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Television, Rituals, Struggle for Public Memory in Serbia during 1990s*

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to point to the the role of television (mainly state owned and controlled) and ritual actions, in creating and distributing messages concerning important social and political events during the 1990s. The main argument is that the urban street political protest actions that were performed by the political and social opponents of the ruling regime, mainly in Belgrade streets and squares, were a logical outcome of the regime's media policy, and closely dependent on it. The aim of that policy was to silence the opposing voices and make them invisible, but also to avoid speaking about events that might threaten the image of the ruling regime as tolerant, peaceful and patriotic, the examples of which were information on war crimes, and devastations of Vukovar, Dubrovnik and Sarajevo. Political protests and ritual actions have created a place where these issues could safely be spoken out, thus creating an emerging public counter sphere. Instead of considering media and rituals as separated ways of communication, it will be showed how in particular social and political context in Serbia during 1990s, television and rituals have reached a point of mutual constitution and articulation.

Key words: urban space and place, rituals, media, political protests, public memory

Due to the development of various mass media and information technologies, the world has grown ever smaller and more connected, creating an inevitable and increasing academic interest in media. That interest had been

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developing since the 1950s, moving from being a mainly American based interest analyzing the supposed psychological and social effects of television on society, to expanding out into linguistic, semiotic and politically charged research programs within British cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s, viewing television as a product of culture rather than vice versa. Critical cultural theory as well as anthropological theoretical thought brought attention to the roles media play in shaping contemporary society, in blurring its boundaries and contributing to the deterritorialization of culture. Arjun Appadurai, one of the most prominent theorists of globalization, post-nationalism and translocalism, and an ardent researcher of "global violence, megalopolises and grassroots globalization", placed the roles media and migrations play in the transformation of the contemporary world at the center of his theory of "global flows" (Appadurai 1996). The contributions of authors such as Roger Silverstone, Lilla Abu-Lughod, Don Slater, and Daniel Miller, to mention but a few, have further fostered debates over the destiny of an already contested concept – culture in an era after the advent of television and other mass media and information technologies.

The aim of this paper is to show how media, and particularly state television, assumed a central position for producing and controlling the meanings of key events in Serbian society during the nineties, and how it took on the role of shaping and sustaining the representation of reality of those who held power.¹ I argue that the state television became one of the most influential producers of an exclusive media mediated public which were carefully cleansed of all the voices that could have threatened the picture of national unity and questioned official versions of "truth". Apart from silencing voices of dissent and making them invisible, the aim of media policy was to avoid speaking about events that might violate the image of the ruling regime as tolerant, peaceful and patriotic. Examples of these included the information on war crimes, and the devastation, which occurred in Vukovar, Dubrovnik and Sarajevo. I treat the urban street political protest actions, performed by the political and social opponents of the ruling regime, mainly in the streets and

¹ As a reminder for a non-native and maybe not so well informed reader, the nineties were a period of intensive social disintegration of Serbian society, and a period of great economic, political and social turbulences. For most of the period that succeeded the first multiparty elections in 1990 the ruling party was the Socialist party of Serbia. Its founder and charismatic leader was Slobodan Milosevic, former leader of the Republic (Serbian) Committee of Communists League. He appeared to be a skillful politician able to adjust to the conditions marked by post-socialist existential confusion, and managed to remain in power until the 2000 general elections by combining an affirmation of national identity with old communist methods of rule, including (not formal, indeed, but actual) restriction of media freedom.

squares of Belgrade, as a logical outcome of the regime's media policy, and as highly dependent on it.

Within these protest rituals and ritual actions, a counter-discourse has been created that tried to frame and interpret the most important events of that time differently. The formation of an alternative discourse was closely connected with the emergence of alternative public spheres within which critics of the politics and social and cultural values of the current regime could gain a voice. Material analyzed in this paper represents the outcome of an ethnography of protest rituals in Belgrade during the period stretching from 1991-1997. This is supplemented with an ethnography of state television conducted during the 1996-97 student and citizen protest, and an analysis of the secondary literature on the subject. Relying on existing ethnographic findings and analysis in this paper, I intend to offer a different perspective from other contributions in the fields of media and ritual studies respectively, in the following dimension: instead of considering media and rituals as separated modes of communication I will show that in particular social and political contexts in Serbia during the 1990s, television and rituals have developed a range of different relationships and reached a point of mutual constitution and articulation. Contrary to the pre-dominating current in the scholarship looking at mass media, which emphasizes its contribution to the homogenization of culture, I will argue that in this particular case television could also be seen as a means of localization and of the production of local political culture. It will be explained how various groups differed in debating crucial existential, political and social issues and how different types of "memory work", employing the complex dynamics of remembering and forgetting, were aimed at producing different social memories. Attention will be paid to how the social and political identities of various groups have been related to the ways different issues, historical or contemporary events were treated.

Describing the Scene – Historical and Theoretical Context

Since 1989, the year when the latest turning points in the history of Europe took place; major social, political and economic changes occurred, particularly in the parts recognized as Eastern and Central Europe. In the years to follow, the famous concert of Mstislav Rostropovič on the ruins of the Berlin wall happened, and two tendencies came to be identified on the European socio-political landscape: on the one hand Western European countries had started their integration project, discussing the common currency and loosening the importance of state borders; on the other, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe the process of socio-political disintegration had begun. The latter

process led to economic and political transformations of societies, changes that in most cases appeared as very difficult, sometimes even as a dangerous experience. Those changes had to be complex ones, including changes to basic principles of existence, the profound transformations of "meaningful universes" - i.e. spatio-temporal frames of reference, reviews of (national) history/ies, a questioning of the nature of ownership, and much difficult work concerning issues of spirituality and morality (Verdery 1999). In all Central and Eastern European societies it also included some way of relating to the disturbing past of misdeeds, of ideologically motivated violence and human rights abuses.

The change in question brought together different, sometimes alternative, sometimes strongly opposed "old" and "new" ideas, values and interests, and simultaneously with those, at times, conflicting views of social and political reality, a new type of arena for public debate began to emerge. Instead of a single-centered, highly exclusive public sphere, a polycentric and more inclusive public sphere, open to different readings of current issues, and by definition more controversial, started to develop. Bringing the scope of interest closer to Serbian society, we can see how different social and political groups (political parties, nongovernmental organizations, peace and women groups, and students), since deprived of the possibility to participate in the main and most influential sphere of public debate (created, controlled and propelled by the ruling elite), made a decision to create public spheres of their own. Thus the issue of media policy could not be detached from the analysis of the post-socialist transformation in Serbia. Moreover, it could be argued that in the social and political context of the nineties, the connection between media policy and social change took on particularly dramatic forms. In my opinion, the development of alternative public spheres, with their specific ways of communicating political messages (using rituals and ritualizations as one of their most effective means), diverse publications, symbols and behavioral patterns, including various usages and significations of urban spaces, was closely related to state media policy.

In one of the most inspiring (and certainly very influential) anthropological contributions to the subject of profound and complex changes in Europe during the 1990s, "The political Lives of Dead Bodies", written by Katherine Verdery (1999), and dedicated to the phenomenon of reburial, seen as a strategy of political and national consolidation, one could find a fruitful insight to the anthropological approach to the study of politics and political change. Verdery argues that, as far as anthropologists are concerned, it must have been something more in the study of politics, something that goes beyond recording the replacing of old institutions (political and economical) with new ones. Political transformation, she argues, must be conceived as something more than mere technological change – a multiparty system, free elections, a mar-

ket-oriented economy. "Something more" she defines through the meanings, values, feelings and ideas about the sacred and about morality, that are just as important as the former ones. The changes must be "anthropologized", says Verdery, that is to say, they must be defined as "meaningful changes", and the legitimization process on which the new order was built has to be seen as a "reordering of the meaningful universe" (Verdery 1999). After defining post-socialist changes in such a broad fashion, Verdery traces their various faces: the legitimization and sacralization of the political and moral order, the reconfiguration of space and time, the formulation of national identity and social relationships. I support Verdery's plea for distinctiveness and subtleness concerning anthropological notions of political change, but nevertheless I would like to add one important further aspect of that change. I would like to stress the importance of the emergence, formation, and change of the public spheres. For the importance of the public sphere lies not merely in terms of supplying the changing societies with a place where different "readings" of the important issues are to be discussed, and hopefully successfully resolved, but the public sphere has a more basic constitutive role in the production of democratic society.

The French Constitution from 1791 declared that the free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most valuable human rights (Calhoun 1996). In the case of the former communist countries, the quest for the freedom of speech was one of the strongest requests of liberal politicians and intellectuals, after the first fissures in the apparently solid communist block appeared after Stalin's death in 1953. Not surprisingly, a thirst for the possibility to articulate different (and dissenting) voices gained its momentum during the late seventies in Poland and it found its way even into the SSSR, during Gorbachov's era in the second half of the 1980s, through the new politics of *glasnost*. As Adam Michnik noted in his recollections on the ways Polish intellectuals invented new forms of resistance after 1976: "Public, though illegal" - this rather paradoxical formulation grasped the essence of the tactic. Books and newspapers had been illegally published, but the names of the authors, contributors and editors were visible on them. Glasnost provided a way of enlarging collective courage, a widening of that "gray space" that had existed between the censor's scissors and the paragraphs of the penalty law, a way of breaking barriers of inertia and fear that many people felt. The chance for success was in *glasnost*, not in conspiracy" (Mihnjik 1995: 24).

I shall start with a reference to Habermas' well known explanation of the term public sphere as a place within which an argument against the public authorities themselves is articulated, in order "to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the (...) publicly relevant sphere" (Habermas 1989:27, cited in: Calhoun 1996:9). The medium of this political confrontation should be, according to Habermas, "people's public use of reason"

(ibid). The characteristic and supposed functions of the public sphere in early capitalist society were subjected to critical scrutiny by contemporary researchers of the public sphere, who have enriched Habermas' theoretical frame from the points of view of contemporary experience, suggesting that the roles of social groups and movements in the creation of the public sphere, and of political debate within it, of the gendering of the public sphere, and of its multiplication in general, should be considered and better understood. (see particularly the contributions of: Frazer; Baker; Ryan; Eley, in: Calhoun 1996). The abovementioned definition suggested by Habermas, no matter how old-fashioned and narrow it may appear, still couldn't have served as comprehensive for the attributes and functioning of the public sphere in Serbia and the other republics of former Yugoslavia under the late socialism of the 1980s. With the exception of Slovenia, whose civic society initiated an emerging alternative public sphere during the late eighties, and which was a cause of controversy and severe ideological attack (particularly the subversive projects of *Neue Slovenische Kunst*) in the rest of the former Yugoslavia, the public sphere had been rather monolithic. In Serbia, by the end of the eighties a strange mixture of requests - for more liberalization and strengthening of national identity - had gained its momentum, both buttressed by the same prominent members of the Academy of Sciences and of renowned cultural workers. For that reason, it could be said that the critical concept of the public sphere could neither apply for the political order that immediately followed the first multiparty elections in 1990, on which the cross-dressed communists, renamed the Socialist Party of Serbia, won. Soon after, the series of wars between ex-Yugoslav republics had started. All sides, Serbia included, quickly refocused around new, nationalistic ideals and sentiments. The main characteristic of the public sphere of these days was its centralization and monopolization on behalf of the ruling party over access to the most powerful media: state TV and newspapers with a long tradition of being read, such as the daily "Politika", and its younger, and more "tabloid-like" sisters "Politika Ekspres" and "Večernje novosti". By the end of 1991, as a reaction against this exclusivity, new public spheres started to be articulated and shiny outlines of new cultural articulations began to appear. The introduction of new values, hidden on the "peripheries" of the "central" public sphere until then, and based on the virtues of democratic, civil and multicultural society had started, as an alternative and counter-balance to the authoritative tendencies.²

² For a more detailed insight into the particularities of the context of social and political change in Serbia, see also: S. Bolčić, *Sociologija i "jugoslovenska svakodnevnica" početkom devedesetih*, Sociološki pregled, 1-4, Beograd, 1993; M. Prošić-Dvornić (ed.), *Kulture u tranziciji*, Plato, Beograd, 1994; M. Lazić et al. *Razaranje društva*, Filip Višnjić, Beograd, 1994; M. Dragičević-Šešić, *Neofolk*

Opposing Discourses – Media vs. Ritual Action

Considering the opinion of Geoff Eley (in: Calhoun 1996) concerning the fact that the public is formulated not only through the engagement of interested individuals, but also due to the activities of various social groups and movements, I would like to additionally emphasize his point that both individuals and social groups and movements take part in structuring the attention, according to the criteria imposed by dominant ideology, ascribed either to hegemonic powers or social movements (Calhoun 1996: 37). This is also a way for producing meanings, and achieving consensus on them, negotiating simultaneously the inner and outer boundaries of the group in question. As Calhoun puts it, social movements and socially or politically motivated action carried out in the public space, "are occasions for the restructuring not just of issues but of identities". This means that through establishing distinct public spheres as distinct epistemic communities of various social and cultural groups in a democratic society, the identity of those groups may be produced and reproduced. Thus questions of agency, of the "struggles by which the both public sphere and its participants are actively made and re-made" (Calhoun, 37) should indeed be taken into account as an analytical concept that helps to explain processes characteristic for all post-socialist societies. In order to explain the existence of "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs", Nancy Frazer introduces the concept of "subaltern counterpublics" (Frazer, in Calhoun 1996:125-6). The explanation of each of these "subaltern counterpublics" must include not just their thematic differences, but their different internal organizations, structural position within the larger public, access to the power, nature and characteristics of the communication process (formulation of messages, type of channel, type of language used etc.). I will focus on just a few characteristics that refer to the differences in the nature of the "technologies" used to create the public sphere of its own, between the authorities and those who stood for alternative political values, options and solutions.

kultura, IK Zorana Stojanovića, Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad, 1994; I. Čolović, *Bordel ratnika*, XX vek, Beograd, 1993; for an "outside perspective" also see: D. Kideckel nad J.M. Halpern (eds), *War Among the Yugoslavs. Special issue of Anthropology of East Europe Review 11*, 1993; J.M. Halpern and D. Kideckel (eds.), *Neighbors at War, Anthropological Perspectives on Yugoslav Ethnicity, Culture and History*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

"I wish to live in a RTS (Serbian Radio Television) country"
1996/97 Protest slogan³

There is hardly anyone, regardless of his/her attitude towards the state controlled media, who could have denied the crucial role of state TV in the process of political legitimization of the regime of Slobodan Milošević and the solidification of its popular mass support. The connections between media and the process of nation building in general is a topic well known both to media theorists and to anthropologists who are concerned with contemporary problems (the most famous and notorious example would be Anthony Smith's "Nation as an Imagined Community"). As for Serbia in the analyzed period, all the possible genres of TV and radio production, as well as different forms of expressions in printed media – texts, cartoons etc – were used to shape an emerging national distinctiveness, a memory of a heroic past, and to remind all the inhabitants of Serbia of the specific position of that country, that very often used to be interpreted as "resistance to the New World Order". Even pseudo-astronomical explanations of the political issues were regularly broadcast during the first half of the decade, and Milja Vujanovic, an astrologist, won an enormous popularity (see: Erdei 1994; Prošić-Dvornić 1991; 1996; Jovanović 2000, Radulović 2007). These facts were usually taken to build an argument regarding a thesis about the manipulation of the masses by the elite, in which masses were usually seen as the passive and uncritical recipients of messages imposed from above. This also implied a radical disconnection between the public and private spheres in terms of production and distribution of power. The private sphere and media consumption by the audiences in private were thought of as deprived of a power that was produced "elsewhere".

³ It should be indicated that we could discern, historically and analytically between three distinct waves of protests in Serbia during the nineties: 1991-1993 - I would refer to it as a formative phase, for the basic symbolic repertoire of spatio-temporal orientation, artifacts, ways of behavior and forms of organizing, as well the basic meanings that were interpreted and manipulated in subsequent protests, were established in that period (on protest rituals in recent Serbian history, see: Erdei, I. "Prostorno-vremeski obrasci novih politickih rituala u Beogradu, 1991-1993", unpublished manuscript of M.A. thesis, Library of Ethnology and Anthropology Dpt., School of Philosophy, Belgrade); 1996-1997 - the first long-lasting – almost three months - civil and student protests, on a daily basis, provoked by electoral fraud; these protests were very widely considered to be an outburst of creative potential and energy of the citizens of Serbia; 1999 – anti NATO protest, as a reaction against the NATO bombing of Serbia; unlike the previous waves of protests, aimed against the ruling regime, the 1999 protests were pro-government, and they were organized with the support of the authorities (on the use of the protest discourse developed by the political opposition in totally different context, see: Jansen 2000).

Therefore the private audiences were considered powerless in their act of viewing, and broadcasting was conceptualized as a one-direction information flow. The same problem could nevertheless be approached from different theoretical positions which focus instead on the point of view of domestic users and audiences. As a result of this it became visible how broadcasting could serve as a connection of private and communal experiences, and also to serve as a mediator between local and national spheres, in building an "electronic community". To illustrate this point we may refer to the words of John Ellis who spoke about television as "the private life of the national state" (Ellis 1982: 5).

In the era of the expansion of new broadcasting technologies, it was necessary to pay more careful attention to the social uses of media, as we must be susceptible to the communicative potential of the traditional ritual forms, and particularly to the contemporary intercourses between media and rituals. In the field of media studies Elihu Katz has pointed to the importance of a closer insight into culture, society and media relationships, stressing the "ritual role of the TV" and defining what he called the "media event" (Katz 1992). From a different perspective, anthropologists have tried to explore the communicative and mediatory role of the traditional forms of narration and to bridge a gap between contemporary media and traditional concepts of narration, as myths and rituals (see: Carey, W. James 1988). From the point of view and experience of participants and observers in the process of post-socialist socio-political transformation, it could be affirmed that both media and rituals have contributed to the creation and distribution of information sometimes of crucial importance for the building of group identities. From the end of the eighties, particularly from 1989 (and a persuasive TV mediated impressive commemoration of the Kosovo battle from 1389), broadcasting enabled millions of people belonging to the dominant Serbian nation, to reshape their identities from former Yugoslav (also communist), to the later national (Serbian) one. That process included state TV broadcasting of the exciting mass rallies, later described by their organizers as "carefully orchestrated" (Kerčov, Radoš, Raič 1990), through which Milosevic raised public support throughout Serbia, during the fall of 1988. These were crowned with a mass rally at Ušće, Belgrade, in 1988, as well as the commemoration of the Kosovo battle of Gazimestan in 1989, used to reinforce national feelings and to help to create an "imagined community" of those who feel to be a part of the Serbian nation. In that way, television helped to broaden the public of those attending the ritual, to widen a ritual community and has contributed to spreading the message regarding the new basis of social legitimacy (nationality against ideological/communist belonging). It has also conveyed the intended message in a new way, using new technology's potentials for creating a persuasive environment. Certainly, the process of mediation (whether by broadcasting or ritual performance) has

its limitations, considering the relation between the extent of reality distortion and the expected results. When the media engineering of reality goes too far, then the social experiences and behavior it is expected to govern, can be turned into a bitter encounter with an unfriendly reality of "real-life".⁴ The same applies to rituals in the cases where their content and ideological frame are not strong enough to "discipline", in what had become radically changed societies. This was the case for many rituals from the socialist period which by the end of the eighties remained only empty shells, not resonating with the already changed social relations they existed to represent.

In addition to state television, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the daily "Politika" took part in marking out the official public sphere. Together with the authority of the Socialist party, they formed a "triangle of power", supporting each other extensively in public. That passionate nationalistic affair gave public life to several projects in the Academy aimed at reconsidering the constitutive status of Serbia in the federation (e.g. the scientific conference held in march 1988) and changes to the constitution of Serbia itself (the declaration made public in October 1988). Thus the Academy of Sciences, by tradition a respectable institution in Serbian society, invested the authority of science and the eminence of its social position, to give legitimacy to just one political option. That very homogeneous campaign lasted to the very beginning of the nineties, when the first signs of division within the authoritative sphere appeared, along with the strengthening of the various counter-spheres. It was a process common to all the countries that had belonged to the former Eastern Block, and which, with different dynamics, went on with a great intensity from the beginning of 1980s, building on the variety of dissenting voices and initiatives from the 1950s onwards.

Here I will take as particularly pronounced examples (and also cases that could provide for a comparative view) Czechoslovakia (before the Czechs and Slovaks peacefully parted), Bulgaria and Serbia. In all of them, Serbia being late for a few years, the beginning of the political change that was sought for was made visible in public by mass, civil urban protests in capital cities. The central city squares (Wenceslas Square in Prague, the Square of Saint Alek-

⁴ That was exactly what happened during the long-lasting student and civil protests in Belgrade in 1996/97, to the participants of the SPS (ruling party) counterraly. who experienced disbelief and humiliation after coming to Belgrade. For weeks, they had been informed, via state TV, that a "handful of protesters keep walking through the Belgrade streets, trying to demolish the capital of the state" . Coming to Belgrade, some of them for the first time in their life, from the most distant parts of the country, they experienced a disbelief and humiliation, facing the masses of protesters in the untouched urban environment. The encounter with reality and its comparison with its media presentation may also provoke humor and irony, as is the case with the current "restoration and development" of the country, after the NATO bombing.

sandar Nevski in Sophia, and Republic square in Belgrade) came to be the centers and focuses of social revolutions, and the dramatic request for a social transformation was framed and invested with physical and meaningful properties of space. Mass, disciplined, highly coordinated performances of socialistic rituals with their elaborated iconography so characteristic for socialism and its self-celebratory ritual events were replaced, on the squares and streets of Prague, Sophia and, later, Belgrade, with vibrant, (self) organized masses of protesting citizens, inventing (through "bricolage") new protest rituals and creating "new traditions" of the "1989 Revolution".⁵ It was those protests that had created a nucleus for the formation of "subalternate counterpublics" in Serbia, providing them with thematic material, and alternative means of communication. In the years to follow a specific context made up by the wars waged, but never publicly proclaimed, was added to these propositions. Questioning the necessity of those wars, and opening up to public debate the related questions of violence, militarism, tyranny, manipulation, solidarity and responsibility, various social groups and movements have been "making and remaking" their specific identities in counter-position to the public authorities, and through encounters with each other's alternative visions and interests. The "subalternate counterpublics" in the Serbian case include the public spheres formulated by the political opposition, women's and peace groups (assembled around the ideas and issues of antimilitarism, human rights, women's rights, non-violence, conscientious objection, etc.), and the students who gathered several times around political claims. The activity of these counterpublics were particularly fervent during the civil and student protests of the winter 1996-97, but it should be mentioned that their beginnings in 1991 and 1992 had been of great importance, for their activities have contributed to the antiwar and antimilitaristic ideas in an otherwise belligerent society. At the start I will mention but a few organizations, initiatives, projects and publications that had helped to build the alternative public sphere(s): the feminist

⁵ Ethnographic accounts, and studies of protest rituals in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Serbia, are given by: A.M. Kukral, Prague 1989: Theater of Revolution, A Study in Humanistic Geography, (Unpublished PhD theses), Lexington, Kentucky, 1995; R. Ivanova, Put ka demokratiji: prostorne dimenzije masovnih političkih protesta u Bugarskoj, Kulture u tranziciji, Beograd, 1994, 169-179; I. Erdei, Prostorno-vremenski obrasci novih političkih rituala u Beogradu 1990-1993, (unpublished M.A. theses), Belgrade, 1998; also, in a broader political and different regional context: F.N. Pieke, Images of Protest and the Use of Urban Space in China's Tradition of Protest, paper presented at the Symposium on Urban Images: Cities and Symbols. Symbols and Cities. Centre of Non-Western Studies, Leiden University, January 6-9, 1992, pp. 24

group "Women and Society" (1978),⁶ the Association for the Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (UJDI-1989), the Republican Club, the Belgrade Women's Lobby (1990), SOS Phone, the Centre for Antiwar Action (July 1991), Civil Action for Peace, Women in Black (October 1991), the Belgrade Circle; the manifestations "Open antiwar debates" and "Belgrade antiwar marathon", lighting the candles for victims of the war; publications such as "Pacific", the first magazine to promote pacifism, and later the bi-monthly "Republic", editions of the Belgrade Circle, books such as "The Crypt for Miroslav Milenković" and "The Serbian Side of the War".⁷ The emerging counter-publics had been trying, and had been successful, in finding different places, both in open and closed arenas that were not connected with the promotion of the ideas of the ruling party. They were trying to define a "domestic sphere" of their own, which stood for the beginning of the process of symbolic battle for the control of the historic centre of the capital, a feature they share with Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Recognizing this intention common to all the abovementioned groups and parties, we should go further from the explicit ideas communicated within different counter-spheres, and enter the world of meanings that are formulated, negotiated and communicated by the spatio-temporal framings of public events, within alternative counter-publics.

What became evident through the analysis and interpretation of the composition and use of new (protest) political rituals in Belgrade (1990-93),⁸ was that their inscribing into existing spatio-temporal frames of reference (physical, strategic, historical, symbolic) supported, to an extent that could not be ignored, the referential messages that the events intended to send. Furthermore, every new (ritual) usage of urban space gave that space with new meanings, available to be counted on, and manipulated, in further events, thus enriching the urban social memory and creating new urban traditions. In that way, the ritualization of the space and its outcomes could as well be interpreted as a project of the re-signification of urban spaces, that always keeps pace with socio-political changes. Cities, the traditional loci of political power throughout the course of history, are among the first things to be conquered, redefined, renamed and restructured, in order to give material substance to the

⁶ Years indicated in brackets denote the year in which the organization was founded

⁷ "Grobnica za Miroslava Milenkovića" - a collection of epitaphs dedicated to a mobilized soldier Miroslav Milenkovic who committed suicide between the two rows of his soldier colleagues, not being able to make a decision as to where he belongs: to those who are willing to continue fighting ("heroes") or to those who will give it up ("traitors").

⁸ This analysis forms a part of my own M.A. research into the composition and meanings of protest rituals in Serbia from 1990 to 1993, with particular emphasis on rituals that took part in Belgrade.

marking of a new beginning (for more on this argument, see: C. Thake 1991; Kukral 1995; Vujović 1997). If it were not possible to do so in reality, as was the case with Serbia at the beginning of the nineties, the political alternatives should have at least started with the symbolic attack and redefinition of the importance and meanings of urban spaces in question. The request for a change in political and social relations had been realized through the "ritual attack" on the historical centre of the capital (Belgrade), its conquest (though symbolic and temporary) and later the widening of this so called "territory of freedom"⁹ to the rest of the city. In that process of political confrontation, the urban space simultaneously represented the final goal of political struggles for power, and a means to achieve it. The strategic control of the urban space should have been a starting point, with an intention to establish political domination. The opposition parties, and above all the Serbian Renewal Movement, connected their movements with the site of Republic Square, and so the meeting of the 9th March 1991 stood as a metonymic sign, in the vocabulary of Belgrade space, of revolt and of resistance. That place surely has condensed different layers of meaning, but the opposition parties also preferred spaces close to the traditional institutions (such as the church yard). Compared with the creators of other counter-spheres they were more traditionally oriented, usually choosing days from the traditional calendar for the events they organize (e.g. St. Vitus¹⁰ day) and showing a tendency towards the creation of a protest calendar of its own. At the same time they had been heavily exploiting traditionalist rhetoric, which brought them close to the public authorities.

Protest along the frequent streets of Belgrade is the feature that can be ascribed to civil and peace groups. At the beginning, and during the time of war in Croatia and Bosnia, several public demonstrations were held on the central streets of Belgrade, in the midst of the day. The first of those was "The black band", the event that was to express pain and solidarity with the victims of the war in Bosnia. The black band was created from paper blocks and stretched between two squares – Republic Square and Slavija - making visible the antiwar attitude of numerous citizens. Just two weeks after that, and departing from three different points in the city, big trucks, carrying bells from the churches demolished in the war, took part in an attempt to "awaken" the citizens of Belgrade, and of Serbia, to resistance against the war as a solution for the political disagreements. Borka Pavićević, one of the founders of the

⁹ This is how one of the prominent opposition leaders of the time, Slobodan Rakitić, from the then strong political party, the Serbian Renewal Movement, gave a name to the centre of the city, after it was "conquered", and appropriated by the people and supporters of the political opposition, during the rally held on March 1st, 1991.

¹⁰ Vidovdan, in Serbian.

organization named the Civil Resistance Movement, stressed the emotional and epistemological dimensions of these events: " What I do consider important in the creation of these events is a common sense of the spirit of the times, something that we feel and have a need to articulate. It's like you are reading a book, and what is written in it sounds so familiar that you say, blimey, this man, has written exactly what I am feeling, yet he has done it so well. The ideally urban and cathartic feeling surrounding these events was the fact that they happened quite naturally, they were founded on a common value system, a pool of common opinion toward certain issues, a common morality, a feeling of community. When you have come to terms with the common points of public attention then ritual came out from it very easily" (personal account, quoted in Erdei 1998).

Nevertheless, the most popular form of protest, that has outdone its initial context of appearance, and now stands as one of the key symbols of ludic resistance to the totalitarian rule, was the walks. Introduced in the early nineties by the protesting civil groups, the walks were undertaken by the students during the '92 Student protest, and subsequently accepted by opposition protesters (during the St. Vitus Day convention in 1992) and widely elaborated during the '96/97 civil and student protests. The walks have been promoted into daily ritual actions, each of them carrying a particular message referring to the ever-changing situation, and using various constellations of spatial symbols. Their "rationale" was to mark the "space of repression" (framed by the institutions that stand for the authority of the regime) as well as the detection of hidden, non explicit sources of power. The method included a simple walking through certain spaces, passing by certain institutions or going in their direction, while the police cordons banning movement along certain lines (such as Dedinje – the part of the city where president Milošević lived) represented signs which delimited the boundaries of the permitted and prohibited. The students declared these frontiers as a boundary between "us" (the students) and "them" (the regime), and at a few points in the town pyramids were fashioned out of cardboard, then named the "Rubicon", and were placed a few dozen meters in front of multiple police cordons (which existed to ban movement in certain directions). In this context, it is worth mentioning the walk of 7 July 1992 (the day of a national holiday) when the students, within their action called "Picnic on Dedinje", tried to reach the residential area where the president of the republic Slobodan Milosevic was living. They were prevented by a demonstration of power upon entry to the president's street. They made a few just as unsuccessful efforts to do that again during the 1996/97 Protest.

Within this thus physically limited space the students continued to publicly present their views and dramatize their political messages. They were not always satisfied with simple declarations of discontent, e.g. with media mani-

pulation or the rough manner of the police during their demonstration walks to the buildings of the TV or the city police, or even their circling. As time passed, they supplemented the walks with other forms of activities, which additionally dramatized specific topics that they thought deserved wider elaboration as was the case with the "heave ho!" construction of the wall in front of the Yugoslav parliament. Parodying the spirit of socialist enthusiasm, and resisting the accusations that they were destroying everything that was built during the time of the post-war "construction of the country", students of Belgrade University responded by building a wall in front of the federal parliament under the slogan: "We do not destroy, we build". The state TV used this event for further stigmatization of the civic protest, by manipulating its representation. They used the procedure of "context clipping", by which the original context was entirely depersonalized, divested of the previous connotations and layers of meaning, and was made ready for re-contextualization under their chosen conditions. This episode could also serve as an illustration of the different relations to certain parts of the past and treatment of similar issues by the state media, controlled by the authorities, and the protesting groups.

The "rally of support" regarding the replacement of the university president or the faked car-rally at Ušće were excellent examples of the ways in which the students concocted ironically reinterpreted quotations from the political language of the authorities, alluding to the methods and technology of rule of the governing party (which until the last days of its rule persisted in organizing "spontaneous" support and abusing the "institutions of the system", whilst at the same time loudly claiming to defend them).

Silent Debates Over Public Memory

During the whole decade, apart from these superficial conflicts and struggles around who is to control the meanings of numerous events and who is to control the use of urban space, there existed a hidden agenda as well. This went beyond everyday political struggles and confrontations, and centered on the issue of public memory or, to rephrase it – making decisions of what would be forgotten and what would be remembered, in order to create and maintain a new political and social identity. The role of media and rituals in that process was particularly clear until the end of the Student and Civil protest in 1996/97, and thus my conclusions relate to that period only.¹¹ Public memory is referred to as a "body of

¹¹ The end of that wave of protests has brought a significant change in the distribution of power within Serbia, for in a lot of local communities, even regions, parties that so far were in opposition won the elections and the protests have helped to legitimate their electoral success. That has had its consequences for media policy in

beliefs and ideas that help a public or society understand both its past and its present, and by implication, its future" and which is always to be understood as a way of speaking about the relations of power in society (Bodnar, in: Gillis 1994:76). John Bodnar differentiates between two types of interests, and we may also understand them as different orientations toward reality, and different relations to power, called *official* and *vernacular*, that participate in the creation and emergence of public memory. According to him, what marks the range of official views is their connection with public authority, that claims to sustain the social status quo. *Official culture*, argues Bodnar, relies on "'dogmatic formalism' and the restatement of reality in ideal rather than complex and ambiguous terms. It desires to present the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness". (ibid: 75). In order to achieve their goal, the authorities rely on the "ideal language of patriotism, rather than the (...) real language of grief and sorrow" (ibid: 75). When faced with official interests, *vernacular culture* stands as a subversive force in the debate over public memory. Those individuals and groups who plead for the promotion of specialized interests and interpretations that are deeply embedded in personal, firsthand experience, prefer to convey expressions about what "reality feels like rather than what it should be like" (ibid, my emphasis). These worthy theoretical notions were noted down by John Bodnar in his analyses of public memory in an American city, and might serve as a prolegomena to the prevailing interpretation characteristic of the "memory work" used by the public authorities and members of the alternative counter-publics in Serbia.¹² The most powerful medium in Serbia during the nineties and especially in the first part of that decade - the state television - has been perceived as a loudspeaker of the governing parties. The responsibility of its editors and journalists who have been one of the most prominent interpreters and inspirers of ethno-national hatred and intolerance should have been (although still are not) carefully measured after the democratic turn in 2000. It is widely argued by the Serbian liberal public that this process certainly would

many local communities, as it enabled the creation of more space for alternative political voices and agendas. It has as its unintended consequence the significant demise in ritual protest actions, for gaining the formal space for democratic debate made them redundant.

¹² It has to be made clear that these so called "cultures of remembering" represent different discourses, and that, as such, they can be used by different actors in different situations, with an aim to legitimize their particular views of the situation and to try to govern its basic meanings. Nevertheless, my opinion is that in the period analyzed in the paper (1991-1997) basic opposition between main political actors (regime vs. political opposition and civic initiatives) corresponded with opposing discourses that prevailed in their construction of reality by trying to control its interpretation (official vs. vernacular).

have been one of the important steps in the process of national reconciliation.¹³ That a patriotic criterion is the one that is to govern and dominate the broadcasting policy was clearly explicated from the very beginning of the nineties when it was made clear that the media policy should be adjusted to match patriotic criteria, defined in the party document of the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). President of the Serbian Television Board of directors, Vukašin Jokanović stated the same, but in a more extensive form: SRT (Serbian Radio Television) as national and state TV being of particular importance. In pressure-filled times like these, when the Serbian people were exposed to genocide, and basic national and human rights were suspended, it could not be permitted that television be anational, nor that it does not protect vital national interest" (quoted in: Veljanovski 1995:VII, transl. I.E.). What constituted the argument of the political authorities was the augmentation of citizen duties over their rights. Thus a sound official discourse from the beginning of the nineties was directed towards creating and promoting an official interpretation of the war events and casualties. Clear differences were made between the moralities of the sides in conflict, dividing "us" ("heroic freedom fighters") from "them" ("aggressive perpetrators"); and war victims were made part of this discourse through the manipulation of parts of their desecrated bodies (e.g. bones and remains of the Second World War victims that were dug up in Croatia and reburied in Serbia, in their "sacred national land"). Later on, after a mass exodus of the Serbian population from Croatia took place in 1995, vernacular discourse started slowly to permeate through official reports on the war, giving voice to the victims. Surprisingly, those voices did not belong to the civilians who suffered the most the loss of their homes, livestock and family land, for the official politics espoused remained rather silent on their experience for a long period of time. Vernacular discourse in the official media was used to legitimize the voices and experiences of the soldiers, "freedom fighters", who were represented as "bleeding for the national cause".

The members of the counter-publics, particularly the non-party ones, have stressed exactly the opposite – they wanted the voice of the individual citizen to be publicly seen and heard. They also claimed their rights as citizens to dissent with the homogeneity of the national collective and demanded that their experiences, feelings, thoughts and ideas be understood and appreciated. Apart from the different political positioning and kinds of authority and legitimacy on which they rest, these two perspectives differ in the way they make

¹³ The bitter fact that this still isn't a case is a cause of great disappointment and criticism of all those who believed in the power of so called "October 6th" as a day of settling accounts with the disturbing past, thus achieving a moral balance needed for building the future. This is a position shared by liberal politicians and the biggest NGOs with a sound political voice, but with weak political influence in Serbian society.

decisions about the issues that are to be remembered, and commemorated, and those that are to be forgotten, and also in the way of (mis)interpretation of their commonly chosen point of attention. For example, the state television for a long time had been avoiding reporting on the bombing in Sarajevo, and from personal experience I know that one of the radio stations in a town near Belgrade refused to broadcast a call for an antiwar meeting dedicated to the year of the siege and bombing of Sarajevo, with an explanation that no siege nor bombing exist, simply a war for the national liberation of the Serbs in Bosnia. When the citizens of Serbia, villagers of Croatian origin from the village Hrtkovci had been severely expelled from their homes the official public remained in deep silence. It was as if there were a consensus regarding forgetting all unjust, immoral, cruel, deeply inhuman parts of behavior that was easily reached in almost all spheres of society. Maybe this is one of the reasons for moral degradation and the incapability to bring about a significant political change. The destiny of the victims of the wars was officially interpreted as an honorable sacrifice for eternal principles. On the other side, the members of counter-publics, bearers of the "vernacular views", favored interpretations more humanly and emotionally grounded - a view "within". Already mentioned events such as the "Black band" and "The Last Bell" from 1992 as well as numerous public vigils by the "Women in black" represent a good example of this kind of attitude. Although the scope and influence of "vernacular view" bearers remained very restricted, it is also to be admitted that the existence of those alternative publics helped prevent the occurrence of a total "collective amnesia".

Concluding Remarks

Summing up this account of televisual and ritual representations of reality and of the most contested social and political issues in the two protest waves (1991-1993 and 1996-97) as well as the relations of these two channels of communication in creating/shaping reality and influencing the public, four periods can be singled out from the end of the eighties to the end of the nineties.

1988-1989 – the birth (invention) of a media-mediated protest – It was at the end of the eighties, when the mutual appeal, seduction, love affair, and intercourse of rituals and their TV broadcasting for the national public started. From 1988, broadcasted programmes provided millions of people belonging to the dominant Serbian nation with the possibility to reshape their identities from being former Yugoslav (also communistic), to a later national (Serbian) one. That process included the broadcasting of the exciting mass rallies, referred to as the "spontaneous rebellion of the people" which were later described by their

organizers as "carefully orchestrated" (Kerčov, Radoš, Raič 1990), and through which Milosevic raised public support in Serbia, during the fall of 1988. These were crowned with a mass rally at Ušće, Belgrade, in 1988, as well as the commemoration of the Kosovo battle of Gazimestan in 1989, which performed a function of reinforcing national feelings and helping to create an "imagined community" of those who felt as if they were a part of the Serbian nation.

1990-1993 – Television and rituals separated and opposed – The first signs of division within the heavily nationalized, authoritative public sphere appeared, along with the strengthening of various alternative spheres at the beginning of the nineties. The central city squares came to be the centers and focuses of social revolutions, and the dramatic request for a social transformation was framed and invested with both physical and meaningful properties of the space. Those protests had created a nucleus for the formation of alternative publics in Serbia, providing them with thematic material, and alternative means of communication – new protest rituals. In the years to follow, a specific context made up by the wars waged, but never publicly proclaimed, was added to these propositions. Questioning the necessity of those wars, and opening up to public debate the related questions of violence, militarism, tyranny, manipulation, solidarity and responsibility, various social groups and movements have been "making and remaking" their specific identities in forming a counter attitude to the public authorities, and in encounter with each other's alternative visions and interests.

1996-1997 – Television and rituals separated, but mutually constitutive – The period between the Dayton Agreement (1995) and the Civil and Student protests (1996/97) was characterized by the dynamic interplay and mutual articulation of television and protest actions, which were carried out on daily basis. Seen as alternative symbolic systems, and thanks to alternative media for narrating actual events, both television (regime controlled) and rituals (created and performed by citizens and students led by the political opposition) relied on the manipulation of the same stock of traditional symbols in an attempt to create/reach a wide social consensus over electoral fraud as one of the cornerstones of democracy. The protest most representative of this period was the Civil and Student protest in 1996/97 and its TV coverage, as well as their interplay (for more on this see: Erdei 1997).

1999 – Television and rituals reinforcing each other – The end of the nineties in Serbia was marked by the NATO bombing, and with respect to the relation between television and rituals, it was very similar to the end of the eighties. Just as at the time of mass excitement with the direct broadcasting of popular support for Milošević at Gazimestan and Ušće, as I mentioned in

earlier sections, television and ritual representations merged into one – an understandable fact if we know that the television editors and journalists and event organizers belonged to the same political stratum – supporters of Milošević's regime. Television gave full coverage to the protest events that were organized on the main city squares, bridges, and streets, helping with community building and strengthening an already strong sense of collective – i.e. national identity. A widely recognizable symbol of these protests was the image of a target – it became hugely popular and was appropriated in numerous popular guises – from simple badges, T-shirts, posters, postcards, even cake decorations at birthday parties that occurred during the bombing. This period enabled researchers to question and further investigate notions of "protest", "resistance", "war" and "peace", all of which had been given substantially different meanings than in previous periods.

After having discussed and summarized the rise of the public sphere in Serbia, a few important details are worth mentioning regarding its decline. The peak of the emergence and formulation of the alternative counter-spheres was reached during the protests of 1996/97. After the election results had been confirmed, and the former opposition came to power in Belgrade and a dozen towns throughout Serbia, the process of the institutionalization of the greater part of former counter publics began. A network of local televisions took over the task of nurturing alternative political ideas, but these nevertheless deadened the subversive character of the urban street (ritual) provocations. The framework comprising the media in Serbia had been divided into two halves: a few powerful broadcasting stations, loyal to the authorities and their policy (RTS, Palma, Pink, BK) and a network of local broadcasting stations in the communities where the coalition "Together" won. But the line of division concerning the free communication of information was unclear. A number of local media, including the Belgrade station Studio B, controlled by the Serbian Renewal Movement, were again transformed into uncritical supporters of the governing parties. From my point of view, this marked the start of the decline of the public sphere, a kind of regression back to an already experienced narrowness of opinion. Soon, the Serbian authorities proclaimed the new Public Information Act (1998), which restricted the freedom of speech, and proscribed high financial fines for the journalists, editors, and owners of the media, who broke it. This authoritative attempt to suspend reality by the prohibition of public speech concerning it was suspended after the democratic turn in 2000. Nevertheless, the public spheres and public communication within Serbian society has had its internal "biases" that have tended to influence the majority of counter-spheres. It must be stressed that the women and feminist counter-spheres were the least subjected to these "biases" which included rather traditionalistic tropes used in public communication. At times, this evident traditionalism has brought the alternative voices too close to the official rhetoric, which they were publicly

rejecting, and therefore threatened their proclaimed political alternativeness. That could be explained by the rather conservative formal structure of group communication itself, requiring a "heritage of common stories, ideas, types of characters, cultural symbols and narrative conventions" which form the very core of the cultures, their "narrative consensus" and generate central mythologies (Thornburn 1988: 57). Building the "narrative consensus" means pleading to be well understood, and by means of understanding may also be politically acceptable in time. The lighting of candles, the symbolism of religious holidays, the implication of Christian relics, bread and salt, brandy, hawtorn stake and a string of garlic, elite work brigades, the motives of the defenders of the domestic hearts and traitors and the related symbols, are but a few of mythologies found within the Serbian folk and historic tradition upon which all participants in communication draw upon, seeking to make use of the changes to preserve a symbolic pledge of their own identity. Regardless of how delicate this attempt to negotiate the boundaries of the group within wider tradition could be, the attitude towards "critical issues" of the moment must be very carefully measured. Even one of the most active and provocative movements in Serbia at the end of the nineties, the "Resistance" ("Otpor"), despite their open confrontation with the authorities along the lines of antimilitarism, disobedience and cosmopolitanism, they sometimes happened to fall into the trap of competing with the authorities in redefining concepts of patriotism, homeland, treasure, and tradition, instead of formulating a truly alternative discourse.

Appendix: Coming to Terms With the Difficult Past After 2000

Not surprisingly, one of the central events of the so-called "October 5th Revolution" was an attack on the State television, and its physical demolition. The anger directed towards state television was provoked by the fact that it functioned as a symbol of state violence and brutal ignorance of many events that had happened on the streets of Belgrade, ever since the first opposition rally was held in Belgrade on March 9th 1991. It served as a means for defining not just "a day" – as was really the case with the evening news in 19:30 – but also as a generator of hatred towards the ethnic and political others, and had fueled hostile attitudes against those who hadn't supported the ruling elite. Thus the entire "2000 Revolution" was renamed after the efficient vehicle that had initiated the demolition of "TV Bastille" – "Excavator Revolution" ("Bager revolucija"). At the moment of the mass protests that were to legitimate the electoral victory of the former opposition, both television broadcasting and ritual action, so characteristic for the former period, were suspended. In the period to come, both institutions – television *and* rituals –

were to change their politics and their appearance. This fresh political start supplied the citizens and now governing politicians with a new starting point, the beginning of the "new era". However, the re-articulation of time generated a need to relate to the recent past. Or, to put it in the vocabulary of civil society, so fashionable these days, to come to terms with the difficult and disturbing past, war atrocities and war crimes included. The task isn't an easy one, and in a nutshell is made up of many of the contested issues from the previous period, around which voices from official and subaltern publics have been debating (mostly disagreeing). Finally, after 2000 and particularly after the tragic assassination of the Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, there are, in my opinion, two critical points on which we will be able to observe and document the degree and quality of social change in Serbia. Unlike the conventional evidence for the degree of social transformation of the so called transitional countries, which includes independent media and developed civil society, I would argue that the commemoration of these two events from the recent past, whose interpretations are much contested among the many contemporary Serbian publics, constitute more appropriate indicators of change. One is the case of Srebrenica, the other Đinđić's assassination. I am convinced that the "social biography" of these events from the past serves as a subtle but reliable indicator of the future of Serbian society.

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Ildiko Erdei

Televizija, rituali i nadmetanja oko toga šta je
"vredno pamćenja"
u Srbiji tokom devedesetih godina XX veka

Cilj rada je da osvetli ulogu televizije (s naglaskom na državno upravljanu i kontrolisanu televiziju) i ritualnih akcija, u procesu kreiranja i distribucije političkih poruka, koje se odnose na važne društvene i političke događaje tokom devedesetih godina XX veka u Beogradu. Osnovni argument koji se u radu iznosi jeste da su gradski ulični politički protesti koje su, protiv vladajućeg režima, organizovali i sprovodili

predstavnicima političke opozicije i pripadnicima socijalnih i studentskih pokreta, logični ishod režimske medijske politike, i da su bili blisko povezani s njom. Cilj te medijske politike bio je da se priguše i učine nevidljivim svi suprotstavljeni glasovi na javnoj sceni, ali i da se izbegava javni govor o svemu što bi moglo da naruši sliku vladajućeg režima kao tolerantnog, miroljubivog i patriotskog, na primer izveštaji o ratnim zločinima i razaranja Vukovara, Dubrovnika i Sarajeva. Politički protesti i ritualne akcije kreirale su prostor gde se o ovim pitanjima moglo javno govoriti, i na taj način su proizvodili alternativne javne sfere. Umesto da se o medijima i ritualima razmišlja kao o razdvojenim načinima komunikacije, u radu će biti pokazano kako su, u posebnom društvenom i političkom kontekstu Srbije tokom devedesetih godina XX veka, televizija i rituali postali deo procesa uzajamnog konstituisanja i artikulacije.

Ključne reči: gradski prostori i mesta, rituali, mediji, politički protesti, javna memorija

Ildiko Erdei

Télévision, rituels et disputes autour
de ce qui est "mémorable" en Serbie au cours
des années 90 du XX siècle

L'objectif de ce travail est de mettre en relief le rôle de la télévision (l'accent étant mis sur la télévision sous contrôle étatique) et des actions rituelles, dans le processus de création et de distribution des messages politiques, se rapportant à d'importants événements sociaux et politiques dans les années 90 du 20e siècle à Belgrade. Le principal argument émis dans ce travail est que les manifestations politiques de rue contre le régime au pouvoir, organisées et menées par les représentants de l'opposition politique et les membres des mouvements sociaux et étudiants, sont un résultat logique de la politique médiatique du régime, et qu'ils sont en étroite relation avec elle. L'objectif de cette politique médiatique était d'étouffer et de rendre inaudibles toutes les voix opposées sur la scène publique, mais également d'éviter le débat public sur tout ce qui aurait pu ternir l'image du régime comme tolérant, pacifique et patriotique, par exemple les rapports officiels sur les crimes de guerre et sur les destructions des villes de Vukovar, de Dubrovnik et de Sarajevo. Les manifestations politiques et les actions rituelles ont créé un espace où il a été possible de soulever toutes ces questions, et ont de la sorte produit des sphères publiques alternatives. Au lieu de considérer les médias et les rituels comme moyens de communication à part, dans ce travail il sera démontré que dans le contexte social et politique particulier de la Serbie des années 90 du 20e siècle, la télévision et les rituels sont devenus une part du processus de constitution et d'articulation mutuelles.

Mots-clés: espaces et lieux urbains, rituels, médias, manifestations politiques, mémoire publique.