

## Media & Crime

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In search for one's own voice

### THE CRIME AND THE PUBLIC

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**Where there is no voice that crime happened it seems that crime did not happen at all**

The crimes are as old as the civilization. One could simply conclude that crimes exist and that the only thing that changes is our consciousness about them. The consciousness of a crime always depends upon our knowledge about it. Where there is no voice that crime happened it seems that a crime did not happen at all. Therefore, facing a crime does not represent a personal issue – the issue of perception, guilt and repent, but represents a process that entire society is passing through. In this seemingly endless process which each society is constantly faced with and fights against – is the fundamental issue for the functioning of the entire society. Legal system represents a foundation based on which the values of good and evil are being established. However, this foundation, regardless of how important it was for the establishment of the justice, stability and security of entire society is not sufficient unless the voice about what crime is and what is forbidden does not reach every individual.

We are talking about the 'voice', the Voice as a foundation of every freedom and justice, which is not only a blind follower of current authority and enthroned institutional power. We are talking about the Voice that directly influences the establishment of public opinion. Finally, we are talking about the role of the media in the creation of the picture of the world and social atmosphere in Serbia.

When, on July 1st, 2005, during the ICTY trial a video was shown, picturing a cold-blooded murder of six young unarmed men, performed by members of a group called 'The Scorpions', it became a headline news in all TV stations that had news programs. It actually caused a 'chain reaction'. The next day all daily papers made this event the head news. During the period from June 2nd to 24th, 2005, a total of 676 of articles were published on this subject. All of the published texts brought this video into a direct connection with Srebrenica. Hence, a month before the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre this tragic event had full media attention of all of the most influential media representatives and consequently of the Serbian public as well. If we compare the number of texts published in papers dealing with the issue of Srebrenica, in the period from January 1st, 2003, to June 1st, 2005, we can see that the total number of published texts was 1492. 45, 31% of all articles published on Srebrenica in the period of 30 months were in less than a month published after the mentioned video was broadcasted. The afore mentioned data is self-explanatory in the existence of free media reporting where dramatic information always finds its way to the public. To be specific, there is no possibility to 'soften' or 'polish' such information that was broadcasted via TV (which is also an authentic video material) and thus be adjusted to a 'historical moment'. Differences in the length of broadcasting, commentary or selection of sequences, substantially do not change a thing. Once the information is released it just carries by itself. It speaks about a crime.

However, this is a very rare occurrence. Similar to an earthquake, this case also does not give a clear picture about how is the voice on committed crimes reaching the public. By analyzing the writing on Srebrenica before the appearance of Scorpions it can be easily determined that the number of testimonies, authentic stories or investigative reports about what really happened in Srebrenica in the month of July is almost not worth mentioning. Running away from the Srebrenica story was more than obvious. The information about Srebrenica was most frequently being released indirectly through the reports from the Hague trials or through flash news on newly discovered mass graves. The information about the results, achieved by the Commission for discovering the truth about Srebrenica which was established by the Serbian Government, never ever appeared as the headliner or breaking news, but was being placed in the public as a marginal note. The strategy of concealing or suppressing the information about the character and the magnitude of the crime is even more obvious when speaking about the publicity given to some defendants' admitting to have committed the crime. As a rule, a lot more media attention is given to those denying their guilt, then to those that plead guilty. The only exception would be the case of Biljana Plavšić where her guilty plea was actually used in a specific media campaign against her. Who would know in Serbia today, how pleaded Goran Jelišić, who introduced himself as the Serbian Adolph, and who was personally killing and torturing Muslims in Brčko? A lot better is remembered what his arrest looked like, as well as the statements by his family members and neighbors saying how respected and a good man he was.

Let's go back to the Scorpions case. The shock caused by the shown scenes lasted for about a month.

That period was used for recharging batteries and for channeling skills of those that could no longer deny the mass murders in Srebrenica. Instead of rude denial of the event, revitalization has started. Simultaneously, speculations about the exact numbers of killed Muslims and announcements of the exact numbers of killed Serbs could be heard. In the same manner the exact number of Serbs killed in the region of Bratunac was determined during the period from 1992 to 1995. Thus, the character of the crime committed in Srebrenica was completely overlooked and misinterpreted– in the course of just a few days several thousands of people were killed gathered on one location, contrary to killings committed during a longer period of time on various locations. `The Scorpios` have initiated a vast media and political campaign aimed at proving the hardships of Serbs in the wars on the territory of Former Yugoslavia. Shown materials were well known to the public for a long time at that moment and most of the audio and video recordings were already aired on the state TV. Finally, as the highlight of the denial, a story was placed that the `the Scorpios` video was a fake. (The rumors spread through Belgrade that the `original` video shows the victims of the alleged assassination getting up and dusting of their clothes). Shocking documents definitely have an impact, but that in itself is not sufficient. Disturbing documents, such as `Scorpios` video, have an important outcome: the fact is that today, there are less people in Serbia claiming that crime did not happen in Srebrenica at all. After the phase of denial we have entered the next one – the phase of relativisation.

How long will this phase last before we reach the point at which we will be able to seriously and responsibly face the past, and all crimes committed by all towards all, is an issue that greatly depends upon media behavior in Serbia. Finding the own voice represents painful and long-term experience not only for the entire society but for journalists as well. Of course, only if journalists, and their respective media houses, feel as a part of that society.