulent nationalist discourse. Like its Serbian counterpart, it too has drawn on nationalist mythologies and 'demonisations' of the 'national enemy': in the Croatian nationalist imaginary, Knin, the capital of the self-styled Serbian republic of the Krajina until August 1995, and the city where medieval Croat royalty was crowned has an aura somewhat similar to the one that Kosovo has in Serbian nationalism, while the Serbs are represented as mortal enemies of the Croatian nation, belonging to a non-European civilisation (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992).

Since independence, Croatian nationalism has been a central feature of social and political life in Croatian society. As the 'restoration of Croatia's national rights' seems to have been the main theme in Croatian political debate and has acquired absolute priority over pressing economic and social problems and the imperative of democratisation, the opposition had to subscribe to the hegemonic nationalist ideology to avoid being accused of not being committed to the survival of Croatia. By relying primarily on a nationalist/conservative Roman-Catholic social and political constituency, the ruling political élite has managed to maintain its control over the state, the economy and the mass media and to suppress demands for democratisation (Aric, 1995, p. 33; Thompson, 1994, pp. 130-46; Tristo, 1995, p. 32). The mass media which had from the outset operated under strict guidelines which covered the hierarchy and content of news printed or broadcast as well as the permitted vocabulary and imagery to be featured in the media[9] were soon to find themselves under attack by the ruling HDZ which has been attempting to control mass communications institutions. After the 1992 elections, the HDZ nationalised the Split daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* and imposed taxes

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8 For a more detailed analysis of the discourse(s) of Serbian populism, see Sofos, 1996a and 1996b.

9 M. Thompson, *Forging War; The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia Hercegovina*, London, Article 19, pp. 170-1.

and duties selectively to media organisations like the *Feral Tribune* which conti-
nued being critical of the government and its practices. As a result, with a few
exceptions, Croatian media have been under extreme pressure to conform and
have been effectively operating as extensions of the Croatian government and the
ruling HDZ; they have thus - with a few exceptions - invariably been publicising
nationalist definitions of the situation (Aric, 1995; Thompson, 1994; Tristo, 1995)
stressing the 'mortal danger' the Croatian nation is facing in its fight against the
Serbs. The imagery generated by the mainstream media[10] has been one of an es-
sentially monoethnic Croatia, whose insurgent Serb citizens have been represen-
ted as 'Serb terrorists' or merely 'terrorists'.

In addition, just as in Serbia, since the late 1980s, the media have provided a
significant forum in which Croatian and Yugoslavian history was re-examined and
the Croatian nation 'purified'; debates on the role of the Ustasa and the Croatian
independent state established by the Axis powers during the Second World War
have often featured in the pages of the press and in the majority of cases, emp-
hasis has been placed on the historical precedent set of an independent Croatian
state at the expense of the authoritarian and monoethnic ideology of the Ustasa-
dominated state. In addition, the media have often dedicated space and time to
refute claims of Ustasa concentration camps, systematic killing and deportations
and forced conversion of non catholic Croatian citizens during that period.

Although it could be argued that such practices were the symptom of the as-
sertion of 'patriotism' within Croatian society during the late 1980s, it is difficult
to ignore the complacency of the Croatian Republic leaderships, and the active
support of the nationalist opposition of the period which eventually became the
dominant political force in Croatia in the run-up to independence. What is more,
it is very difficult to be oblivious of the attempt of the HDZ governments to mani-
pulate the media to their advantage by virtually monopolising access to them and
disseminating nationalist definitions of the situation.

Conclusion: Media Performance and Populist Politics

Through their contribution to the creation of a series of moral panics and the
cultivation of specific narratives and memories of nationhood and the suppres-
sion of others, Serbian and Croatian state-controlled and pro-government me-
dia, aided by the media of nationalist groups and organizations reinforced natio-
nalist definitions of the situation and definitions of community. In fact, as it has
been shown, they posited the national community in opposition to enemies, or
informed the imagination of the nation they addressed as a *community under
threat*. This particular modality of imagination of the national community is pre-
mised on processes of simplification of the political field into two opposing camps,
or the positing of an irreconcilable antagonistic relationship between the "peo-
ple", or the "nation" and its "other". In fact, the positing of this binary political
and social division not only simplifies the political field, but also entails the main-
tenance of some sense of homogeneity within the ranks of the community in
question as it unifies it on the basis of establishing a relation of equivalence among
its constituent elements. The mass media identified the nation's 'enemy' in se-
veral ways (Albanians, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, the Vatican and the USA, in the

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10 I use the term 'mainstream' as there are still some - marginalised - publications which
continue criticising the government; see p. 16 above.

case of Serbian nationalism; Serbs, the backward Eastern Christianity and internal dissidents in the case of Croatian nationalism); however, in the context of this antagonistic relationship, these 'others', or enemies, and the threats they are thought to represent, have been treated as equivalent facets of one enemy/threat. The disintegration of Yugoslavia has therefore been linked with the emergence of populist discourses in the political spheres of the former Yugoslav republics: national identities have been asserted through the positing of oppositional, or antagonistic relationships between the nation and its 'other', and the complexity of the 'political' has been reduced to bipolar antagonisms. Despite the optimism of diplomats regarding the irreversibility of the peace process after the Dayton peace agreements, one should not be oblivious to the fact that the nationalised public spheres of the successor states of Yugoslavia have been premised on the negation of, and irreconcileable antagonism with the 'other', partly sustained and reinforced by the mass media of these societies. The transition to democratisation and peaceful coexistence cannot rest merely on signing and implementing peace accords and adopting western-style liberal-democratic institutions; it requires a radical transformation of the public spheres of the former Yugoslav societies that would enable alternative social (including, but not restricted to ethnic) identities and solidarities to be negotiated and forged, and non-ethnic notions of citizenship to flourish.

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Summary: **Mass Communication and the 'Nationalisation' of the Public Sphere in Former Yugoslavia**

Although the quasi-confederal character of Yugoslavia, especially after the introduction of its 1974 constitution did not encourage the development of a genuine Yugoslavian public sphere where public debate could transcend ethnic and republic divisions, it nevertheless allowed the formation of what could be called Yugoslav cultural space, a space within which social and political actors (feminist, peace movements) forged their identities regardless of the ethnic or national diversity that characterised their membership. However, the existence of this 'space' had a limited impact in Yugoslav politics partly due to the breakdown of inter-republic communication and the fragmentation of the Yugoslavian mass media. This paper traces the process of disintegration of the Yugoslav cultural space and the emergence of national 'public spheres' in the republics and provinces of former Yugoslavia and attempts to assess the role of the mass media and cultural institutions in these developments by identifying the key strategies of representation employed in the process of the fragmentation and 'nationalisation' of the public sphere of former Yugoslavia.