SOCIAL CONTEXT AND THE RISE OF ANTIHEROES

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Abstract. *The paper analyses the development and significance of social heroes, as well as the substance, functions and dichotomies of heroism, with particular view of those conditions in a social system which enables and facilitates mutual approximation, specificating symbolic and functional alternation of those diverse categories. The situation in Serbia during the last two decades was the object of attention in an attempt to strengthen the assumption that extreme turbulent processes in a society, followed by willing and substantial antisocial activity of certain favorably positioned groups, as well as by specific elaboration of social reality by those unfavorably positioned, "ordinary" people, thus enabled the conversion of classic antiheroes into social heroes. The role of the media in these processes was closely noted.*

Key words: *hero, antihero, crime, criminals, media, Serbia.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of negative social heroes, as a social phenomenon, is analysed in this paper in a general social context, with a review of the mythical and epical elements of heroism, for which it is believed that they are, according to the postulates of analytical psychology, enshrined in the individual, collective conscious and unconscious. In this aspect it may be assumed that individual and collective feeling of powerlessness, disappointment of the existing norms and fear in the face of the threatening return to a "chaos", with an inappropriate degree of development of the person and the society, push the individual and the collective toward the mythical and imagined. Before and after, under the pressure of disbelief, that evil can win; sufficiently strong challenges in difficult social circumstances lead toward deserting the terrain of values which were at the actual degree of development of the society proclaimed as positive, and then to accepting the negative hero, antihero, as a constructive actor, i.e., a social hero. In fact, where formal normative-value system is not sufficiently established and accepted in a society through its historical development, the positive values it contains are more easily rejected, which allows room for

negative heroes, who very often place themselves above the formal normative order and emerge from its other side. The most dramatic is the moment when anti-heroes, as champions of change and rebellion against deficiencies of the existing system, become fallen heroes raised to the level of a social role-model, i.e., become established heroes. Then they are not a reflection of unsuccessful adaptation any more: they become socially accepted and affirmed, as negativists of the negative. The world of crime and the immoral to which they belong is not so consistently questioned, does not appear as so bad any more, it is even on various levels promoted as the one, or even the only, effective active space, the space which guarantees survival.

It could be taken that the experience of centuries-long oppression of the peoples in the Balkans region has disrupted the flexible (concerning ″moral purity″) ethical profile of an epical hero. The national epical hero has won redemption for certain shady deeds in the context of his righteous and continuous struggle against slavery, crime and the vile ruler.[1] Thus, Kraljević (Crown Prince) Marko, certainly one of the leading Serbian epical heroes, is courageous and noble, but also cunning, hot-tempered, stubborn; in an effort to cope with misfortunes and horrors, he lavishly uses deceits, perjury and slyness against the fraudulent and criminal world, but ″his heart remains pure: fearless and noble, in God and in treachery, in vassalry and in cunningness″ (Koljević, 1974, quoted from Kostić, 2002: 70). Relying on postulates of the phenomenon which is in terminology of depth psychology called *The Shade (dark side)*, Kostic emphasizes the depth of the duality of heroism in Serbian national epic poetry: "Similarly to great symbols and archetypes, our hero represents an ambivalent Entity too: he is a very *positive*, but also a *negative* person. […] We know that the community of heroic ethos fosters heroic arrogance and over-ambition and that the hero does not put up with anything which challenges him in any sense. Perfidious murder of a person better than himself is not exemplary of the traditional character of the hero. […] But folk poetry speaks about something which is a simple fact of heroic life, confirmed many times in the national historical reality. Prince Miloš killed Karadjordje, the previous master of Serbia and a hero, for reasons of political pragmatism, but also quite certainly because of the psychological motive which drives our hero [Marko Kraljević] against ″the child from Dukadjin″ (Kostić, 2002: 376-379).

Indulgency as a moral characteristic of the national hero also enables the elevation of wrongdoers up to the cult of heroes, especially if they are wrapped in the veil of fight against the enemy ("others"). "Narrow tribal conscience and binary mythical *own/alien* opposition within the framework of which heroic character is determined, as a rule, leads to the belief that everything which is *our own* is also positive: what is alien may have a morally indifferent status, but is more often *negative*. This explains our proverbial familiarity with crimes of our compatriots against the *alien* entity. The heroic character closes his eyes before his own smaller and bigger moral sins. What is most important is the re-

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[1] Dvorniković had, at the time, described Kraljević Marko as a person with a soul "unsettled", "schismatic". "Colorful epic décor and external folklore around Marko's character covered the deeper tragic split in his character. Marko is a hero, individualist, guardian of his personal honor and his armament, but he is also defender of the rightless people, fighter for national and human rights. […] Even Marko's bravery and heroism, nobleness and just chivalry, as well as the dark side of cruel revenge, wild banditry and even bloody sadism, grew equally from the psyche of the enslaved people. The people were torn between, both rightless subjects and heroes at the same time; and so was their Marko" (Dvorniković, 1939: 545-547).

lentless heroic instinct, constant heroic tension, in response to the principal imperative - victory in a conflict with a (stronger) enemy. Depicting negative characteristics of its hero, which it does not condemn, folk poetry supports the strategic line of the sense and essence of heroic ethos, making tactical concessions: many things must be forgiven to a hero. That is less important. What is truly important is the Heroic Act" (Kostić, 2002: 381).

The activated archetypical perceptions of evil, the dissolution of the community and the omnipresent threat of a return to darkness/chaotic state, evoke mythical heroes as saviors. As much as the threat of uncontrolled and unforeseen evil derives from the very social structure, springs in the social entity itself, the degree of division of the "moral character" of social heroes is larger. Moving the source of evil, which hits the broadest strata, from the rims of the social entity toward its inside, leads to favoritism of those role models (mythical/epic heroes) who "cope, know and are able", manage to survive and offer resistance to the oppressor, in comparison to those who, safeguarding the external rims of the entity, do not have internal moral dilemmas, or another choice but a heroic death (e.g., the epic figure of Miloš Obilić).[2]

SERBIA OF THE 90S: SOCIAL CONTEXT AND THE RISE OF ANTI-HEROES

Crisis, crime and actors

The general social context in Serbia in the last decade of the 20th century was markedly characterized, beside other things, by the following: security crisis; difficult economic situation of a large part of the population, manifested as poverty, divisions and polarization; social disorganization and deregulation; exposure to violence and fall of efficiency of formal crime control.

The scale of the economic deprivation of citizens of Serbia at the beginning of the 90s was dramatic. Apart from the fact that economic uncertainty of the majority naturally follows the transition from controlled economy into capitalism, the fact is that even before the beginning of the transitional process the country's economy was already pending collapse, so that to the already existing ones, additional existential uncertainties were added, stemming from the loss of social guarantees based on permanent employment. Privatization was going on under weak formal control of the repudiated system, which produced fast and very high polarization and further collapse of the informal system of values. Consequences of all the above were additionally made harder by wars in the neighborhood and the UN economic sanctions in 1992, which not only caused rapid impoverishment of the masses, but also boosted the polarization process among the warfare economic profiteers and others, transitional winners and losers, while the middle class mostly sank merged with the latter. The beginning of the economic and social transition had marked the beginning of new "rules to the game", which put most citizens in an almost hopeless position: in the period from 1989/1993 only, gross national product was almost halved,

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[2] Kostić ends his study *The character of Marko Kraljević in the Serbian epic poetry* - with the forecast: "What shall be the future life of our hero, we cannot know. All chances are that his mythical and literary life is over. But that the 'archetype of an unusual hero of capricious temper' shall exist on, in some other form, in reality of our psyche, which is *the only* true reality – we should not doubt that" (Kostić, 2002: 460).

industrial production and income per capita in FRY decreased almost three times (Dinkić, ed., 1999: 165), while in 1993 nearly 40 percent of the Yugoslav population was on the poverty line. Serbia ended up with the classes of "the new poor" and "the new rich". Unemployment, economic downfall, chronic existential uncertainty and sudden increase of inequality weakened social cohesion, functionality of the family and authority of pro-social values.

Limiting social circumstances, but also dramatic economic polarization of the society, followed by the shadow of suspicious privatization,[3] may have also contributed to the acceptance of crime as legitimate in such an (unjust) order of things. Awareness that perspectives are grim, escalation of tactics of social competence, and willingness to take risks, all tore down moral barriers toward crime and violation of the law: the borders between the legal and illegal for the majority of citizens, forced to smuggle in order to "survive each day", became blurred, and violation of the law "justified". The convenience of privatization through the sale of "social property" was used by those few people from the political elite of the time, who from the very beginning compromised the ideas of democracy and pluralism and contributed to further erosion of the formal and informal normative system. Economic deprivation, growth of competitiveness, decrease in solidarity, and destruction of the social cohesion deepened, leading to a state of complete social deregulation: the circle of deprivations and disorganization of the society was closed.

Violent crimes escalated in Serbia during the 90s. In absolute and relative indicators, the dimensions of murders, bodily harms, banditry and kidnappings significantly exceeded the scope of violence in the period of several decades preceeding the 90s (Simeunović-Patić, 2003). The city arena was ever more noticably characterized by conflicts solved by state-of-the-art armament and new "street heroes". But, the crime which shook Serbia of that time most, and inflicted the deepest wounds to its social tissue, is surely a political one. By factual suspension of regulatory mechanisms of rule of law, and through expansion of political crime, i.e., abuse of power, Serbia became an area in which the political elite inflicted serious damage to the society with a myriad of very hard consequences. "Milosevic permitted introduction of […] Weberian 'political capitalism' in Serbia. In the old communist establishment political elite controlled the whole social wealth as well. But, in that control it was seriously limited by internal political and moral rules. Wealth could have been the output only of systemic privilege of the group, not of individuals' successfulness in abuses. However, when communism fell, previous constraints on robbery, which the political elite was facing, also disappeared. […] Hard currency and commodity reserves, primary emission and banking credits, state budget and state property - all that went into the hands of the political elite. This happened at the moment when the fall of communism and dissolution of the Federation blurred the usual rules of behavior and made everything look allowed. Milosevic also allowed all that. 'You wanted capitalism, and it means getting rich freely', was what Milosevic and his people said […] 'You wanted a multi-party system, and there the winner takes it all', they explained cynically. And with the war, hyperinflation, international trade sanctions im-

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[3] Results of a research from that time show that two thirds of citizens perceived the beginning of privatization in Serbia (through the sale of the socially-owned capital for 'peanuts' to privileged individuals from the political-economic elite) as "pure theft" (Vuković, 1995:198).

posed on Serbia, and 'patriotic smuggling', organization of getting rich through abuses was built up to that end" (Antonić, 2002: 371). The so-called political police allowed "delicate" jobs to some offenders (as its "collaborators"), offering them in return a possibility to come to high positions or seize extreme economic power.

Increase of organized crime and sudden increase of crime as a whole in the new conditions in Serbia has several characteristic manifestations. The chaos in the national economy was used by the then political and state elite for heedless grabbing of the so-called social property. The beginnings of privatization practically presented a form of robbery made legitimate, of enormous values, by the privileged managerial lobby and the political-economic elite. Social divisions, which in the second half of the 80s became significant, at the beginning of the 90s were becoming extreme. The new/old rich (communist-socialist elite, together with the military and police establishment) amply practiced "useful malversations", taking fortunes out of the country, etc., while the newly formed "pyramidal" banks greatly developed their activities, practically under the protection of the state. Many of the "respected" business people who got rich fast, and who immediately upon leaving socially-owned companies became heads of their own companies, now formally entered into politics in order to additionally ensure positions for better protection and further realization of their personal interests.

At the same time, perception of crime in Serbia during the last decade of the 20th century was to a significant degree deceptive, which was a consequence of various circumstances. "The dark figure" of crime (a myriad of undiscovered crimes and perpetrators, i.e., criminal acts against whose perpetrators criminal charges were not pressed) showed tendency toward a very high value. The policy of selective charging of criminals contributed to this, subject to the political will of those in power. Poor performance was especially present in discovering perpetrators of crimes[4], which, among other things, was a consequence of the fact that the police at the beginning of the 90s "was transformed in such a way as to offer better protection to the governing elite than to the citizens' interests" (Nikolić-Ristanović, 1999: 39). However, more than anything, the picture of the state of crime was distorted by the improper crime policy in the part which relates to the control of alarmingly spread phenomena concerning economic crimes and abuses of office, e.g., uncontrolled spending of funds for entertainment expenses, malversations with travel expenses, "documentation laundry" of the so-called phantom companies.

With the inadequate crime policy, the state practically stood on the position of systemic and profound criminalization of the society. In Serbia at the beginning of the 90s, the system of social anti-values was turned into the system of recognized values. The permitted and the prohibited were getting mutually progressively closer to each other, and the borderline eventually disappeared completely. Capability to cope, "useful malversations", primitive greed for material goods, the relation of the newly rich toward spiritual values, became postulates of the new social rules. "Accomplices in this forged crime policy and criminology, in the sense of theory and practice, beside the judicial system, were the Public Prosecutor's Office, and police, as well as scientific institutions and universities

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[4] Čolović stresses that some Serbian national heroes and avengers were extremely cruel. In the oldest records on haiduks' exploits, great epic heroes (e.g. 'Starina Novak' and his son 'Grujica') were not as cruel to anyone as they were to their unfaithful wives.

with their relevant schools, always ready to offer support, with their 'scientific' constructions, or to hide political arbitrariness, to the disadvantage and with sacrificing postulates of science and professional ethics". (Vasiljević, 1995: 262).

Under those circumstances, those "street" criminals, "tough guys", recognized in a certain degree as "fearless doers, sensitive to social injustice", and always ready to a protective, or at least renegade action against it, had slowly entered the moral universe of the "average" and helpless, while the role of the media in this process was undoubtedly very significant.

Legitimization of violence and anti-heroes

The model of "just violation of the Law" relies on the perception of its violation as a necessity, forced act of defense, but also "satisfying of justice", which could be deconstructed up to the craving of the recipient for reanimation of the just order in the society. It is noticeable that, among the "just violators of the Law" from the epic past, but also in the present, there are many of those who, among other things, are characterized by perpetrating violence, in spite of the fact that violence is traditionally followed by relatively stable and sharp moral and other bans. But violence, as a pre-theoretic reply to frustration/threat, is deeply inserted into the repertoire of appropriate reactions: generalizable decoding of violence as the response to the existentially threatening attack makes the paradox understandable that the most serious, extreme violations, sometimes strangely easily withstand the cutting edge of the observer's moral analysis. Perpetration of violence for personal protection is legitimate, and readiness ("when necessary") to perpetrate violence "in the general interest", is the characteristics of the hero (protector, avenger, or at least outcast).

Idolization and romanticization of criminals was partly relying on revival of myths of a "potent" protector of the "endangered group" and frustrated individuals. In Serbia of the 90s, the protective function of the state was dramatically weakening. Under the pressure of the security crisis, and in the absence of a "legal state" and rule of law, tribal perceptions of justice were reanimated, and "fighters for justice" and protectors from all "the others" (peoples in the neighborhood, "internal enemies" and oppressors) were imagined. The measure of uncertainty had determined the necessary "fierceness" of fighters. Bloody texts about crimes of "heroes" and "protectors" were suppressed by sublime notes of odes for "saving of the people". Defense of the people from the endangering "others" is a big "historic" task – and in defense of something so important, all means are allowed.

Of course, the crisis of external security was thoroughly used by the political elite in Serbia for the purpose of strengthening its own complete power. Upon the collapse of the socialist social system, social egalitarianism held by those in power was replaced by national collectivism, in order for the power to be retained, or yet to be won. Supporting of the myth of the renewal of the national states in the territory of the former Yugoslavia gave rise to dissolution and destruction of its society. Unfortunately, destruction of the socialist ideology opened the door to the newly-rich mutated quasi-traditional ideology which in its wave brought drifts of long forgotten and deeply suppressed collective content of the conscience. The awoken "national identity" became the framework of the ideological machine which led to the international conflicts and wars, creating new heroes. Production and revival of national myths has a quite clear social role, proven many

times. As Miladin Zivotic observes, it holds us in chains and tames our feeling of social injustices and social lack of freedoms, directing it toward other nations. "Autocracy based on production and heating up of national myths is the most expressive form of crisis of a totalitarian society, crisis which strengthens known forms of political dictatorship – plebi-scitary Caesarism, cult of the leader, decennial practice of ruling, merocratic promotion of new "war heroes", whose activities are directed primarily toward suppression of all forms of expression of civil disobedience to existing political regimes, all forms of searching for new alternative democratic forms and contents of the social life" (Životić, 1992: 27).

Return to the "warrior tradition", strengthening of violent values and offering of "le-gitimate" channels for outlet of accumulated values, were only appropriate means for di-verting the subject from the essential process. The nationalistic discourse and ideological passionateness were shown as quite generous means, while, collaterally, "arms in hands" and capability of fighting wars/fight (in circumstances similar to the natural state of the Hobbes' type), were incorporated in the foundations of the social normative of the real "masculinity". At the same time, many well-known Belgrade criminals, who "built" their criminal carriers in the previous decades around Europe, at the end of the 80s and the be-ginning of the 90s had (after their "heroic voyages" full of temptations) returned to the country, not missing the ample opportunities to expose themselves in the media as refined and rich businessmen, and generally capable and successful people with "petty mischiefs" of their youth. Many of them had also intensely presented themselves as protectors of "national interests" and "the people endangered by the war". The war, it is true, was a "convenient opportunity for psychopathic offenders to present themselves in a completely different light than their violent behavior presented them, an opportunity to turn their de-structive behavior into a "heroic struggle for the general good", and even to present them-selves as victims who suffered for "higher social goals" (Momirovic et al., 2002:445).

Many of the "heroes" of Serbia in the 90s did not hesitate to perpetrate violence of dif-ferent kinds – moreover, violence was their important decision. As a rule, maturing of their "masculinity" was confessed (through the media) in clear mythological metaphors, as difficult and painful, "full of self-sacrifices": although "exceptional" in something in childhood already, poverty, conflicts with fathers - tyrants, or other "injustices" drove them to "heroic voyages"; leaving home early and enduring in the wide world justified their "petty mischiefs" of the youth, because of which in mature years "they repented sin-cerely", and for them they redeemed with uncompromised fighting for the benefit and in-terests of the fatherland and the people. Forgiveness for their destructive nature and le-gitimating of their crimes they obtained as martyrs who protected "Serbian homes", de-serving fighters for the "democratic renewal of Serbia" in lines of the then oppositional political parties, or as "tough guys" capable to confront the force, evil and injustice (pro-jections of "rebels with reason").

The moment of heroic promotion of national criminals was not accompanied by the true conflict with the existing centers of political and social power. On the contrary, it served for realization of their joined goals in the given social moment. Ordinary people, especially young people, could not perceive this very important circumstance at once. In the twilight of devastation of all values and under the circumstances of complete hope-lessness, the life motto of criminals - live for the moment grabbing everything the life can offer – may have been quite attractive to young people. Attractiveness of physically strong, clever guys from the fringes, who make dizzy financial fortunes, accompanied by

all elements of glamour of the "folk culture" which blossomed in the isolated social quagmire surrounded by war horrors and internal destructed economy, political and moral misery, became irresistible.

CRIME AND THE MEDIA

No doubt, the media obsession with crime and its actors significantly contributed to the creation of new myths. Djordje Ignjatović, professor of criminology at the Law School in Belgrade, speaks about the production and creators of the mythology of crime, analyzing the technology of creation of myths in this domain: "Myths about crime usually occur by acting of forums which are not scientific, by telling or retelling of invented or sensationalist stories" (*Danas*, May 16, 2005). They are created through fabrication, as well as distortion of what really happened, through numerous biased media stories, whose goal was to raise the circulation or watching rates. In a wish to compete with "hot topics", the media put criminals in the focus of interest: together with the timing in the main news, they acquired social significance, regardless of the fact that it was founded on negative publicity. Since that happened at the time when persons from the world of crime enjoyed support of the state, it was impossible to write about them objectively without fear, so journalists competed in subjective, poltroonish, affirmative showing of these personalities and their environment. "In the media presentation, and probably in real life, the impression was that simply crime without punishment is governing, and that it pays. Beside war violence, smuggling, thefts, robberies, abductions, murders, revenges, and retaliations filled newspaper columns and made the public dependent on this type of texts. […] Tough guys from the street who were previously called thieves and criminals became idols, respected citizens with reserved tables in best restaurants, booked apartments in best hotels, businessmen with bodyguards, owners of luxurious, often armored cars, and respected guests of talk show programs" (Milošević, 2005).

We should not forget the tendency of the state to divert attention from the real and important problems and omissions to the plan of crime, as the always interesting subject for the public opinion. Ignjatovic commented on this as follows: "It is difficult to avoid the impression that in previous years, dramatization of the crime problem was a convenient means for various political and other manipulations. It was convenient exactly for power centers, to divert the attention of the public, through various campaigns and mythology, from real social problems to the field of crime and its curbing. In this context it was convenient to occasionally turn to panic penal populism, because intimidated citizens supported a stricter penal policy and this brought valuable points. On the other hand, while people were entertained with spectacular acts of violence, many serious processes were going on in the society, out of their focus, which were to determine their future life" (*Danas*, May 16, 2005). Beginnings of transition in socialist societies had obviously presented the days of "primary accumulation of capital", accompanied by various criminal activities. No one wanted or dared to inform or write about that: instead, we were swamped with romanced biographies of characters from the underground. The heritage of the recent past continued to live in the political life and the media: it was not rare that mafia leaders and their followers were then called legends, gentlemen, experts, even reputable citizens.

Even a random view of the contents of newspaper articles and journalism in the 90s in Serbia is sufficient to conclude that in the presentation of criminals a pattern was applied which was based on manipulation and abuse of the mythical heroic model. Throughout history, from the times of haiduks up to the present days, the myth about the hero and antihero remains an ideal way to camouflage the most damaging social phenomena and events. In fact, there is a way to present the character of a criminal in literature, journalism and the media as a hero, and for an average consumer to make this *heroic quality* seem quite natural and authentic.

In his famous book *The Brothel of the Warriors*, Ivan Colovic analyses the way in which the character of *Ljubomir Magas*, alias "Ljuba Zemunac", one of the most notorious Belgrade criminals of the second half of the 20th century, was produced into an ultimate hero. The special language, which carries in it symbolical messages establishes a link with the unfathomable world of special emotional meanings. Colovic gives the characteristics of that language: striking rhythm, figurative speech, illogicality and special diction. This is the language of elementary literature forms which potentiates part fictional, part literary elements. False documentary nature of such texts is also important, which is based on quasi authenticity, characteristic of mythical thinking. Documents, lockets, numbers, statements of lawyers, policemen, testimonies of persons from the circle, letters, mothers, all this contributes to the directed realism of the invented story. Bipolarity and contradictions of characteristics of heroes themselves were also taken over from the mythical elaboration of reality, and so, of Ljuba Zemunac it is said in one and the same story that he was "loved too much" and "hated" and "dangerous", "full of greatest human softness", but also most brutal violence. He is only seemingly a bad man but "to be honest", also "essentially gentle". His violent fierceness is shown most often as a means for the realization of noble goals. "He is merciless and cruel only as an avenger and savior of the innocent and the miserable, as protector of the fatherland, or a just and strict judge" (Čolović, 2000: 10).

Constant implementation of the Robin Hood principle, although disturbed by the presence of unmatchable "exploits", such as raping of girls, acts as a general cover for all committed crimes. Especially significant was the understanding given to characteristics such as unrestrained madness, unnecessary cruelty in the punishment of enemies in which he sadistically enjoyed. Basing the story about the contemporary "hero" on the epic traditional story, the author of the modern epic about Ljuba Zemunac, because of the excess of meanings, does not allow us to see just a brutal criminal, or just a noble protector of the weak. He is, on one hand, full of angelic gentleness, saintly forbearance, unselfishness, wise fairness, and he respects family values. The pater familias, loved by all because of his fatherly care for all members of his nation. He helped everybody, especially the weak, ill, drug addicts, sinners. Of course, he was an indubitable prominent patriot, guardian of Europe, who guarded Frankfurt from criminals, Schiptars, Ustashas and the Chetniks. Beside all these sublime ethical properties, he is physically superior without competition. The expressions: "physically very strong guy", "hill of muscles", "athletic phenomenon", "medical sensation", described his physical supremacy which touches the mythical in the statement that "even six months later Ljuba's body was almost unmodified, as if death cannot touch him" (Čolović, 2000: 20).

The approach toward mythical protectors lies in the foundation of such presentation of the hero. He can stand ambivalence in which he is a martyr who makes sacrifices for those

close to him (but also for those not so close to him), and on the other hand he is a bully, brutal, cruel, ruffian, dark, merciless, ruthless, arrogant, dangerous, greedy, cunning, insolent, evil and vengeful. This ruthless icy brute, covered in scars, is a real bandit-protector who offers his death for the survival of his nation. Because of that he is the subject whom people fear, but whom at the same time they worship and admire. This is the way used for "proving" the "noble essence" of a criminal and this principle was used in the media presentation of criminals in the 90s. Journalists themselves talked about this within the framework of the research "Journalism and Ethics in Serbia in 2005", conducted by *Media Center*, replying, among other things, to the following questions: *Have your media cited memoirs or confessions of some criminals? Do you believe this improved their images? Were there any political implications in the contents (mentioning of* politicians, state institutions, etc.)? The following are some of their replies (Media Center, 2005: 96-98):

"Some media presented members of the JSO (Special Operations Unit) as heroes. There is this already famous captain Joe from *Kurir*, as a former member of the Red Berets, who spoke about the Hague brotherhood, Djindjić, Legija. I remember there was quite a mess in public about that" (Lady journalist, 8 years of experience, public city TV).

"Tabloids are full of fairy stories in which all criminals are angels. I think that such media are trying to improve the picture the public has of them and that they are doing PR for them" (Journalist, 12 years of experience, private TV).

"Not in my medium. But thanks to the publishing of such things criminals became heroes here. There were cases that Legija[5] and Čeda were at the same page and put in a completely same rank. Criminals obtain the same space as everybody else. One of them published a book which was sold with daily newspapers and I don't know what more could be done for extolling of criminals. In some media there is a tendency of heroifying of criminals" (Lady journalist, 3 years of experience, radio).

"Yes: Kristijan Golubović, Andrija Drašković, Čume… Finally, maybe this made kids have an improved picture about these characters" (Editor, 12 years of experience, daily newspapers).

"Stories about criminals increase circulation and people read them. If we publish an interview with, let's say, Kristijan, then every kid shall take it and say 'Look at this!', and read it. And this is not some policy of the papers, this is just so" (Lady editor, 15 years of experience, weekly magazine).

"At the time, Vanja Bulić brought guests who would say – yes, I did this and that, I stole, I was in prison… that is somehow OK to me. Now, you make the most ideal story about someone, like about C…, he put himself as a candidate, and he is a criminal! In fact, who are all the criminals here?" (Lady journalist, state radio, 10 years of experience).

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[5] Milorad Ulemek 'Legija', the primary accused for the assassination of the Prime Minister.

The media in Serbia turned criminals into heroes. Enormous part of the press and other media played the game with the political, state, and criminal structure of the time, closing the magic circle which for the public became a vague, mystical but attractive story. The average citizen was not able any more to get by in the ethical space, to assess who was "proper" and who was "bad", who was the butcher and who the victim. "The moral obligation of the media not to flatter the contagious curiosity, giving criminals space not to justify crime, but to stigmatize criminal behavior, was ignored in a great degree – firstly, because of the moral collapse which seized the society; secondly, because of the call of "wild capitalism", the struggle of the media for survival and the magnetic attractiveness of the gun-and-girl formula; thirdly, because of the collapse of the mechanism of social protection and paralysis of the judicial system" (Milošević, 2005).

Teofil Pančić's comment on the early death of a young man who played one of the main roles in the movie *Wounds* of the director Srdjan Dragojević,[6] describes the deepest tragic of that time: "Death of a boy who could perhaps have been a great actor – if only he did not live in a state *full of death*, ill from *overdose* of nothingness-as-the-view-on-the-world – unfortunately, except the 'realistic' dimension of a private/family tragedy also got the discouraging, collateral, 'mythological' plane; as if its 'message' is that no one here can escape the claws of the Programmed Fall" (…). According to this author, the most shameful and the worst decade in the written Serbian history was marked by leadership of the worst, helplessness in confronting the hopelessness which was not the product of the chaos, but of the system which produced an auto-genocide of its kind, especially concerning young people. He also emphasizes that the documentary of Janko Baljak *See you in the obituary*, made after the book *The crime that changed Serbia*, is a testimony about real criminals who were "part-time helpers of the nomenclature, spokesmen of the time in which the worst were the best, genuine heroes of the Serbian nineties", and concludes: "The thing is just – and this is the terrible thing – that celluloid Pinki and the real Pekić were members of a fearfully authentic, not at all poseur 'lost generation' (in which every conventional 'romantics of losing' disappeared, to which 'bohemian' types from happier times glued), generations criminally sacrificed to realization of sick pseudo-utopias of a very sick society led by kleptocracy […]" (Pančić, *Vreme* April 15, 2000).

In a great degree, at that time there was no journalistic sharp critical word, but on the contrary, "master's dandies" and "smug dudes" at that time, and later also, were treated with the greatest possible amount of benign sympathy which tendentiously alleviated their real criminal origin and nature, and threw into the focus associations of mythical-heroic archetypical codes. Even after the so-called October changes in 2000, the situation has not essentially improved. "To the old controversies new ones shall be added. […] Various versions occurred about whether on October 5th 'Legija', in agreement with the Prime Minister Djindjić, stood on the side of the people, which contributed to avoiding of bloodshed, or he just acted important at the moment when no lever of the former regime was executing orders. Some media joined the creation and inflating of the myth of the October 5th savior role of criminals who 'stood on the side of the people'. Some papers

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[6] The director, Srdjan Dragojević, deals in this movie with crime and its champions in Serbia of the 90s in an opposite way, emphasizing the social ambience of plunging into an abyss and value-system disorientation, which was bringing young people into its world of perpetual darkness, with a certain tragic end.

published feuilletons and interviews in serials on the subject 'How I saved Serbia and removed Slobodan Milosevic'. Milorad Ulemek, Luković Legija Cema, who joined the overthrow with his people from the Special Operations Unit of the State Security, received great romanticized publicity. Almost until the warrant for arrest was sent after him, under indictment for assassination of the Prime Minister of Serbia Zoran Djindjić, he was the hero of the media, especially of tabloids. Newspapers romanticized his biography, writing that after some robbery he escaped to France, that he, as a bouncer, killed a man and went to the Foreign Legion, that he escaped from there to Djibouti, that the French sent an arrest warrant after him […], that he somehow managed to run away, return to Belgrade and join the Arkan's Guards […]. With a certain morbid fascination, after October 5th the media described scandals tied to his name, and the arrogance […]" (Milošević, 2005).

FINAL REMARKS

The question arises - what is really going on under social circumstances in which the rule of law is suspended, circumstances under which social actors with moral integrity are missing? What is really going on if the once clear perception of the border between the constructive and the destructive, appropriate and inappropriate, correct and wrong, is absent? What really happened in Serbia during the previous decade?

 The poorly started process of social transition, the security crisis, the political crime in expansion and difficult economic deprivation, with sharp polarization of the society (the majority of "losers" against the minority of "winners" – favorites of the etatist elite, transitional, black market and war profiteers), are some of the crucial characteristics of Serbia of the 90s. The "ordinary" man, observer of dramatic happenings, was exposed to a multitude of threatening and contradictory signals from the social milieu which was under destruction, under pressure of multiple uncertainties, intimidated by dangers of every kind and displaced from all footings.

First of all, there was the crisis of external security. Bullies (criminals) are promoted and exposed as heroes – their criminal legitimation was eradicated (also from the positions of the social elite) by the narrative on the necessity of struggle for just causes - "defense, protection" from "the others". Criminals come under cover of the collective identity – every rebellion against the primitive values order inside the collective and relativization of the "moral magnitude" of warriors (by inappropriate objections for his "controversial" moral character) threatens the "we" existence (treason). Affirmation of "heroes" is cemented by magnification of their heroism through mythical metaphors,[7] potentiating of their (above average) bodily strength, fondness for sports, eroticism, skillfulness, invincibility, elusiveness, but also intrapersonal complexity in which with the same violent passion there burn nobleness and uncompromising quality, gentlemanliness and fighting efficiency up to cruelty and ruthlessness.

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[7] For example, most information about Zeljko Ražnatović Arkan and the members of the paramilitary formation whose leader he was contained passages on his/their fondness of sports, regular exercise, physical beauty, tidiness and refinement, discipline, contempt toward alcohol, drugs, tobacco and other vices (which weaken the "heroic tension"), dedication to family, Orthodox Christianity, "tradition", but also on "cunningness", invincibility, invulnerability, elusiveness (skillful "escapes" from prison /"disappearances" from battlefields), as well as on efficiency of the (cruel) control of members by the leader.

At the same time, normative order was falling apart inside the social system, crime of every kind almost exploded at the very beginning of the 90s, while efficiency of the state bodies in its control was dramatically falling down: Belgrade, once "the safest city in Europe" became a city with practically the most unresolved murders, robberies and other forms of hard crime. Not interested in the establishment of rule of law, and with insatiable appetites for power and wealth, the etatist elite in Serbia discovered the usefulness of criminals with pretensions to become heroes, and the tragic symbiosis was established. To the etatist elite and its partners, selected criminals served in war efforts and control of the political opponents within the country. In return, they obtained "clean files", opportunity to expose themselves publicly as models and a part of the "elite", to become political actors and to broaden their criminal activities. Their promotion was directly relying on the threatened national issue and the "world conspiracy" against Serbs, and their exposure, beside other things, was to raise the poor mobilization of reservists for going to the war (with appropriate manipulation of the stereotype of "masculinity"/national adequacy). On the other hand, some "tough guys" who, defying "great social injustices" and "not letting on themselves", have not only survived, but had also achieved financial success and power (thieves, robbers and dealers "from the neighborhood"), were models to generations of young people who were growing up in economically marginalized families and a society which offered them few alternative ways for social affirmation and achievement.

In general, the exposed role-models, who competed for social heroes in Serbia of the 90s, were mostly criminals. These criminals, in oppressive, unjust and uncertain conditions of social life, if nothing else, at least left the impression of being capable (over normative extent) to do "something", to take the control over things (to take "the matter in their hands"), to rebel – all of which ordinary people yearned for. In the process of perception and marking of social events, under insufferable pressure of fear faced with various possible catastrophic outcomes, unscrupulousness could be decoded as a capability for leadership, and crime justified by extraordinary (extreme) state of affairs. Definitions which stimulated such legitimization arrived from all sides and were neatly transmitted through the media. Those who, under the guise of the night, engaged in crime which forever remained in the zone of "a dark figure", became in daylight adorned with laurels as "patriots", "the best Serbian sons" and "successful businessmen", grabbing and bragging about various social privileges which are becoming only for heroes. "People from the other side of the law became media stars, partly because of war conditions, and partly because of the collapse of the social system and system of values in the disintegrating SFRY". Some of them were simply promoted into national heroes (like 'Arkan', but he was not the only one, other "tough guys" also followed, 'heroes of the asphalt', obviously linked with the police and the regime of the time), and even those (Beli, Giška) who were with the then opposition. Some were simply promoted because of paramilitary activities, which was praised as defense of the state, nation and the faith, and some as examples of luxury, power, adventurism and leaving the settled course of the grey life of the ordinary people" (Milošević, 2005).

Some of the criminals exposed by the media practically wished to take over the roles, which took place inadequately in the state apparatus of Serbia during the 90s, and thus to express their own leadership capabilities toward return to a state of social order: apart from "protecting" the people in the territories of the former Yugoslavia gripped by war, they punished personal and "state enemies" and "traitors" (contrary to the state bodies in charge of crime control, which did not succeed in preventing or constraining the escala-

tion of all possible forms of crime) with impunity. Some of them also promoted themselves as humanitarian activists, founding funds to help "children", "invalids" and other affected population categories, or as "proven fighters against oppression of the Milosevic regime", standing out in lines of the then opposition parties, in order later to enter the legend as "tragic heroes", redeemed through martyrdom and suffering (mostly under circumstances sufficiently "mysterious" to enable them "immortality"). Destructed and miserable Serbia became the country of wonders, and new social heroes became symbols and supports of the alternative (sur)reality, developed on the results of the yearnings of their elites and masses.

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DRUŠTVENI KONTEKST I USPON ANTIHEROJA

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Predmet razmatranja u ovom radu jeste razvoj i socijalni značaj društvenih heroja, kao i sadržaj, funkcije i dihotomije herojstva, sa posebnim osvrtom na one uslove u socijalnom sistemu koji omogućavaju i olakšavaju uzajamno približavanje, simboličku i funkcionalnu alternaciju njegovih različitih kategorija. U pokušaju provere postavke da ekstremno turbulentni procesi unutar društva praćeni znatnom antisocijalnom aktivnošću određenih povoljno pozicioniranih grupa, kao i specifičnom elaboracijom socijalne realnosti onih nepovoljno pozicioniranih (tzv. "običnih ljudi") stvaraju uslove za konverziju klasičnih antiheroja u društvene heroje, predmet posebne pažnje bila je situacija u Srbiji tokom poslednje dve dekade. Ulozi medija u navedenim socijalnim procesima posvećena je osobita pažnja.

Ključne reči: *heroj, antiheroj, kriminal, kriminalci, mediji, Srbija.*