

## Serbian tabloid discourse vs. reporting on Gender Minority Groups

Boban Tomić<sup>1</sup>

Centar za studije medija i komunikacija  
Beograd

***Abstract:** The withdrawal of the state from media ownership through deregulation and an accelerated liberalization of the media market, in Serbia as well as the entire region, have resulted in the expansion of media entrepreneurship. The entry of foreign media companies into domestic markets has galvanized the mediasphere and enriched the media market with electronic and print media. The increased number of periodicals and dailies has not contributed to the quality of media content; rather, it has led to the devaluation of media professionalism and the ethics of public speech. The tabloidization of the Serbian print media, alongside the rudimentary forms of media commercialization, has pushed to the back all traditional and modern values of free press and professional journalism. One of the domains in which this destructive and retrograde process takes place is reporting on Gender Minority Groups and a wide array of topics relating to the activities of organizations and individuals engaged in GMG communities. The most obvious examples of a complete lack of journalistic professionalism and ethics can be found in the reporting of certain Serbian tabloids. The approach to various topics, processing the information materials and the creation of the journalistic text, as well as the use of the formal-stylistic and linguistic-symbolic*

<sup>1</sup> Kontakt sa autorom: boban.tomic@fmk.edu.rs

*elements in a journalistic text, are entirely inappropriate in the objective journalistic procedure, and more often than not have the open characteristics of propaganda and hate speech. In this paper, we analyze examples of reporting of the Serbian tabloid press on GMG activities and individuals, and we point out the necessity of changing the given circumstances in the context of the rule of law and media legislation.*

**Keywords:** *tabloidization, media ethics, professionalism, framing, hate speech*

## Introduction

The processes of transition, social reform, and modernization have lasted unusually long in Serbia, and the effects of positive social changes are insufficient and not visible enough. Media activities are characterized by significantly unsuccessful reforms and a heritage of an authoritarian and destructive past that is problematic in more ways than one. Attempts to implement the transition of the media system and practice in optimal time periods have not been successful and key processes such as media deregulation and digitalization are slow and inefficient. The reforms of media legislation – very dependent in some of their segments on the reform of the criminal law – still fail to establish a permanent and stable legal framework for media operation in Serbia. The technical and technological innovations, as an area of reform and modernization, are applied in step with global progress in telecommunications and information and communications technologies. In this respect, there are achievements in media technologies, but also in the degree of media creation and freedoms in *online* journalism, development of the blogosphere, web 2.0 platforms and the social media, which undoubtedly improve public and mass communication.

The basic progress of mass communication, the media, and journalism as a public corpus is still not properly reflected upon. The indicators of media freedoms largely put Serbia high up in terms of the extent to which media freedoms and professionalism are endangered. According to the report by Reporters Without Borders from 2014, Serbia is in the 67<sup>th</sup> place out of a total of 180 countries in terms of the freedom of the press. The said organization estimates that “the government in Serbia stifles critical reporting, while

different, especially financial pressures undermine the independence of the editorial policy of the media. The development of the media situation is not leading towards the desired, European goal.”<sup>2</sup> Though insufficient, media freedoms are used in differing ways and even abused to various ends, which additionally jeopardizes the efforts to professionalize the media and make them more responsible. The abuse of public speech, and media time and space, has become a patently obvious and virtually unscrupulous practice of different ideological-political, religious, or extremist formations, as well as groups. An especially indicative practice of some media in Serbia has to do with reporting on gender equality, the rights of LGBT community organizations, and the GMG (Gender Minority Group). “In the dominant public and media matrix in Serbia, the resistance to modernization and the homophobic discourse survive and keep regenerating, which is clearly reflected through the value matrix system of younger generations” (Višnjić 2013:5). Stereotyping is not only the heritage of authoritarian and undemocratic history; rather, it is an additionally actualized practice, especially in daily newspapers with significant tabloid content features.

The production of news-oriented daily press in Serbia is made up of seven dailies (Politika, Danas, Blic, Večernje novosti, Kurir, Alo, Informer) providing non-specific news-oriented content with national coverage, as well as two regional dailies – Dnevnik in Vojvodina and Reč naroda (The People’s Word) in the south of Serbia. Analyses of the national dailies’ content clearly demonstrate that with such dailies as Kurir, Alo, and Informer, there is a clear commercial and tabloid orientation in the editorial policy and reporting. With dailies such as Večernje novosti and Blic, elements of tabloid journalism and content commercialization are also clearly visible, but they can be considered a milder form of tabloid press due to other types of content and approach. A clear editorial concept and the value aspects of tabloid daily press warn from the outset of problematic practices as regards media representations of gender minority groups. That fears are justified and expectations regarding professionalization of media reporting are unmet is clearly indicated by an almost decade-long practice of Serbian tabloids and by effects which increasingly undermine progress and ideas of equality, and cooperation and tolerance. Media representations of gender minority

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/srbija\\_zabelezila\\_losije\\_rezultate.55.html?news\\_id=301131](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/srbija_zabelezila_losije_rezultate.55.html?news_id=301131). Accessed on 18 May 2015.

groups in Serbian tabloid dailies are for the most part based on problematic selection criteria, lack of professionalism in processing, and lack of balance in the system of evaluation of phenomena, events, or persons reported on. By affirming such an approach, tabloid press increasingly forges an entirely new discourse of conflict, which it uses to compensate for the lack of own media content based on objective, unbiased, and rational information. The development of such practice could change the very foundations of the forms and structure of not just tabloid press, but also other types and forms of journalism and mass media, with far-reaching consequences in the domain of mass communication and culture *en general*.

### Old practices in a new framing

Understanding the social role and social responsibility of mass media is inseparable from the concrete results of each individual media and its journalistic practices. It is in this sense that the media modernity is ripe with a multitude of mutual implications between the media and the social context. "Journalism and the media, today more than ever before in the history of mankind, fill the public sphere and spread pervasively through the entire society the world over. With the development of science, and especially the information and communications technologies, journalism and the media have become the ubiquitous and all-pervasive factor of social reality" (Tomić 2012: 18). By upholding certain traditional values and roles of journalism and the media, such as the commitment of journalism to the truth, the role of the watchdog, setting the priorities of public policies (agenda setting), the media become responsible for formulating the public discourse and for constituting public opinion. Regardless of what social practice or reality the media report on, and which events, phenomena, or persons are the focus of attention of reporters, commentators, analysts, the media always have a degree of supremacy in the process of creating public opinion. Consequently, the practice of reporting on gender minority groups is immeasurably significant in the process of dissemination of media messages on topics, events, persons, groups and their social engagements, importance, and results.

In the practice of fact-based journalism, the journalistic forms of the news item and report are dedicated to the mediation of basic information

(facts) about the subject event, persons, or phenomenon. Facts must not have any elements of interpretation or analysis, or any other form of value expression. Fact-oriented reporting of tabloid dailies on gender minority group topics could be characterized as acceptable, but with some provisos - only if certain news items are seen in isolation, out of the visual and thematic context. An example of such facts-oriented reporting can be found in the news item titled "All Serbian Gays and Lesbians Unite" from the daily Kurir dated 24 April 2015. By relaying the agency news item originating from the press conference of seven LGBT organizations which had united by signing the LGBT Platform, the editorial board fulfils the factual aspect of the task. The very same event was reported on by the daily Danas, which uses the same agency news - titled "United for LGBT Rights" - as a background, connecting it further with a wider context of the activities of the LGBT community in Serbia, and corroborating it with two broader statements of different participants in the abovementioned event. In this case, the news item has been surpassed by means of the classic report form -- a result of a significantly higher-quality journalistic and editorial observation, treatment and evaluation of the said event. By comparing these two very paradigmatic examples, we conclude that tabloid practices are based on reporting on LGBT activities according to the principle of necessity and unavoidability, reducing the reporting to a compromise between two opposed affinities. Reporting in the form of a bare-bones news item containing no more than the most basic facts is accurate, but it is not sufficient given the crucial importance of the said event in the context of the general state of LGBT community rights in Serbia.

The next example of tabloid reporting on the rights of LGBT persons is illustrated by a news item with the introductory lead on the front page of the tabloid Alo dated 15 January 2015. The kicker: "Charge against the Defense Minister and the Army Headquarters" Headline: "Serbian Officer Wishes to Be a Woman!" Introductory Lead: "M.V., a member of the Serbian Army, nicknamed Helena, is retired with a 'diagnosis that damages the reputation of the Army' because he wants to make a sex change?!" Although this content is very short and it formally introduces a more detailed text on pages 4 and 5 in the same issue, said text is a textbook example of a full news item with an introductory lead. The dominant headline takes a large part of the front page and its graphical and meaning-related elements are

skilfully balanced with the photographs of the officer and a female. Even though we cannot identify the inaccuracies in the denotational layer of this news item, a degree of confusion can be discerned, whether consciously introduced into the news item or not. The very headline -- "*Serbian Officer Wishes to Be a Woman!*" is lexically and stylistically constructed such that the traditional public understands it as an oxymoron, or at least something that is not possible or should not be possible. The headline suggests the discrepancy between the concept *officer* and the concept *woman*, and the syntactic construction "*wishes to be*" implies the logical categories of the impossible, unnatural, and unreal. The news lead contains a statement in quotation marks to the effect that Helena was discharged with a "*diagnosis that damages the reputation of the Army*", but rather than pointing out the social and legal unacceptability of the act of assigning a "diagnosis" by the military authorities, this lead balances out this act and puts it beyond doubt. Visually, additional confusion is introduced by the presence of the photographs of a dominant soldier stereotype in full combat gear and the juxtaposition of this with a sensitive female person whose face is pixelated. There is a puff box over the first photograph, with the text "This is Major Helena", and over the other one with the text "This is Major Helena too". The overall textual and visual layout of this news item taking up the large part of the front page is an objective news item only upon first glance; a more thorough analysis reveals considerable ideological-conservative and stereotyping domination. The very same event was publicized by the daily Blic dated 15 January 2015, with a single headline only -- "*Army drives Major into retirement for wanting to be a woman!*" announcing the text on page 10. The readership which, according to all current polls looking into the trust in public institutions, has the highest trust in the Serbian Army, can only understand this headline as confirming that the decision of the Serbian Army is indeed the right one. Therefore, instead of having informational function, the headline was performed the task of decontextualization, of evaluating an act directed against LGBT persons in terms of idea and value, which is a typical example of *framing* in its negative sense. "The *framing* procedure is used to emphasize certain portions of reality, while at the same time reducing or marginalizing the value of others." (Kunczik, Zupfel 1998: 103).

Front pages of dailies are an especially important space for newspapers in general, mostly because of efficiently attracting the attention of the

reader, also due to the effects they have on the commercial positioning of newspapers, and lastly, as an indicator of sensibility and affinities of a newspaper. The Serbian tabloid practices, brimming with homophobic utterances and blurts, often use front pages to posit crude, humiliating constructions, largely without any factual basis. The tabloid daily Informer of 20 March 2015 has the following content in the biggest and most dominant part of the page: The kicker: "*Ombudsman Saša Janković proposes*", headline: "*Faggots in Serbia to have the right to adopt children!*". Text: "*A working draft of the law on gender equality drawn up by Ombudsman Janković stipulates that everyone has the right to adopt, irrespective of sex, marital status, and sexual preference. Government is against. Also proposed is the legalization of 'surrogate mothers', rented by gays around the world to have children.*" This text, in large letters, contrasting colours, bold and visually highlighted font, was illustrated with a portrait photograph of Ombudsman Saša Janković. Even though this too is an announcement of the text inside the paper, all the facts relevant for framing are stressed here as well. A highlighted headline gives emphasis to the semantic and valuative standpoint of the journalist with respect to the topic and event reported on. The use of offensive lexis (*faggot*) in the syntactic construction suggesting the unnaturalness and illogicalness, and ultimately provoking conservatism and nationalism, is a very specific destructive media discourse. Although in their valuative and normativet sense they represent the contemporary legacy of modern Western cultures and societies, Janković's solutions are not presented as such; rather, they are presented as their own opposites -- as a threat to national identity and tradition, a classic example of xenophobia, homophobia, and chauvinism. In the sentence "*Government is against*", a reference point is suggested of the ubiquitous authority of the state and the governing ideological matrix which in this kind of use aims to be a criterion of fear-mongering, or a mark of the boundary which must not be crossed. Linguistic (the text) and extralinguistic (the photograph) insistence on the fact that the author of the Gender Equality bill, Ombudsman Saša Janković, aims to diminish the reputation of the authority of the law and the ombudsman. In the above-mentioned tabloid, Janković has been a persona non grata for a while now, and is associated with the most negative scripts. In this case, the appearance of Janković suggests to the traditional public that the proposed law is bad for Serbia and its reputation.

The front page of the tabloid daily *Alo* dated 11 February 2015 introduces the story with the kicker "*A shocking confession of the novice Milanka*". The headline: "*Lesbo-scandal in the monastery*" announces a separate text, but it essentially frames a deeply-rooted stereotype using an utterly unethical and bizarre reflection. By skilful wordplay, syntactic constructions supported by visual compilations of photograph, colour, and contrast, a "news item" publicized in this way represents writing with a clear tendency to stigmatize lesbian sexual orientation, even though it is debatable whether there is anything lesbian in the story. The supposed "sex scandal" between the hegumeness and the novice at the monastery suggests sacrilege in the Orthodox tradition in its own right, but here it is lesbianism that is stressed as the source of sacrilege and not the sexuality of the act itself, which is a proscribed category in the Eastern Orthodox jurisprudence. Would a case of sexual congress between a male and a female of the monastery have been presented, and would the degree of supposed sacrilege involved in male-female sex have been the same as in the case of alleged lesbian sex? Contrasting lesbianism and the Orthodox monastery as an institution significantly strengthens the existing stereotypes and feeds the homophobic inclinations of the mass public, thus realizing and affirming the media discourse of extremely simplified mannerisms and rudimentary forms of vulgarity. "The position of women in the dailies analysed suggests their marginalization, by strengthening the gender relation stereotypes. The media approach supports traditional, polarized gender roles, according to which women are passive, inferior, incompetent for presenting official discourses or for offering expertise in matters of public interest" (Torlak 2011:50).

Another specific form of pressure and unethical reporting on LGBT topics is discernable in the writing of Serbian tabloids. A rapid expansion of TV reality shows has promoted new formats which are eroticised in terms of concept and content, and based on show-business standards and a profane outlook. One of the scandalous reality shows titled *Parovi* (Couples), is broadcast by the national TV station TV Happy, and features explicit scenes of erotica, sex, and pornography, with a wide range of problematic actions on the part of the participants. Vulgar and inappropriate content in this show has resulted in legal sanctions against the show itself, imposed by the regulatory body in charge of electronic media because of inappropriate

scenes and parts of the show. It is part of the practice of Serbian tabloids, in varying degrees, to attract the attention of their readership by publishing in their daily editions short overviews of the developments in this reality show during the previous day. Such overviews have the form of a modified report, ripe with inappropriate lexis, vulgarities, subcultural jargon, and are supported by photographs ranging from erotica to pornography. By "retelling" the events, tabloids also relay statements of the participants, many of which are examples of scandalous insults and discrimination of LGBT persons. "Marko is a faggot and Atina a pole whore!", "Faggot!", "Lesbo action in Couples!", "Sex live, orgies in couples", "Goca and Sandra doing it" are typical headlines of texts stigmatizing or discriminating against the rights of LGBT persons. Such practice is most common in the tabloid *Alo* and *Kurir*. "The media lend to everything they report on a positive and/or negative connotation, but they also build a context around the object/subject; the contextualization of LGBT topics is extremely important for the positioning of the LGBT population in the society." (Turčilo 2012: 11). Consequently, we conclude that the tabloid discourse of Serbian dailies constructs to a considerable degree a negative attitude, a discrimination characterized by stereotyping, stigma, and homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic responses at the denotational and connotational level.

### Connotative media constructions

Present-day media representations and media reporting on gender minority groups in Serbia are characterized by a sort of improved, or sophisticated discriminatory practice, which is considerably different from rudimentary forms of media discrimination in the past. During the destructive periods in the recent and more distant past, reporting on the activities, rights, and values of the LGBT community was articulated largely through nationalist patterns of the so-called protection of patriotism, boiling down to open insults, stigmatization, and discrimination of all members, entities, and institutions of gender minority groups. In the contemporary practice of the media as discriminators, the primitive forms of discrimination have mostly been dropped, and discrimination now has a new face, more subtle forms and patterns, with just as dangerous destructiveness towards gender minority groups. This process of transformation of an aggressive

media discourse has not been willed into existence by the media as communicators; rather, it was part of a general process of pacification of the geographic and demographic space. The decade gone by, even with the results falling short of expectations in Serbia, has nonetheless had successes in terms of modernization and social reform, as well as the adoption of modern values and civilization gains. As part of these processes, through necessity or of their own accord, the media participate in the creation of a new social reality in which there is no place for old and aggressive models of public nationalist and chauvinist speech. Public communication using such content has become the subject of criminal law and legal sanction, still not applied to a sufficient extent, but nonetheless topical, serving as a deterrent, preventing the expansion and strengthening of discrimination in the media. A strong conservative bent and the heavy burden of the traditional patterns are still present in large portions of the public, and, unfortunately, in the media as communicators in the process of mass communication as well. This bent shows in practice as an authentic phenomenon, and largely as a collective or personal frustration; as such, it successfully moves the boundaries of legal norms, ethics, and aesthetics in the media representations of gender minorities. The imperfections of the felony and misdemeanour legislation, the dysfunctionality of the judicial, prosecution, and security structures in practice, frees up the space for the flourishing of subtle, connotative, and contextual forms of discrimination, nationalism, chauvinism, mysogyny, xenophobia, etc. The tabloid press represents an ideal public space for presenting and promoting these forms of discrimination, boiling down to the application of various forms of communication as per the types of symbolic systems and the subjects of communication and their features (Radojković Miletić 2006: 33). Such practice of the tabloid media introduces into the public communication such media constructs as are based on linguistic and no-linguistic communication codes. Science unambiguously confirms that this practice is much more dangerous and more destructive than open hate speech in the sense that "non-verbal communication is very reliable, because its level of veracity is very high due to the fact that the process of non-verbal communication is not in full control of the central nervous system, unlike speech; rather, it is considered a sort of unconscious activity or *non-verbal leakage*, as it is sometimes referred to" (Tomić 2012: 30).

The contextual and connotative media constructions are realized in

the tabloid press by creating visual and textual wholes aimed to attract the attention of the readership and suggest the axiological message level. Front pages are the most used space for such content explications, and it is part of everyday practice to use photographs as the illustration genre forms, with graphic pictorial and symbolic content. Photographs are most often graphically processed and printed in such a way as to underline the semantic layer and have the maximum persuasive effect on the viewer – reader. We note here the practice of having a pleasant and attractive photograph when a tabloid has a positive view of a person, and an inappropriate and inadequate photograph with a negative aesthetic when the view of a person is negative. Graphic elements such as pointing arrows, visually inflammatory wholes, *clip* applications of exploding objects, star-shaped forms of shining and flashing symbols, outlines of fire, water, and sunlight, as well as many other symbolically condensed and pre-determined visual points, are developed with the aim of increasing persuasiveness, to the detriment of the information content of the message. In addition to destroying the essence that is reported on, this practice of the tabloid press destroys the classical forms of journalistic text and its composite whole. The aim and logic of the journalistic text specify that a text must have a form and content structure which is dependent upon the form of the journalistic text. News item, report, coverage, interview, commentary, feature, column, and other forms belong to their genres (particular or individual types), and as such are by definition defined by specific features of form, style, and language. A news item must have a well-known construction – a pyramid, an inverted pyramid, an hourglass or the *system of compartments* – so that it is treated and published in the media as a news item, and so that the public could adequately perceive it and evaluate it. The destructive practice of the tabloid press destroys the news form, especially on front pages containing text fragments, highlighted headlines, too large kickers, and contextualized subheads. With this method and level of fragmentation, a symbiosis is actualized of the text divided in this way, and the tendentious visual content, which produces a high level of persuasion and an evaluation of the message by the media, which in communicological terms represents the explicit code noise. The reduction of information content not only decreases the quantity and quality of information on front pages of tabloids, but also increases the redundancy of such a process and the mass communication system.

"Inadequate representation is not dangerous only because it is 'untrue', but also because it persuades people that there is nothing bad in doing so, i.e. about the fact that the 'others' even deserve to not be treated as equals. Media representations sometimes even create an apparent acceptance, promoting the view that inequality is a normal and acceptable response to difference" (Milivojević 2012:13).

The front page of Kurir from 17 May 2015 manifests a milder sort of contextual and connotative construction of media news regarding the bestowal of the Duga award for the contribution to the fight against homophobia. Rather than adapting the news content as the textual form and photographs as the visual form to the topic and event reported on – this being bestowing the Duga award to Jadranka Joksimović, a Serbian Government minister, this content directs the attention to a whole different level and irrational content. The bulk of the front page is taken up by the photograph made by editing together two separate photographs – that of Minister Joksimović and of the Serbian Army Major Helena. At the top of the photograph, just above the heads of the photographed persons, a kicker is placed in a white font against a red background, saying, "*Helena loses to Jadranka*". In the same space, running across the bodies of the photographed persons on a yellow sideways ribbon and in a red and black bold font, the headline says, "*Minister in a gay scandal*". Just under the headline, in three separate sectional indents, the following text is placed: "*Jadranka Joksimović has won the Duga award for her contribution to the fight against homophobia, even though six out of nine members of the jury voted for trans-Major Helena. I'm not interested to find out what individual votes were, says Joksimović. Four members leave the jury following being pressured.*" The overall impression, based on the textual and visual form, is based on insufficient understanding of the type of event the text reports about. Is the object of reporting the Duga award or the problematic aspects of the decision process in bestowing the award? The headline content points denotatively and explicitly to the existence of a "scandal", i.e. it problematizes the decision process, which may and should be the focus of the journalist's attention and reporting. However, the position, creation, and content of this story imply to a considerable extent that an important event is turned into a scandal, while pushing to the invisible back the fact that the Duga award has been given in the first place. The news criterion stipulates the completeness of content,

clear determination by information, and the harmony of language and style, with full avoidance of connotation and arbitrariness, and this is not met in this example.

Media content dedicated to activities, events, and individuals in the LGBT community and gender minorities in Serbia are grouped within the unusual tabloid forms of reporting – most often the news item or a short report, while interpretive texts are quite rare. A researched information, an in-depth investigation and reporting are extremely rare in Serbian tabloids. Even when they do exist, they can be found in a problematic semantic and evaluative context, so that they bring more harm than benefit to the communications of LGBT and gender minority groups. One of the few examples of a more comprehensive journalistic form and interpretive genre is found in the daily Blic dated 2 May 2015, publishing a hybrid form of a report interview with five photographs in the text titled "*How I got out of the cage: The victory of Major Helena in macho Serbia*". However, this text is in fact an adaptation by the editorial board of the original and deeper story titled "*Transgender Army major wins victory in conservative Serbia*"<sup>3</sup>, published by Associated Press on the previous day. This is not the only example, because the Blic daily customarily fails to cover LGBT topics via own stories, using good and bad examples from the local environment. One could get the impression that it is part of the policy of this daily to "acknowledge" LGBT topics by taking stories from the international exchange service. Naturally, such actions are not bad per se, but if this is the only in-depth approach to topical issues and analytic journalism, then this is not a completely positive practice. Even more so when it is applied by a daily with a large circulation, production volume, business operation, and market share such as that of Blic. The fact that tabloids do not pay sufficient attention or properly observe these topic is indicative in its own right, demonstrating that an awareness of the public agenda priorities does not correspond to the gravity of the circumstances and state of affairs in the area of LGBT community rights.

Contextual negativity is seen in tabloid journalism in publishing headlines that have no text or indication as to where the text is in the newspaper. Such headlines are often phrased as a lexical and syntactic

<sup>3</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_SERBIA\\_TRANSGENDER\\_ARMY\\_MAJOR?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_SERBIA_TRANSGENDER_ARMY_MAJOR?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT). Accessed: 24 May 2015.

construction that ties into the same syntactic whole the negativity and the ascribed subjects and objects. Frequent syntagmatic wholes signifying some of the typical gender stereotypes are: "Gay scandal", "lesbo scandal", "gay affair", "lesbo affair", "lesbo orgies", "surrogate mother", "faggot making advances", "and many others. The prevalent headlines in tabloid papers such as "Pajtić amid a gay scandal", "Lesbo sex action", "Gay monster", "Lesbo scandal in the monastery", "Erotic ombudsman", "Lesbo orgies in couples", "Conchita: I would explain to Putin the pleasures of gay sex", "Palma for Kurir: I will become a shepherd if gays are an EU condition" very clearly and in a simplified fashion frame the semantic and valuative aspect of the message, putting the LGBT and other gender minorities into a fully negative context. Even a simple lexical link between one's name and the notion of belonging to the LGBT and gender minorities is enough to attract attention and provoke a reaction of the conservative readership, which, according to all indicators, has the ability to clearly understand the paralinguistic and extralinguistic symbolic systems that tabloids abstract away from.

### Possible implications for the mass audience

To what extent can the tabloid journalism and the media practicing it change their own criteria and the quality of reporting on these topics, and would tabloid journalism find a safe haven only in tabloids, or would it be incorporated into other types of daily and weekly press and the electronic media? Answers to these questions demand caution and a high level of focus on media modernity and its attributes. Establishing responsibility for public speech in Serbia is a process which has for decades been failing to become part of social structures and the systems of common values. Attempts to establish normative frameworks in the media profession are made by defining and implementing various types of self-regulation of the media profession and, by analogy, adopting the code of professional journalists. Although in Serbia there is a generally accepted Code of the Journalists of Serbia, passed and adopted by two biggest associations of journalists – The Association of Journalists of Serbia and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia – the provisions of this documents are still not adhered to. Chapter IV, Item 4 of the Code strictly defines the responsibility of professional journalists regarding the prevention of

discrimination: "A journalist must be aware of the danger of discrimination which could be spread by the media, and shall do everything in his/her power to avoid discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, age, sexual orientation, language, religion, political and other views, national or social origin" (Popović 2008: 19). Although journalists were informed about the nuance of manifest forms of discrimination, in practice the journalistic profession invests insufficient or inadequate effort, and lacks the necessary attitude.

However, due to insufficient functionality of the legislative, executive, and judicial power in the domain of protection from all forms of discrimination, and especially the discrimination of LGBT and gender minority groups in the media, the practice demonstrates more and more conclusively that the media themselves can be discriminators. In addition to attaching excessive importance in their reporting to the actions and statements of people who engage in *individual discrimination* (as exemplified by the text titled *Palma for Kurir: I will become a shepherd if gays are an EU condition*), the media can engage in *institutional discrimination* in their writing. Perhaps the most complete description of tabloid media practices in this connection is the assessment that tabloid reporting on LGBT and gender minorities represents a classic example of *structural discrimination* which "refers to the policies of institutions of the dominant race/ethnic/gender group, and the behaviour of individuals who implement the policies and control the institutions, intended as racially/ethnically/gender neutral, but resulting in possible harmful treatment of other race/ethnic/gender groups" (Mršević 2011: 38,39). The media are institutions which are often implied in the dominant social, political, ideological, religious, or ethnic supremacies. As such, they represent a favourable framework for all manner of discrimination as the nature of their profession and public communication as a platform to influence the public offer countless possibilities for good and bad effects.

Perhaps the gravest threat to the development of positive gains and values of public communication are the sophisticated, hidden ways to discriminate, which are increasingly improved upon over time. Through the development of information and communications technologies, and the relocation of the media discourse out of the typographic culture and into the digital culture, numerous possibilities open up for sophisticated forms of journalism, but persuasion, public relations, marketing, and, consequently,



abuse, follow as well. The tabloid media discourse, which is in stark contrast in all its formal and content characteristics with media responsibility and professionalism, can be adapted very efficiently to the digital environment, which is already happening. Tabloid media electronic editions, web portals, and accounts on social networks fully accept and share all content with their printed "parents". The dissemination power and potential of web 2.0 technologies and social media platforms are considerably greater than those of printed dailies. Improved forms of communication, interaction, and collaboration between the media and mass audiences develop along these lines. Through this, the persuasive and framing functions of tabloid journalism are made more pronounced and implemented very successfully in the target audiences, which are as a rule discriminatory against LGBT and gender minorities.

Whether this technological breakthrough can improve upon the unbridled power of the discriminatory discourse, and what forms of social, professional, or expert activity can positively construct this zone remains a mystery. The danger of media freedom abuse, non-compliance with media codes and ethical norms stipulated in them are topical issues and threaten with complete destruction of the dailies framework, but also with entering into radio, TV, and on-screen media programmes. The responsibility for the development of media representations and modes of media reporting largely lies with the public itself, i.e. the target audiences of tabloid dailies as well as the general public. The readership must recognize its responsibility primarily because of the criteria for content selection for which it is responsible and has a sovereign influence over. Then, in the process of decoding messages received via the media, the public alongside the media impacts on the final effects of the communication process, as pointed out by "Stuart Hall's theory according to which the media *encode* the messages through an ideological framework of the media institutions, while the public *decodes* the messages via desirable readings" (Ros 2011: 81). The way in which the readership will go about decoding messages, or, to put it differently, the way in which it will understand and evaluate tabloid media reports on the LGBT and minority groups, is crucial for taking a standpoint and affirming the value system of the mass audience. If discriminatory practices are still skilfully and successfully framed in stereotypical norms and cultural patterns of the tabloid audience, the right

to access public communication channels as exercised by the LGBT and gender minorities will be further jeopardized. Thinking along similar lines, but from a different axiological point of view, Douglas Kellner states that "In the postmodern culture of image, the scenes, the stories and the cultural texts provided by the media are meant to offer the individuals a variety of attitudes that can shape their personality. These images provide social role models, appropriate and inappropriate patterns of behaviour, style and fashion and a subtle impulse of imitating and identifying with certain identities." (Kellner 2004: 426). And lastly, from a psychological standpoint, tabloid journalism in Serbia, as a by-product of social and economic transition, has the characteristics of a pragmatic, but essentially inferior and frustrated, collective identity which uses discrimination of any type of *otherness* to resolve its own conflicts and existential fears. The best proof for this claim is the supremacy of tabloid dailies in the daily newspaper market which is threatened by any and all oscillations in the content; more simply put, any deviation from the negativist credibility would be punished by the traditional readership as well as by a financial collapse. Every shape and manner of discrimination is the most desirable haven of racism as its fundamental factor, as Stuart Hall points out: "By inferential racism I mean those apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether "factual" or "fictional" which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions" (Hall 2011:83).

## Conclusion

The place and role of the public are often defined as key concepts of any kind of detailed reconstruction in social practice. However, current, just as much as recent and distant past, practices teach us that incentivizing the public to represent foundational social and civilizational values almost never succeeds. The populist milieu, domination of stereotypes, and ideological predetermination of society make difficult any process of setting up the public agenda regarding matters of reform. This is the way to approach issues in the domain of media practices and representations of *otherness* and, consequently, reporting on gender minority groups. The professional public and the academic communities of the humanities and social sciences

can play a special role in this, but not to the exclusion of natural and technical sciences, whose work helps create and develop information and communications technologies as material and technical prerequisites for media operation. Practitioners, experts, and theoreticians of media activity have a serious and far-reaching problem seen today in a phenomenon called tabloidization. All the negative consequences and performances of this phenomenon can develop and aspire to do so only if social actors and factors of the information and communications system of Serbia do not contribute to a solution. Reporting on gender minorities is but one discriminatory practice of tabloid press, but discrimination targets - admittedly, with considerably different consequences - other constructive and prominent segments of society, organizations, and individuals as well. "One should always bear in mind that the study of media culture requires a multi-perspectival and transdisciplinary approach if one wishes to dig a little deeper into the complexity of the processes unfolding from an idea, through production, to the moment of consumption of media content; still, some developments in and around the media in countries in transition can be identified as typical. Often disconcertingly. Especially as it is beyond doubt that today the media culture is a dominant, and to a large majority of citizens, most influential producer and transmitter of meaning, and so an ideology, of social values, or departure points for identity construction." (Sarnavka 2004:7).

Civil society organizations represent a significant point of support for all processes and measures through which the bearers of modernization trends and activities will improve the media communication practices in Serbia. The importance of establishing intersectoral cooperation of civil society organizations and an overlay of interest areas in the domain of LGBT and gender minority rights (but in other segments of the fight for universal human rights as well -- the right to equality, a healthy environment, and other rights), can and should create a high level of synergy and productivity. Insufficient development of civil society organizations in the area of media construction, media literacy, and education for media production and media consumption, are important drawbacks, but also a possible chance for development. Media forms of discrimination of LGBT and gender minorities that we have listed here, as well as drastic examples of open or concealed stigmatization, misogyny, and other forms of discriminatory

practices, can be made liable to control by active organizations and citizens, which would ultimately resolve and considerably improve the degree of communication rights and needs of LGBT and gender minorities, as well as all forms of *otherness*.

## Literature

- Hall, S. (2011). *The Whities of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*. Dines, G., Humez, J. M. (eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media, a critical reader*. Thousand Oaks. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kelner, D. (2004). *Medijska kultura*. Beograd. Clio.
- Kunczik, M., Zipfel, A. (1998). *Uvod u publicističku znanost i komunikologiju*. Zaklada Friedrich Ebert. Zagreb.
- Milivojević, S. (2012). "Razlike i drugost". U L. Huremović (ur.), *Izvan četiri zida, priručnik za novinarke i novinare o profesionalnom i etičkom izvještavanju o LGBT temama*. Sarajevo. Sarajevski otvoreni centar.
- Mršević, Z. (2011). *Ka demokratskom društvu – rodna ravnopravnost*. Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka.
- Popović, A. (Ur.) (2008). *Kodeks novinara Srbije, uputstva i smernice*. Beograd. Fondacija Konrad Adenauer.
- Radojković, M., Miletić, M. (2006). *Komuniciranje, mediji i društvo*. Stylos. Novi Sad.
- Ross, K. ed. (2011). *The handbook of gender, sex and media*. Chichester. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sarnavka, S. (2004). *Sloboda medija*. U L. Matić (ur.), *Mediji i LGBT zajednica, Priručnik za novinarke i novinare o LGBT zajednici*. Rijeka. Lezbijska organizacija LORI.
- Tomić, B. (2012). *Uvod u medije*. Beograd. Čigoja štampa.
- Torlak, N. (2011). *Medijska slika žene u Srbiji*. CM – Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem. Broj 19. Godina VI. Beograd, Novi Sad. Fakultet političkih nauka, Protokol.
- Turčilo, L. (2012). "Mi" i "Oni" – važnost izvještavanja o LGBT temama. U L. Huremović (ur.), *Izvan četiri zida, priručnik za novinarke i novinare o profesionalnom i etičkom izvještavanju o LGBT temama*. Sarajevo. Sarajevski otvoreni centar.

- Vasiljević, L., Anđelković, V. (ur.) (2009). Priručnik za medije. Beograd. Ženski INDOK Centar.
- Višnjić, J. (2013) Izveštaj LGBT populacija u štampanim medijima u Srbiji 2012. Beograd. Labris. <http://labris.org.rs/lgbt-populacija-u-stampanim-medijima-u-srbiji-2012/>. Pristupljeno 12.05.2016.

## Konvergencija i njene implikacije na poslovanje medija<sup>1</sup>

Igor Jovanović<sup>2</sup>  
Beograd

**Apstrakt:** Vrtoglavi tehnološki razvoj, korišćenje Interneta i digitalnih medija doveli su do toga da korisnici informacija medijske sadržaje primaju na velikom broju platformi. Tradicionalni mediji više ne mogu u potpunosti da zadovolje konzumente jer oni prve informacije o događajima, sve češće, prvo dobijaju na mobilnim telefonima ili preko društvenih mreža, dakle na Internetu koji se i dalje naziva "novim medijem". Sve to uslovalo je brojna prilagođavanja u tradicionalnim medijima, jer kao što je nekada pojava televizije ugrožavala štampu, tako i sada razvoj Interneta ugrožava ekonomski opstanak konvencionalnih glasila. Ukratko, značaj konvergencije za današnje medije postaje nemerljiv. Cilj ovog rada biće da predstavi pojam konvergencije u medijima, ali i da pokaže da je ona prestala da bude samo potreba redakcija u savremenom novinarstvu, te postala uslov opstanka i uspeha na medijskom tržištu. Uz to, rad će se baviti novim medijima, društvenim mrežama i njihovim servisima preko kojih sadržaj tradicionalnih glasila sve učestalije stiže do publike, ali i etičkim implikacijama i regulacijom pri objavljivanju medijskih sadržaja na novim platformama. Na kraju, u radu će biti reči i o tome kako je konvergencija sprovedena u pojedinim medijima u Srbiji i kakvi su rezultati prvih projekta konvergencije u domaćim medijskim kućama.

**Ključne reči:** digitalizacija, novi mediji, konvergencija, internet, društvene mreže

<sup>1</sup> Rad je proistekao iz istraživanja i diplomskog rada „Konvergencija u medijima“ odbranjenog na Fakultetu za medije i komunikacije Singidunum Univerziteta u Beogradu 2015. godine.

<sup>2</sup> Kontakt sa autorom: igorjovanovic22@gmail.com