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JOURNALISTS ADJUSTING TO CONTROLLED MEDIA - A GROUNDED THEORY

Master Thesis in Media Studies

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The path towards finalizing this thesis was challenging, sometimes demanding, but most of the time a fulfilling process. However, my work would not have been accomplished without favorable life aspects.

Abstract

The Theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media is a grounded theory that arose from the qualitative research of data collected in Serbia. It focuses on how journalists resolve the lack of opportunities to practice accountable journalism in traditional mainstream media nowadays. The theory of adjusting has been derived in accordance with the classic grounded theory methodology, described in the original literature written by its founders, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss[1].

Officially, as a former communist, authoritarian and post-conflict country with a complex and long lasting transition towards an absolute reign of democracy[2], Serbia is a fertile ground for observing a multitude of social phenomena. In this particular case, the non-existent independent competitive media market causes the inability of the media to remain economically sustainable. As the government and state power demonstrate unwillingness to withdraw from the media environment, Serbian media register the increase of censorship. Objective journalism is neglected in such circumstances. Consequently, journalists create strategies to adapt to a new business environment.

The lack of space for exercising and publishing accountable journalistic content appeared as the main concern of the Serbian journalists interviewed during this research. It emerged from the data that journalists resolve their main concerns by adjusting to controlled media in three ways: by staying and enduring the new media environment, by shifting from journalism to another workplace within the branch, or by absolutely leaving the media. The Theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media demystifies how journalists handle the presence of censorship among the newsrooms, and the increase of pressures to satisfy the needs of media financiers. It helps in overcoming professional dilemmas by offering possible solutions.

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[1] Glaser G. Barney: "Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussion" (1998) and "Theoretical Sensitivity" (1978), Glaser G. Barney and Strauss L. Anselm: "The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research" (1967)
[2] Chapter 1 of this Thesis

Contents

List of abbreviations

ANEM	The Association of Independent Electronic Media
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
CIMA	Center for International Media Assistance
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EU	European Union
FH	Freedom House
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
NDNV	Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina
NUNS	Independent Journalistic Association of Serbia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RWB	Reporters without Borders
SPJ	Society of Professional Journalists
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNS	Journalistic Association of Serbia
WAN-IFRA	World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO SERBIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The Republic of Serbia is one of the seven independent countries established after the break-up of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. As a state union with Montenegro, it lasted from 2003 until 2006. In its current shape, Serbia exists since 2007, after the southern province of Kosovo declared independence. Geographically, it is located in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Its population is slightly above 7 million with the average age of 42.2 years[3]. The capital city is Belgrade.

After the year 2000, Serbia has been referred to as the post-conflict, former communist and authoritarian country, in the process of democratic transition. Formally, it is a multi-party, parliamentary republic with free elections, while the unicameral National assembly consists of 250 proportionally elected deputies on a four-year term. However, the current Serbian political system can be more precisely defined as: "semi consolidated electoral democracy with a culture of disconnect between the government and the citizens" (Banjac, et al. 2016: 1).

Yet, disharmony between the state apparatus and the public sphere is not an innovation. It has lasted for three decades. United as one, citizens, organizations of civil society, opposition and the whole network of independent media severely struggled against the autocratic, pro-nationalistic regime practiced by the former president Slobodan Milošević, from 1992 until 2000. Regardless of the fact that democracy won after many years of turbulent mass demonstrations in the streets of Belgrade, two decades later it is still not fully implemented.

Considering its political history, transitional path, socialistic legacy and cultural heritage, current Serbian system is unique. "In combining various characteristics of its preceding authoritarian regimes with the introduction of democratic institutions and their further development, Serbia now seems to be somewhere in-between – it is no longer an autocracy, but neither is it a fully developed democracy" (Marko, 2013: 12). The complexity of such a political phenomenon points to the general society, and a rather disordered media environment. Despite the presumptions that the media and the state are in a process of separation due to democratic transformations, paradoxically, these have become even more

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[3] Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, "Census on population, households and dwellings", (2011)

intertwined.

Building Media Independence

Traditionally, media and politics are referred to as an inseparable symbiotic phenomenon within the context of Serbian society. As the national poet Matija Bećković describes*:" During communism, one radio-television broadcaster and one newspaper was enough for the ruling party. Now a lie usurped countless television channels and newspapers, so the citizens can choose medium that offers the best lie. With such a wide and sumptuous selection, how will we recollect and remember what the truth was"* (Lopušina, 2015: 329).

Political propaganda has enjoyed media coverage by default, since the rule of communism in Yugoslavia[4]. Nationalistic and warmongering propaganda of the previous socialistic regime[5] spread throughout the still controlled mass media network. Finally, after the democratic victory in 2000, the New National Assembly adopted a necessary set of media laws and regulations, among the others. However, it was just in the shape of a temporary solution that would trigger democratic transition. "Arguably, most laws, including the media law package, were only adopted in order to meet the preconditions for membership of the Council of Europe and the EU. Professional demands and criteria were less important and even dismissed" (Marko, 2013: 14).

In the following years, steaming transition obliged the state apparatus to commit a complete deliberation of the media sphere, in accordance with the model of developed democracies. Implementation of democratic standards and values implied dissociation of political interests and other sources of power, from the media control management. "In a democratic society, media strive to reach an ideal of free flow of information, opinions, views throughout media pluralism and free media establishment. Media is supposed to make a clear distance from the influence of power- first of all from the state, business, military. What is more, a democratic country is obliged to establish its own free media market, excluding the state ownership of the media" (Veljanovski, 2009: 365). Transitional changes are expected to last long and be complex, especially in systems such as Serbian, because the media faces

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[4] Lopušina Marko (2015)
[5] In 1990s media space was strictly divided to pro-governmental and opposition media (Veljanovski, 2012)

radical changes in the process of separation from the state. In fact, two basic directions of these changes are expected - a democratic and a professional transformation of the media system.

Yet, the introduction of democracy was not a guarantee for establishing independent media environment in Serbia. Political leaders, coupled with economic power holders are now reinforcing more sophisticated mechanisms of control over the news production. Widely present censorship and the increase of self-censorship pervades within the industry, while independent journalism is alarmingly limited. Critical reporting appears on a level of statistical error in the mainstream media, and has been replaced by sensationalism. Saturated media illusion covers the reality. In simple words, objective journalism is deemed seditious and is seriously reduced. The traditional mass media tendentiously subjugate to the will of the power holders, despite the negative consequences that such acting leaves on the public sphere undergoing the democratic transition.

Media Market

Approximately 1600 media are serving the Serbian population of around 7 million people, which makes the media market quite saturated. Yet, the content offer is quite poor. The same news from one source is commonly shared, while competitiveness is missing. Moreover, business demands are irresponsible towards motivating attractive news production.

Relying on the data gathered from the Serbian Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media and the Agency for Public Registers, the IREX presents the number of active media outlets in 2016[6] as follows: print, 818 outlets (newspaper circulation: not available); radio stations, 284; television stations, 175 active (top four TV stations by average viewers per day: RTS1 (public service, 3.3 million); TV Pink (2.7 million); TV Prva (2.6 million); TV B92 (2.5 million); online news portals, 334; news agencies (Beta and FoNet (private), Tanjug (state owned)). These data illustrate the struggle for survival of the media market in the context of Serbian society. Presence of numerous media outlets on the market weakens their role and influence. It creates a fertile ground for implementation of control over the news content.

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[6] IREX "Media Sustainability Index" (2016)

Indications of Political Control

Dramatic turbulences in the sense of stifling media freedoms in Serbia began in 2014. Simultaneously with the devastating floods[7], which questioned the capacity of government to deal with the consequences of a natural disaster, objective journalism was silently sinking as the domination of control loomed. Additionally, financial situation among the media deteriorated, censorship became rampant, attacks on free media increased, and the status of journalists was continuously degrading. Yet, a proper reaction from the responsible national authorities[8] was missing.

To illustrate this, in late spring of 2014, online magazines "Telepromoter" and "Druga strana" were temporarily removed from their web domains. Both are known for their critique of government[9]. In addition, a well-established, analytical online media "Peščanik" was blocked from its Internet domain, after publishing an investigative article written by three scientists, which proved that the Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs, Nebojša Stefanović, plagiarized his PhD thesis[10].

That same year in September, a popular political show "Utisak nedelje" (The Impression of the Week) was canceled by the television with the national frequency "B92". Despite 24 years of broadcasting, it was suddenly removed under complex and unclear circumstances. The author of the show and journalist Olja Bećković, stated[11] that her show was banned due to a political order, and named the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić[12] as the main responsible for that decision.

Fierce pressures on the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) started in 2014 as well[13]. After a year of publishing investigative reports of national matter, state political

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[7] The value of natural disaster damage, estimation is 1.7 billion Euros, "The Report: Serbia Floods" (2014)
[8] Share Foundation, "Monitoring Report on the State of digital rights and freedoms in Serbia", (2015)
[9] OSCE, "Report "(27th May 2014)
[10] "Peščanik" (June, 2014)
[11] Regional television "N1" (6th January 2015)
[12] Aleksandar Vučić has been the Prime Minister of Serbia since 2014, and the leader of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Even though he has been active in Serbian political circles since 1993, as a member of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), Vučić achieved his first serious political role as the Minister of Information from 1998 until 2000, in the government loyal to the hard-line nationalist president Slobodan Milošević. Following the rising resentment against Milošević's political regime, Vučić's mandate stayed known for the bans of more than 36 media, the fines introduced for the journalists who criticized the government, and the bans on foreign TV channels
[13] BIRN (10th January 2015)

leaders verbally accused BIRN for seeding slanders and labeled it as a "spy" organization. More specifically, the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić called BIRN's journalists "liars"[14]. The accusation came just after the network had published an investigative story which said that the Serbian state-owned power company EPS, awarded a contract to drain the Tamnava mine. The story drew attention to a controversial consortium of two companies, with no relevant experience and management members under the court proceedings.

On the International Press Freedom Day [15] 2015, The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) highlighted the fact that Serbia was a country with no media freedom, whose citizens lacked a proper information source. It was stated that: "some media drastically violate professional norms, by using their professional role for development of the Prime Minister's personality cult of personality, and for organizing shameful campaigns against his political opponents. That will most certainly go down in history as journalistic dishonor"[16].

Representatives of the European Union and the OSCE, the Commissioner for Public Information, the European Parliament, national and international civil society organizations, journalists' associations, independent media, and journalists themselves identified Serbian Government as the main responsible for stifling the rights to the freedom of information, and the increase of media censorship[17]. Yet, those claims were categorically rejected by the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, and he demanded a public apology [18]. Despite reactions, the apology never occurred, and the media continued sinking even deeper into the crisis.

Press Freedom in Decrease

The wave of censorship and pressures on the media continues[19], as the government ignores warning signals. From 2014 [20] until 2015, Serbia dropped 13 places on the World Press Freedom Index list published by the organization Reporters without Borders (RWB)[21], and

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[14] NUNS (10th January 2015)
[15] May 3rd is The World Press Freedom Day, proclaimed by the UN
[16] NDNV, "Media far from freedom" (2015)
[17] OSCE (27th May 2014)
[18] "NEWS online", (3rd June 2014)
[19] ANEM: "Media Monitoring Report", (December, 2015)
[20] RWB, "World Press Freedom Index" (2015): Serbia was ranked as 54th in 2014
[21] RWB, "World Press Freedom Index" (2016), http://index.rsf.org/#!/index-details/SRB

ended the year as 67th among 180 countries. "Financial and editorial pressures are placed on the media. Those that criticize the government most are attacked publicly. The investigative media group BIRN is often targeted. "Hostile" media are subjected to frequent arbitrary financial and administrative inspections. Three media laws complying with the European standards of freedom were approved with the aim of facilitating admission to the EU, but were never put into effect" (RWB, 2016).

Additionally, the American organization Freedom House (FH)[22] describes Serbia as a state with a "partially free" media environment, in which objective reporting about the government is endangered. Considering the list of freedom index, the country recorded a fall from 33rd to 45th place in the period between 2011 and 2015. The FH's in 2016 reports[23] that: "the administration of the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić and aligned media outlets, portray the investigative and critical media organizations as foreign-backed propagandists, seeking to damage his government and destabilize the country. Self-censorship was a deteriorating phenomenon that journalists attributed to concerns about both harassment and economic pressure. Journalists continued to experience threats and physical attacks. A number of outlets, including the ones which hosted minority-language programs, closed down during a media privatization program, outlined in a package of 2014 reform laws supported by the European Union (EU). Political and investigative programs also continue to close, leaving the public with fewer sources of information".

Despite the expectations, instead of proceeding with the application of its media strategy, the state's media policy has been almost entirely devoted to seeking greater control over the media content (IREX 2013). As a result, the gap between the law's provisions on media freedom and its daily practice is dramatically expanding. Throughout the years, self–regulatory bodies have failed to stand up and fight for the media freedom. The non–transparency of media ownership and the non-existence of free competitive media market[24] are burning issues. Also, the Law on Public Information and Media is not obeyed[25][26]. The additionally adopted amendments[27] to that law have enabled further financing of the media

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[22] Freedom House Report (2015)
[23] Freedom House Report (2016)
[24] Anti-Corruption Council of Republic of Serbia (2011)
[25] The Freedom House Report (2015)
[26] The Law on Public Information and Media (August 2014)
[27] Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Public Service Broadcasting (December 2015)

from the national budget. Citizens' money has been used as a source for financing the media and satisfying the interests of political parties and ruling elites. By practicing "soft censorship" [28], the government exploits financial vulnerability of the media outlets to influence the content of news. "It is an indirect and often highly effective media control mechanism that diminishes journalistic independence, constrains freedom of expression, and narrows democratic debate" (WAN-IFRA, 2012: 5). These covert forms of media control are manageable by selective distribution of subsidies, and manipulations through the advertising channels. What is more, they allow biased application of regulatory and licensing powers that affect editorial policy, and the level of media's influential credibility.

<u>Ignorance of the Rule of Law</u>

The process of adopting media laws lasted more than a decade. Until the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Public Information and Media in 2014, the media struggled with the lack of legal security, legacy of the previous system, complex and long-lasting democratic transition. However, the law did not deliberate the media system from state control. Despite its presence, it is still not implemented in practice.

The law in force obligates the media to report objectively. Public information is free, and not subjected to censorship. Forbidden is any direct or indirect discrimination of editors, journalists and other people in the field of public information, especially in relation to their political affiliation and belief, or other personal characteristics. One must not jeopardize the free flow of information or the editorial autonomy of the media, especially not by pressuring, threating or blackmailing the editors, journalists or other sources of information. According to the law[29], the freedom of information should not be hurt by the abuse of positions and public powers, property and other rights.

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[28] WAN-IFRA and CIMA (2012) define the term "Soft censorship" as: "The array of official actions intended to influence media output, short of legal or extra-legal bans, direct censorship of specific content, or physical attacks on media outlets or media practitioners."

[29] "The article 4", Law on Public Information and Media (2014)

Endangered Journalistic Freedom

Giving the context in which the media appear to exist nowadays, the level of respect towards accountable journalistic practice is worrisome. The importance of objective reporting vanishes under the weight of business and political interests.

Common presence of censorship, increase of political propaganda and advertising, as well as the lack of critical and analytical approaches within the news content, point to a crisis of objective reporting. The lack of possibilities for autonomous news production and dissemination of such content to the public, shows a general degradation of professional principles and the status of journalists. Control roots are reaching the news production engine. All of this questions the true role of journalists within the new media circumstances. By being prevented or restrained from practicing journalism responsibly, journalists are losing their essential duty.

Status of Journalists

While analyzing the media in Serbia, the European Parliament (2016) recognizes: "smear campaigns against journalists, and their general failures to respect ethical, professional and social norms". Accountable journalism is drowning, because the financiers believe it is not necessary. Media industry balances between its financial appetites, business demands and political interests. Journalists suffer consequences of the poor media market and lynched media freedoms, and lose their purpose within a changed working environment. Adaptation to the new circumstances requires sacrifice.

According to the study "Position of journalists in Serbia" conducted by Journalists 'Association of Serbia (2015), 75 out of 107 (70.09%) participants were involved in censorship and self-censorship. At the same time, journalists mainly work in poor conditions. They survive with no decent contract of employment, receive minimal wages (Chart 1), and their labor rights are not respected. In 2014, 38% of Serbian journalists had regular income, while 12,82% of them experienced a one-month delay. Around 3% of journalists had been waiting for their earnings for more than a year.

Chart 1. Salaries of Journalists in Serbia 2014

- < 150 EUR
- 150 - 300 EUR
- 300 - 400 EUR
- 400 - 600
- 600 <

14 %
26 %
34 %
18 %
8 %

Research conducted by Journalists' Association of Serbia
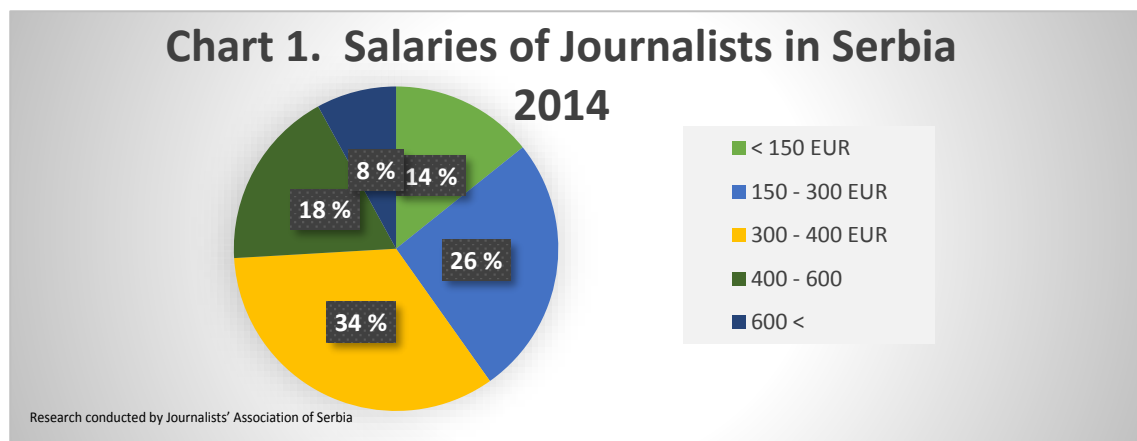
Finally, the accurate number of active journalists in Serbia is not a known fact. The National Labor Agency's data does not classify those engaged within the "media and communication industry" according to the type of job they perform. In September 2015, there were 52,983 active workers registered within the communication and information sector, which shows a decrease when compared to 54,718 people in 2014[30]. Other rough estimations would be on a level of speculations, based on the number of registered members within the Journalistic' Association. However, not all of the active journalists became members.

In sum, regardless of the status and role that journalists in Serbia enjoy, they are globally obliged to respect the fundamental principles of good journalistic practice. Succumbing to the interests of the media financiers, biased reporting and submission to censorship seriously violates the rule of democracy. It brings damage to public interests and annuls the fundamental human rights to independent, truthful, objective information.

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[30] Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia (2015), "Employment and Earnings from 2000 until 2014"

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH FOCUS, DATA AND METHOD

Changes in power domination within the media industry in Serbia focused the initial attention of this research onto the potential consequences these changes may have on journalists. My first intention was to examine the level of responsibility a journalist has for the increase of censored content in the media. Also, I wanted to research how they professionally perceive an act of self-censorship within the context of post-conflict, transitional democratic society.

Considering the complexity and non-stimulated transparency of these specific phenomena, qualitative investigation seemed to be the most appropriate tool for data collection at the beginning. Before familiarizing myself with grounded theory, I defined the initial qualitative research framework by navigating through Alan Bryman's fourth edition of "Social research methods" (2012). The idea relied on the inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, while the stress was on understanding the social world by examining how its participants perceived it (2012: 380).

Preparation for the Fieldwork

In order to define a general concept for the subsequent fieldwork, I followed the approved project proposal. I was devoted to understanding and illustrating the current role of the media within the context of Serbian society. I focused on understanding the interrelation between the state and the media through the historical context. I was aiming at clarifying the balance of power and manifestations that represent threats to media freedom. In general, my main focus at the beginning of this project was the level of obtained press freedom in the Serbian media. My attention was attracted by current threats to journalists who objectively and professionally carried out their work; media shutdowns; censorship re-appearance; political control over the media content. I considered the fact that the darkest era of absolute governmental control over the Serbian media ended just 15 years ago.

In an effort to collect qualitative data, I contacted experienced journalists via e-mail at the beginning of summer 2015, and shortly before my journey to Serbia. I introduced myself and briefly explained my professional background, reasons, intentions, the objectives I had as a researcher, as well as the rationale behind my interest in the topic. Each of the contacted journalists expressed an enthusiasm regarding the subject matter, but not all were willing to cooperate.

In total, eight out of ten journalists accepted to participate. This made a satisfying rate of 80%. The interviews were conducted in Serbian, because the communication in a native language leaves no space for mistakes usually caused by language barriers. The participants were journalists from both public and private media, and individually, they created news content for a range of different media outlets such as televisions, newspapers, radio televisions and online media. Experience was the common denominator for the participants in this first data collection phase. Namely, they were all well-experienced and they reported on social, political and economic issues. They participated under their full names, and we met in person for the first time during July 2015, in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Semi-Open Interviewing

In the first stage of data collecting, I used the semi-structured interview type - defined by Alan Bryman. It explains that: "The researcher has a list of questions of fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees. But, by and large, all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee" (Bryman A. 2012: 471). There is a certain level of flexibility in this interview process. It provides an important presence of space for the interviewees to share their opinion, and for the interviewers to gain even more relevant information. I considered this to be a particularly beneficial aspect of qualitative interviewing. This interview type provides much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view. It gives insight into what is relevant and important for the interviewee. Since the direction of discussion can depart significantly from the scheduled pre-ordained questions, semi-structured interviews allow me as a researcher to ask an additional question that is related to the interviewee's previous answer. I was striving to get clear and rich data, while keeping the focus on the main topic.

Five core issues, spread over approximately 14 flexible questions, were covered in eight face-to-face interviews. The idea was to get familiar with the journalist's personal point of view about the achieved independence in praxis, while focusing on the phenomena of censorship and self-censorship in the Serbian society.

The starting point was to get acquainted with the informants by gathering personal data such as name, age, current job, professional experience and general background. I proceeded to the topic by asking the initial question: "Is the right to the freedom of press guaranteed in Serbia, after 15 years of political transition?" This was asked to help me define how they were experiencing the freedom of media in Serbia. Then, the following set of topics included in the interviews were about the connection between politics, economy and media; the presence of censorship and self-censorship; mechanisms used to control the media; the status of journalists in the Serbian media and society; independence and rule of the media law in Serbia in 2015; and finally, about their personal thoughts on what Serbian journalism needed, so that it could be perceived as non-suppressed.

The interweaving process provided rich informative illustration of the media occurrences at an internal level of organization. Former presumptions of degraded status of journalists appeared as the burning issue. Discovering how unimportant the journalists were in the perception of Serbian society, the research got a whole new perspective. I needed an adequate methodology to analyze the findings in a proper manner.

Methodological Approaches and Adjusting to the Research

The initial aim of this research project, which was to analyze the phenomenon of censorship and self-censorship in journalism, provoked a range of other issues during the semi-open interviewing. My initial attempt to test how the increase of media control and censorship challenge objective journalism in Serbia, 15 years after the beginning of democratic transition, introduced a different perspective. Interestingly, the interviewing enlightened another problem of the professionals being prevented from working independently. Namely, journalists lack the media space for publishing accountable journalistic content.

As a researcher, I was intrigued by these new findings. Regardless of the fact that I had numerous pages of information concerning the issues of suppressed media freedom, and contaminated media environment, the degraded status of journalists caught my full attention. What should the journalists do if they are being conditioned or ignored at different stages of the news production process? If their attempts to work professionally are neglected by the media? The new blazing phenomenon of endangered journalists within the media

convinced me to reconstruct the initial research focus. However, the possibilities for an induction of a new theory seemed challenging at that point.

While discussing methodological perspectives, the thesis supervisor introduced me to grounded theory. It refers to a general method defined as "the discovery of theory from the data- systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1). Also, grounded theory uses "any kind or mix of data, and is particularly useful with qualitative data" (Glaser, 1998: 40). It allows the researcher to approach the collected data, and enables the findings and conclusions to emerge naturally.

Regardless of the fact that subsequently I spent almost six months simply aiming to get familiar with the tenets of grounded theory, the more I read about the possibilities of the method the more I was convinced that it was highly adequate for my new focus of interest. Constructed on resolving the truth through the prism of "what's going on" philosophy (Glaser, 1998: 19), grounded theory was exactly the method I needed to dig into defining the status of journalists within the controlled traditional mass media in Serbia. The following chapter provides a descriptive chronological insight into the most prominent grounded theory research phases, on the path of the later derived theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media.

<u>Exploring the Principles of Grounded Theory</u>

In an effort to practice the grounded theory method, I read the original literature. The most valuable source of information was *"The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research"* (1967) written by its founders, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, as well as *"Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussion"* (1998) and *"Theoretical Sensitivity"* (1978) written by Barney G. Glaser. Grounded theory is the "systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method. Grounded theory is not findings, but rather an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses" (Glaser, 1998: 3). It is the systematized discovery of what is actually happening in a specific field of researcher's interest. It does not invent, rather it conceptualizes patterns of behavior that emerge from the analyses of the data collected. The researcher "detects happenings without first having them filtered through and squared with pre-existing hypothesis and biases" (Glaser, 1978: 3). Even when I was reading some other relevant articles, in the end, I always returned to the explanations

provided by the theory founders. In fact, grounded theory is one of the most thoroughly described methods there are, and the original literature offered solutions to all of the methodological dilemmas I was experiencing.

It took a lot of effort to understand the processes and intentions of grounded theory, however from the very beginning it strongly kept my attention. In relation to the importance of valid literature, doing grounded theory involves the "minus-mentor" aspect (Glaser, 1998). This literally means that nobody teaches the researcher how to practice this method. The mentor supervises the process, but the researcher herself needs to understand the method clearly, otherwise the research process is impossible. I remember returning repeatedly to the chapters of literature I had already studied. Obstacles in the process of generating a new theory were resolved step by step, in a systematic manner, as I followed the tenets of doing grounded theory. In fact, researchers hold the opportunity and are challenged at the same time, to conduct their own project with the highest level of autonomy. The individual progresses independently within the framework of the grounded theory process. Even when mentor assistance is available at any given moment, the researcher might find it difficult to ask for help, considering the weight of the unshared individual experience gained during the parallel processing of data collection, memoing, coding, and constant comparison. In a nutshell, adequate literature provides concise answers to all the methodological dilemmas, and the work progresses.

Familiarizing with the Research Process

The main challenge of the research process is identifying the main concern of the participants, and how this main concern is resolved. The resolution is identified through a core category, which needs to be conceptualized. More precisely: "The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved. The goal is not voluminous description, not clever verification. The generation of theory occurs around a core category" (Glaser, 1978: 93).

It is of crucial importance to allow the core category to analytically emerge from the data and to avoid forcing the data. In order to build a grounded theory that is fit, relevant and works, the researcher has to ensure that the steps of doing grounded theory are followed. Grounded theory researchers dig into the following steps of data analyses; coding, memoing,

constant comparison, selective coding, sorting, theoretical coding, and writing up the theory. Considering my research at this phase, after the first eight interviews, the data collected was not rich enough. Based on previous semi-open interviewing, an assumption of the recognized behaviour, and the main concern thereby, was floating over the pile of collected information. Yet, I needed more data in order to crystalize the main issue and establish solid categories. At that point, the potential core concept was in its initial phase, while the possible direction for selective coding was on the horizon.

Collecting More Data

Refocusing the aims and familiarizing myself with the grounded theory approaches refreshed my research perspectives. For that reason, I re-visited the journalists in Serbia during the summer of 2016, when I met again with some of the interviewees. While discussing the changes of my research focus, I learned about the experiences they had after our first meeting. The interviewees provided a rich insight into the ongoing situation within the Serbian newsrooms. Additionally, the directions of my inquiry became more specific, and I was able to focus on the topics of importance to the research. I was in the phase of theoretical sampling and selective coding of new data.

Finally, I gathered plenty of new relevant data from seven journalists, and enriched the data gathered from the eight journalists whom I met the year before, and then again in 2016. That made a list of 15 interviewees, all professional journalists. However, seven of them left journalism after more than five years of active engagement. To my great satisfaction, whenever I needed some additional information, I was free to contact them through social networks or Skype.

As advised by Barney Glaser's book "Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and discussions", I did not tape the interviews during the repeated data collection process. By recording, "the research gets lost in an unanalyzed, unlimited mound of conceptually repetitive data. This runs counter to grounded theory methodology. The researcher becomes pressured into descriptive incident tripping and conceptually impressioning out." (Glaser 1998: 109). Therefore, I saved weeks of transcribing and translating numerous pages. Instead of taping, I wrote down everything during the conversation, and transferred the necessary information into the working file as soon as I could. The opportunity to dig into the topic without the

existence of methodological fences during the data collection process, additionally motivated me to explore the true issues of my interest. Motivation paced me on a working lane of multitasking research requests.

Constant Comparison

The same process of constant comparison illustrates a necessary reaction of the researcher to the existence of a pile of gathered data, and the effort to make the content of information theoretically feasible. Constant comparison of the collected data ensures that the researcher get on track of main patterns of behavior and doesn't get lost in details. In fact, the constant comparison of the data can be explained through four stages: 1) comparing the incident to another incident applicable to the categories, 2) integrating categories and the related data, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) generating the theory. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 104)

"Control over similarities and differences is vital for discovering categories and for developing and relating their theoretical properties, all necessary for the further development of an emergent theory. Comparing as many differences and similarities in data as possible, tends to force the analyst to generate categories, their properties and their interrelations as he tries to understand his data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 55).

This phase leans on coding and memoing. As in case of my research process, at first, the researcher compares the empirical information from the gathered data with the reflections and ideas in the memo bank. Further on, the researcher proceeds to a more demanding theoretical coding, by conceptually comparing an idea with another idea. By constant comparison of the emerged ideas, the research reinforces its meaning. In addition, a replication during the comparison serves as a means for validating the facts gathered. Future theory is about to be grounded in stable statements, examined through the process of similes, and the consequent writing is formulated presentation of the validated findings.

Sorting, Memoing and Coding

Before diving into the field notes, it is of crucial matter not to be biased by preformed assumptions or expectations. Only by staying open to the data and a neutral approach to the analysing process will the researcher be able to remain sensitive to what is actually happening in the substantive field that she investigates.

Considering my research analyses, I first began with open coding of the transcripts of the first semi-open interviews conducted in 2015. "The goal of the analyst is to generate an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating into a theory. To achieve this goal, the analyst begins with open coding, which is coding the data in every way possible" (Glaser, 1978:56). By open coding of the first interviews, I got on the track that the main concern of the Serbian journalists is the lack of media space for publishing accountable journalistic content. Identifying the main concern opened the passage into further analyzing, and the clarification of the main issue felt remedial. However, at that point I realised that I needed more data in order to find out how they resolved this main concern, thus I re-visited the journalists in Serbia in July 2016. During this second journey, I collected more data, took field notes, thoroughly analysed even the smallest conversation gathered, and wrote valuable memos simultaneously. The open coding of data in the first round of interviewing had led me to the discovery of the core variable, while the selective coding in the second round of interviewing revealed the relevant sub-categories related to the main issue.

Constant memo-writing was carried out simultaneously with the coding and data collecting process. In fact, memoing continuously followed the analyses until the finalization of this thesis. "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (Glaser, 1978: 83). Aiming to store my ideas, I wrote down every associative thought, idea or concept in relation to the work in progress whenever it occurred. By memoing I kept the track of the emerging theory. Subsequently, as the memos accumulate and mature, "they increase to the point of saturation and need to be sorted for writing up. Memos by covarying with coding, collecting, analyzing, other memoing, theoretical sampling and sorting, provide the integrative binding and power to put it all together into a grounded theory" (Glaser, 1998: 177). In praxis, sorting of the memos provoked the process of linking the emerged thoughts and ideas and building a large network of cross-related hypotheses. Constant comparison of memos integrated the related ideas into theoretical units. Categories and sub-categories became more and more saturated, as the pile of written memos dwindled.

Coding Families

Led by the gradual development of personal conceptual thinking skills, the analyst has come to the phase of theoretical coding, which explains how the identified categories interrelate. When memos and concepts are sorted into categories and subcategories, one starts looking for the ways that the categories are integrated and mutually dependent. One constructs a network of cross-connected hypotheses that are divided into conceptual coding families (Glaser, 1978). Each family unit is built on a network of logically connected sub-families, and it relates to the main concern. The coding families in the grounded theory method are not rigidly determined classifications. Instead, they are quite flexible, mutually inclusive, and suitable for cross-connecting.

In this particular case, I was aware of the specific conditions in the research environment[31]. The stifling of journalistic freedom in the suppressed media was the general context[32]. As the research continued and the data became rich and complex, the emerging ideas were affiliating towards "The Strategy Family" defined by Barney Glaser: "The point to keep clean on is whether or not there was a conscious act to manoeuvre people. If not, then behavior pattern is a consequence of behavior" (1978: 76). At the stage of theoretical coding, it emerged from the data that journalists' patterns of behavior were a consequential response to the behaviour of the control system towards the news production.

Write-up

The generation of the theory appeared as an upgrade of complexity of the previous work, equally challenging and requiring. At the point right before the beginning of the write-up process, I used the hand sorted memos to sketch a list of concepts for categories and sub-categories. As a result of previous analyses, I had piles of sorted memos that were ready to be written up. Most importantly, I was confident that I held a sketch of a systematically generated substantive theory. Moreover, it was crucial to continuously follow the ongoing process. Comparison of the ideas derived logically consistent material, illustrated by the

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[31] Chapter 1 of The Thesis
[32] "The Six C's" of coding families, (Glaser, 1978: 74)

research data. As the work progressed, categories and sub-categories became adequately dense.

The result of continuous comparison of the memos and coded data was the emergence of some new sub-categories. So, the need for re-designing and re-integrating the theoretical ideas arose, which led to some digressive considerations before the final adaptation. Yet, the advantages of the grounded theory are that "the researcher can return to the coded data when necessary to validate a suggested point, pinpoint data behind a hypothesis or gaps in the theory, and provide illustrations" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 113).

During the write-up process, I tried to avoid using a style which is too formal. I found that dynamic, proactive writing, with shorter sentences and paragraphs, was suitable for my intention to communicate vividly and accurately. At the same time, I focused on the concrete problem conceptualization by formulating the categories "abstract enough to make the theory a general guide to multi-conditional, ever changing daily situations" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 24). Finally, re-writing, correcting and editing appeared as the last phase of the writing process before finalization.

Self-Pacing

Exercising a grounded theory is both complex and satisfying for a researcher. It gives an opportunity to discover and share knowledge, while stimulating creativity and involvement of a researcher during the entire process. It gives autonomy and independence to the individual involved, while the best guidelines are constantly available in the original literature. Likewise, it requires researcher's constant concentration on the progress, and keeping up with the ongoing work.

I caught myself searching for the appropriate settings of the emerged data, during some irrelevant everyday activities. When I was unable to note new ideas on a memo, I emailed them to myself. The topic of the thesis kept me continuously active, reconsidering the facts and possibilities for the best generation of the theory.

Exercising grounded theory introduced a whole new perspective of academic research, and I was quite occupied thinking about the possible solutions. Consciously or not, the more I learned about the steps of doing grounded theory, the more involved I got.

CHAPTER 3: THE THEORY OF JOURNALIST ADJUSTING TO CONTROLLED MEDIA

Summarizing the General Context

Turbulences among the journalists trigger reappeared political and economic pressures. These shake the internal media organization and introduce reinforced patterns for information control. Regardless of the media type, external censors successfully whitewash their acts by financially manipulating through the established advertising network. Fulfillment of the conditions towards the amortization of content publications secures presence of advertisers, and guarantees financial sustainability of the media. On the other hand, manifested resistance towards the news production control, introduces serious business problems to defiant media, including a possibility for bankruptcy or shutdown.

Independent journalism is becoming a collateral damage for the media which desire to maintain profitability. In addition, journalists are left without an opportunity to conduct their work, and are therefore forced to search for an alternative. While in that transitional stage between acceptance and solution, journalists need to decide whether to adapt to the new circumstances, or to make radical professional changes and leave journalism.

Introducing the Theory

The main concern of Serbian journalists is how they handle the loss of their established role. By focusing on their presence within the context of a suppressed media freedom environment, journalists lack space for exercising and publishing accountable journalistic content. The resolution of the main concern relies on establishing the alternatives for journalists in new circumstances. Those individual actions are subjects to freedom of choice, since journalists hold the right to make career decisions independently.

The core category is journalists adjusting to a controlled media environment. Adjusting to a controlled media environment can be done in three ways, either by:

a) Staying and enduring a new media environment - refers to the journalists who refuse to leave the suppressed media environment, while accepting the pressures. Subconsciously or not, they adjust their newsroom activities by adapting to the newly-established atmosphere.

b) Shifting within the media branch - focuses on the journalists who leave journalism, but stay connected or related to the media branch. Their interests shift away from traditional

journalism, due to impossibilities to conduct the work professionally. Thus, they find it more dignifying and moral to stay within the media business by servicing demands of the new industry, or by conducting some other related duties.

c) Leaving the media - abandoning journalism and the media environment refers to the third category within the following theory. It represents real professionals who leave the occupation due to the loss of rights to practice journalism. Their termination is a response to the dying occupation. They feel powerless to change the system, and pessimistic about the possibility that anything could change for the better in the near future.

Valuing a Decision

The process of deciding which choice to make falls under the domain of privacy. Journalists value benefits and challenges of the possible action, and a career change potentially reflects a whole range of interrelated moral, ethical, personal, professional, and individual values. It is a complex personal decision.

Questioning moral and professional values appears as a demystification of an actual role of journalist, within the context of performed profession. By observing the ideal of journalism through the prism of ethical principles, it relies on the practical work based on respect of ethics. Journalism relies on respect of law and professional standards. The decision of an individual journalist whether to remain active, follow the orders and participate in the media censorship, is a sensitive topic that questions and denies the fundamental principles of journalism. By doing that, it denominates the right to a title of journalist, and one becomes a media henchman with a press pass. Paradoxically, controlled media are full of workers who trade professional ethics and personal values, aiming to endure at a workplace as journalists.

Contrastingly, by protecting the personal morale and dignified truthful journalism, those who leave the newsrooms preserve their dignity, and gamble with certainty. Potential threat to the stability of private finances clouds the satisfying moral decision. The devastating fact is that the leaving ones are actually those who believe in the profession, their conscience, truthfulness, public interest and media importance, which is the essence of journalism. Journalists who stop reporting, but shift within the branch, preserve the right to be considered as dignified and moral, except if they are servicing the censor. That chameleon ability to switch from journalism to support of censorship, questions moral principles and

values of the person in their former role. Nevertheless, just on a level of critique. Such former journalists will adjust their acting to the future tasks. In the following sections, I will elaborate further on the three strategies that Serbian journalists do when adjusting to a controlled media environment.

STRATEGY I: STAYING AND ENDURING A NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Journalists working within the suppressed media silently accept to adjust their work to the interests of influential censors. It means that they produce content by prioritizing the needs of those in control of media, whereas the postulates of independent journalism and freedom of information remain neglected. Accepting the imposed rules implies accepting censorship as a part of the job. What is more, stifling freedom of media covertly stimulates self-censorship amongst the journalists. Their obedience is registered and appreciated by the superiors, as well as periodically awarded with salary bonuses. Loyal journalists are recognized as those who work without disturbances, and actively continue working within the controlled media. Staying within the controlled media implies that journalists are subjecting themselves to pressures, consciously or subconsciously. The latter is a common phenomenon among the inexperienced, uneducated or young colleagues.

Generally, the mechanism in which censoring among the media content appears refers to a complex structure of various, interrelated external factors. These factors involve state, political and economic power elite, and ownership structure of a medium. All of the above-mentioned are in favor of using advertising as a channel for implementing control inside a specific media system, while manipulating over the level of financial vulnerability of the media on the market. The fusion of powerful censor's interests cracks down on journalists within the media, through the internal media structure.

Production of news is subjected to economic and political interests. Journalists are subjected to pressures in accordance with their willingness to follow the orders. While obedience guarantees duration of a journalist without the unpleasantness on an internal level of the media organism, disobedience triggers various sanctions- warnings, salary reductions, restrictions, ignorance, penalties, or even job loss. In simple words, they deal with constant fear of potential pressures or additional threats to their private lives, financial existence,

stability of a family budget, as well as the lack of job possibilities. Personally, they cope with shame or abhorrence in relation to the workplace.

On the other hand, by abandoning the postulates of freedom of information, by losing independence and by subjecting to the requirements instead of objective reporting, the obedient ones are propagandists rather than journalists. They lose their professional identity by adopting the imposed rules. From a broader perspective, journalists under internal pressures within the media just contribute to the successful implementation of censor's objectives. The obedient journalists serve as a tool in the hands of those in power.

Sharp turnaround of power roles and influences in the media industry brought new challenges to the journalists, and journalism as we know it. The following paragraphs provide insight into the position of journalists who remain active within the newsrooms in a controlled media environment.

Working by the Rules

Commonly, journalists demonstrate multitasking efficiency in a hectic newsroom on a daily basis. They are expected to show continuous presence of initiative, desire, creativity and devotion, as well as high quality of delivered work, with respect to deadlines and fulfillment of tasks. In a controlled media environment, such as the Serbian, journalists are additionally burdened by censor's demands. New rules treat a reporter as a skilled tool for the best possible implementation of desired interests, under the assumption of independent journalistic content. Since only a handful of professional journalists hold the privilege to perform some other job, or become independently financed freelancers, others are forced to do what the system dictates.

Inside the newsrooms under control, journalists are familiar with desirable and non-desirable topics. Reporting according to the taste of the censor, and production of desirable content clear the path for undisturbed, long-lasting existence in business. Docility creates possibilities for regular wages with potential bonuses. It facilitates good communication and relationship with the superiors, lowers the chances for potential discomfort within the media, and the additional stress. The fear for private life and finances decreases as the journalist's willingness to cooperate increases. On the other hand, subjecting to control denies the existence of that individual as a journalist from the prism of professionalism, ethics and

morality. In the ideal media circumstances, trading with freedom of information, calculating with truth or hiding it, should be punished by introducing bans and conducting legal persecutions. In the context of media control in Serbia, however, such performances are stimulated by the system.

Editors gain instructions from the higher level of the hierarchical pyramid, and silently implement awareness of the topics, people and words that are desirable or non-desirable in the media content. *"And, as it actually happens, when you start making a list of prohibited items, then paranoia develops indefinitely and the list infinitely expands." (Interviewee 5)* Also, the editor is responsible for implementation of rules among the journalists involved in the newsroom, as well as for the selection of news. Simply, journalists are clearly taught what is desirable reporting and which interests they should favor. They recognize non-desirable interlocutors, and know which questions to avoid in the effort to survive at the workplace. In addition, evaluation of the journalist's loyalty and respect of rules is conducted by the editor, who personally monitors and regulates the situation within the newsroom.

Captivity of journalistic freedom is reflected in the lack of critique, and objective reporting about the topics that matter in traditional mainstream media. Those who accept the implemented rules are blind and deaf to the burning social issues. They still recognize, but disclaim important information, and investigative journalism that opposes the interests of media censors. Instead of serious journalism, an illusion of freedom is offered through the excessive publication of irrelevant news, produced by obedient journalists with the support of their editors. "*Media in Serbia from grace I call – Informational Disneyland. No one is dealing with topics related to transition, the fact that citizens are being robbed, that too many highly educated young people are leaving the state, that unemployment is high, etc. Nobody calls anything into question. Satisfying the boss is crucial.*" (Interviewee 7)

The control pattern prevents journalists from doing almost anything in accordance with independent journalism. They produce desired content, so as to secure the stability of their private lives. On the other hand, resistance is non-existent. The journalistic voice is silenced, and the collective spirit destroyed. They act individually. Any trace of disobedience could possibly provoke consequences to their personal finances, professional status, present and future. Unstable and low income restricts and threatens their private lives, while the "disobedient" label aggravates the transfer of that journalist to a different medium.

<u>Accepting Pressures</u>

Journalists remain working in a system of commercial or state-owned mass media, in which the will of the censor is inviolable. What is alarming is that the majority of them, consciously and obediently, accept to participate in this dysfunctional media environment. Accepting control denotes their legally guaranteed rights, freedoms and duties of objective, independent and impartial observers, which is a paradox by itself.

"When journalists start taking care about influential politicians and advertisers present in the media they work for, and when that knowledge stands in the way of deciding whether to run a certain topic or not, then those journalists become spin doctors of a political party or an ideology, and immediately stop being journalists." (Interviewee 5)

From the perspective of media censors, reconciliation of journalists with the enforced rules encounters joy. Those journalists are either willing to do so, disappointed over the years of professional degradation, or focused on mere survival. Paradoxically, the loss of freedom of information and independence is not a number one priority for the interviewed journalist. Complaints mainly regard low wages and existential difficulties. "*Journalists in Serbia are more than exhausted, after many years of mortification on the minimum wage. Simply put, if journalists do not behave as the power commands, it is better to stay away from the profession."* expressed the *Interviewee 3*, while the *Interviewee 2* described journalists as *"the captives of income".* Knowing that salaries among the journalists in Serbia are below the national average, it appears that the main reason for accepting pressures is the fear of uncertainty, job search or changes.

Accepting control is the line of least resistance, from the perspective of professional engagement. Serbian journalists are familiar with inconsistencies in every aspect of media environment. Wage cuttings, dismissals, or empty promises are just a small part of the general collapse of independent media. Many journalists rather agree to follow the imposed control of information flow, than to suffer the consequences of struggling for independent and dignified journalism. In addition, poor legal protection of journalists in practice supported the decrease of resistance among them, and facilitated the growth of fear for existence, and stability of private finances. Those who refuse to be slaves of the media potentates, but continue working as journalists, are goggling with finances in their future.

Paradoxically, an enduring reporter makes compromises by sacrificing journalism in the effort to continue working as a journalist. In order to secure the salary, one adjusts behavior, restrains ideas and thoughts, agrees, and ignores the censorship. Thereby, one is participating in self-censorship, and practically serves as a channel for realizing censor's intentions. On the other hand, any trace of resistance, protest or disobedience hinders stable income. Personal life of a disobedient journalist is more turbulent from the financial aspect.

Endangered journalistic freedom triggers establishment of an atmosphere of fear among the journalists. By the beginning of the second millennium, many of them enthusiastically welcomed democracy. Optimism flourished. Today, they are heavily disappointed. Negative atmosphere reinforces hopelessness, and eases the acceptance of control. Disobedience cannot survive alongside hopelessness, because the latter demonstrates strong domination. As an illustration, the majority of young colleagues are more interested in salary, than principles. To put it simply, activists for media freedom and independent journalism are becoming weak and miss the power of new forces.

For financial and private reasons, out of awareness, or due to hopelessness and fear, journalists who continue working in a suppressed media environment, accept following the rules and coping with additional pressures as a part of their job. Objective journalism and independent journalists are endangered species in the Serbian traditional and mainstream media environment. Those involved in the controlled newsroom production share the same fear of uncertainty and powerlessness, and the same responsibility for the collapse of media freedoms.

Obeying

Internal media pressure leads journalists to reconciliation. It confirms the status of an "obedient" journalist, assent to censorship and self-censorship. Aiming to secure stable workplace and income, obedient journalists under editorial supervision, intentionally or unintentionally avoid the forbidden topics, and fulfill censor's demands. Dutifulness helps avoid the restrictions, and contributes to the loss of integrity and professional dignity. Vice versa, disobeying the media control confirms the morality of journalists, while placing them on the margin of media production. Serious professionals are subjected to various sanctions for respecting the ethics of journalism, instead of business interests.

The great majority of journalists from the traditional media are under control of their editors - who are acting as puppets of the ones in power. Somehow, an individual is not suitable to work as a journalist in a newsroom under control, unless he or she is willing to forget the professional standards once learned. *"While I am writing the news I measure each word, afraid that my editor will either call my name at the editorial meeting, or reduce my salary just because I was doing what a journalist should do."* (Interviewee 1)

Nowadays, if a journalist does not behave as the power commands, it is better to stay away from the media. However, if one claims to practice journalism and produces propaganda or marketing material in a newsroom, then that person should not be considered a journalist any longer. It is an existing oxymoron.

Obeying the censor's interests destroys the core principles of journalism. When political or business interests are a priority, then much information of public importance remain neglected, manipulated or inverted. Journalists in the newsrooms under control are involved in the production of desired content, instead of being the messengers of truth. The principles of truth and accuracy are not fully respected. Docility destroys independence of journalists, as well as their duty to point to the social problems. Sense for accountability excludes real journalists from a controlled media environment. Those who remain working are often required to produce a content that is in connection with the real events of public importance, but reversed in a manner that suites the censor, not the reality.

By rejecting the postulates of independent journalism and truthfulness, some of the journalists who are aware of being involved in informational darkness, may experience a crisis of professional identity, which leaves them deeply dissatisfied, unmotivated and unproductive. On the other hand, those without the sufficient knowledge or consciousness are fulfilling demands without any doubts. According to the personal attitude regarding the media control, obedient journalists are divided in two groups - those aware of the current situation and possible consequences, and those who do not recognize the issue. The first group of obedient journalists refers to the highly educated, conscious professionals struggling between the lack of possibilities for independence, and financial needs. Deeply disappointed in the media environment, but without any alternative, they remain active under the conditions of a suppressed media environment.

"I am a journalist. That is my occupation and life description. My being relies on a deep need to contribute to the society by delivering truth. I despise lie, injustice, business interests,

and still I am where I am. Within a newspaper that lost its dignity by promoting political interests. I have an important story, but not a medium to publish it. I'm angry. I'm labelled. I am yesterday's news in search for a miracle that will deliberate my profession and my being. I am decisively waiting for changes, aware that those are not going to happen. From the perspective of those who left the media, I am simply one more coward. However, deep inside, I feel that I have no other place to go. Print media is who I am. Journalism is who I am. Every other occupation provides more dignity, but then I would lose myself. That is an even higher price to pay." (Interviewee 6)

Contrastingly, those that enjoy the status of being entitled to a role of journalist, without any real knowledge about the impact and relevance of journalism, peacefully work under control. At its best, obedience characterizes the beginners, young journalists or those without rich educational background. Their commitment to fulfilling the orders and satisfying the superiors easily becomes recognizable and awarded. By feeding the will of censors, they undermine the status of real journalists within the newsroom, and reinforce the power position of censors. Unfortunately, many of these colleagues are not even aware how their actions undermine the freedom of information.

Journalists willing to cooperate are highly appreciated among the controlled media in contemporary Serbia. Simply, media rejects objective journalism and agrees on political and economic control, in order to avoid the lack of financial inflows and remain profitable, or competitive on the congested media market. Otherwise, those same media deal with financial difficulties reflected in the withdrawal of advertisers, public accusations from state officials, loss of the respectable status and business sustainability, and gamble with potential bankruptcy. For the media, non-obedient journalists represent an obstacle for smooth business. In capitalist economy, independent journalism is a collateral damage.

Degraded, disappointed, concerned or simply uneducated, crafty or unaware, staying journalists participate in censorship. They avoid additional pressures and get paid for satisfying the censor, thereby securing their work position.

Accepting Censorship

"Unfortunately, almost every media in Serbia nowadays has been reduced only to the level of an advertising brochure. Information without censorship is not a "well-done" category anymore. Rather, it is a serious incident for a journalist " (Interviewee 2).

When the media is subordinated to the advertiser controlled by politicians or tycoons, for the sake of financial survival on the media market, then such an attitude directly affects its news content. Top managerial layers within the commercial media focus on how to maintain sustainable business, or how to gain more profit. Negotiable editorial policy and content production represent goods that satisfy business appetites of all the interested parties. Because of its desire to survive on the market, it offers content that satisfies tastes of the powerful people, and not public interest. Therefore, obedient journalists without the brakes on censorship are highly appreciated.

Interviewee 2 explained that censorship is an expected occurrence since the media in Serbia exist due to poltroons and marketing, and they are inextricably linked. *"To simplify, marketing is created for those who have the money, and they are rich because of dealing with politics. If any person from the "money crowd" in Serbia has something against certain media, they will not pay for advertising. If the commercial media do not have a profitable ad, then it is far more realistic for the owner to open a bakery, than to sell fog through a certain newspaper or television without profit."* As follows, media owners pass requirements onto editors, all in order to satisfy the demands of an invisible interest group. This group is linked to a marketing agency through which the media conducts business. Further on, the editors in service transfer pressure onto journalists, who become productive parts of the mechanism. It is the moment when all levels of the media are involved in the production of censorship. The very act of production relies on journalists, who are familiar with the interests of the media and their financiers. Also, they will be reminded of how easily replaceable they can become.

Instead of free-thinking unbiased journalists, the media forces are represented by subordinated obedient producers of the media content, paid to follow the orders. Otherwise, they suffer consequences- such as ignorance of a produced outlet, salary cuts, warnings or job loss. The *Interviewee 3* experienced advertiser's demands more than once. Once those appear within a newsroom, the pressures are intensifying every new day. *"Pressure sounds*

like: "I will give you the salary, and you know who gives it to you"- who is the interest group behind the scene, even if the media presents itself as independent. Moreover, you know that if you, as a journalist, do something that is not "allowed" by those who provide salaries- starting from tomorrow you will not have any salary or job. It is simply, openly hidden. Lacking another job offer, I had to follow the requirements of politicians at the events that they organize themselves. To interview and honor political "activists" who do not contribute to the society, but they have their regular income flow, while I am struggling to earn at least the half of it. But, everything happens in the newsroom."

Increase of fear among the journalists supports editorial methods for the successful censorship practice. During the data-collection phase, it appeared that journalists within a controlled media environment gather knowledge regarding the possible outcomes of disobedience from the cases of other colleagues. Silence and reconciliation with censorship increase when a colleague is subjected to restrictions, warnings and punishment for being disobedient. The fear of negative possibilities encourages the level of loyalty among others. It supports the fall of resistance, and triggers self-censorship as a defense shield.

Self-censorship

"Self-censorship mutated into a skill of journalists not to think, but only transmit the statements and comments. Most of those know exactly what should be said about a particular subject in order to preserve jobs or be rewarded. Every journalist in Serbia had to self – censure his or her work, and not just once. Journalists are not allowed to criticize politicians, managers, party officials, as well as national singers, starlets, owners of cafes, or similar, in case that person is, for example, a friend of the media owner or general manager. Actually, it seems like the best solution is when the media hangs a list of undesirable people, so that we can simply avoid those names. The problem is when there is no list and the journalist has to pay every lesson high" (Interviewee 7).

The applied complex mechanism for sophisticated media control supports the appearance and development of self-censorship in Serbian journalism. This silent threat to the freedom of press and information deserves a status of the most powerful tool in hands of those, who are presumably the messengers of freedom- journalists. Numerically illustrated, seven journalists involved in this research confessed that they self-censored their work. Those

auto-corrections were not accidental or subconscious reactions – since they were all aware of their individual actions. They knew how self-censorship affected the final media product, and that wrapped information would lose veracity, but they nevertheless signed the content. Also, they did it consciously, regardless of the consequences that their reporting left to the media freedom.

The fact is that the phenomenon of self-censorship exists among Serbian journalists. What is concerning is that the interviewees are aware of its presence, but do not define it as a priority problem. Rather, they describe it as an appearance. *"Working conditions are so miserable, that self-censorship couldn't reach an agenda of issues. Obviously, no journalists who work undisturbed, while claiming that they are never self-censored - are honest. Probably they were just not aware of it, which is even worse. They did it, and probably got a 10 euro salary bonus at the end of the month. In addition, they continued working. Simply, some of the colleagues are not aware of their deeds, or they refuse to confess something so traitorous. One way or another, self-censorship is a pure tragedy for journalism."* (Interviewee 3)

In general, an act of self-censorship occurs as a conscious or subconscious reaction of journalists - as connoisseurs of the social conditions. They know that "undesirable" reporting may, or will provoke some potentially negative consequences, still they exercise it as a protective shield. In its bit, self-censorship is a cynical term. It indicates that journalists censure themselves for no reason. That is not the case, since it occurs because of the pressures. The phenomenon is not unfounded, as it would not occur without a direct or indirect pressure on professional, as well as private lives of journalists. Universal trigger for self-censorship is a mixture of external and internal pressures, and personal fears of the reporters.

Over the past decade, journalists have developed a whole range of effective patterns for successful production of covertly censored media content. Demonstrations of self-censorship are continuous, non-critical reporting about the topics, persons and events of importance to the censor, avoiding questions and problems, and similar. That is the way to manage the "loyal" status within the newsroom. Although it is assumed that journalists are supposed to remain objective and resistant to threats on press freedoms, in Serbian media the higher interest defeats them. *"I am aware that I sold my soul in a way, but to be honest, journalists represent a dust these days. An irrelevant occurrence in the media mechanism. At least that traitorous system will respect my contribution. Otherwise, I am unemployed and the*

society will not appreciate me at all." said *Interviewee 2*, while explaining his self-censorship actions.

The fact that journalists are degraded does not undermine the importance of respecting the journalistic principles, while the act of self-censorship certainly annuls all ethical and legal postulates on which free journalism is built. Moreover, it is a silent killer of freedom of information, freedom of expression, independent journalism, and the basic principles of democracy above all. It strengthens censorship and helps deepen the gap between the media and the society. An act of self- censorship certainly has no right of justification in journalism. What is concerning is the fact that journalists involved in the media environment in Serbia, stand behind the statements that they individually have no objective chances against the system constructed with the purpose to maintain control. Therefore, it is a 'take it or leave it' decision to make.

Experiencing Restrictions

Because of the resistance to the introduced control, journalists also experience sanctions within the media- the representatives of the censor's will. What is more, sanctions help strengthen the control over a complete team of journalists. Somehow, when one of the journalists experiences punishment, editorial control over the newsroom becomes even stronger.

The patterns for control of journalists are similar among the media. It begins with editorial suggestions and intensifies through warnings, classification and labelling of the "obedient" and "disobedient" ones, ignoring the journalists' production, salary deductions and the dismissal of the unwanted. Except for acting internally, the media may punish disobedience on a broader scale. *"New television management undermined my reputation. At collective meetings in front of the colleagues they were saying how I was working unilaterally. Additionally, they spread those ridiculous rumors of me being unprofessional to another media. It was a direct attack on me as a journalist, and professionally I handled it hard, and consequently had health issues. Finally, I filed a resignation"* (Interviewee 11).

Suggestions and warnings refer to the weakest form of punishment. Journalists are advised how to act and which path to follow, in order to continue reporting without disturbances. These measures adjust the working behavior of journalists to the requirements

of the censors. Suggestions and warnings affect the direction of media content production, and reduce later subsequent efforts to correct delivered material. That eases the fulfillment of censor's requests and teaches journalists how to behave in a newly established atmosphere. If these measures fail to produce desired results, the pressure on journalists gradually increases.

The ignorance refers to a silent rejection of a specific disobedient journalist, and on a gradation scale, it appears between warnings and salary reduction. It punishes an individual in a way that he/she loses journalistic voice, and commonly targets well-experienced journalists with a permanent working agreement. Interestingly, the ignorance of an individual's work is most difficult to legally prove as a restriction. Occasional or regular attempts of journalists to deliver the content produced in accordance with the principles of independent journalism, cause ignorance of the superiors. Ethical and expected attempts of serious journalists are considered inappropriate. Thus, the journalist continuously appears at the workplace, and the ignorance nonchalantly continues. *"For six months I was in a newsroom, and regularly reported as I did during the past 17 years. My articles were not being published, and my salary was reduced below human dignity to talk about it. Of course, I knew the answer, but I asked him (the editor) "Why?" The official explanation was that I was not a compatible journalist at the moment. Since all my attempts to change the media were a promise without a returned call, it was obvious that I possessed one cute disobedient tag on my back. I am honored, if I may say. To be marked by that shameless crowd of poltroons makes me proud. It seems like I did a great job. One day I will see the back of my editor, and I will be working again. Until deliberation, I am resisting and waiting."* (Interviewee 14)

A frequently exploited principle of salary deductions punishes journalists who dare to do something that does not comply with the editorial policy, or requests of the censor. *"I was threatened at the Public Service "RTV", that if I did not write what I was told, my salary would go down appropriately. They basically had a price menu for disobedient journalists."* (Interviewee 1) Each of the interviewed journalists is familiar with the salary reduction punishment. The decisions are made by the editors or media owners, while in some cases the advertisers indirectly stand behind such restrictions. *Interviewee 7* lost 10% off her salary because as an editor of a printed "TV Magazine", she announced a TV show in which the guest was a politician who was not supported by the editorial board of the magazine. The

percentage of salary deductions grows with the level of recognized disobedience. It occurs before the termination of employment.

Losing the job is not the toughest restriction, according to the journalists interviewed for the purpose of this research. Regardless of the disobedient label and the unemployed status, interviewees agreed that the termination of contract represented a deliberation of a journalist from censorship, control, and most of all, from the atmosphere of fear. *"The contract is a reason for staying and not doing anything to improve your life and career. Journalists in a controlled environment are paralyzed by the presence of fear. Common sense vanishes. Everyone is afraid what could happen, and everyone is afraid for their working place that actually doesn't exist. It does, but should not be called journalism."* (Interviewee 3).

In addition, as a tool for correcting disobedience, real journalists are constantly reminded of the beneficial status they may achieve by switching to the obedient lane. This method is conducted by constant rewarding of the humble journalists who enjoy a privileged status, in comparison with the punished disobedient journalists. The obedient ones achieve the right to report about important topics, while being repeatedly rewarded with a little extra on the salary, or being prioritized by the editors. *"A colleague with high-school education and the lack of critical opinion came into the newsroom a week after the implementation of a new, appropriate superior editor. She appeared, and a month later she was covering all the important city events. Her reports were non-critical, mild, illiterate, so the editor corrected them in accordance with desired tone. Six months later, her salary was twice as higher than mine. It was almost impossible to track all the rewards and bonuses. I confess that I was devastated. She left for a better job offer, and some colleagues implemented this preposterous model of reporting just to gain more money. So, it obviously works for some colleagues who share the same working environment"* (Interviewee 6).

Obedient journalists are supposed to serve as role models for the others. Experienced, serious journalists recognize the inconsistencies in the work of loyal colleagues. On the other hand, young and adaptable colleagues easily implement the desired model, and independent serious journalism vanishes faster.

Enduring in a Group

A group of professional journalists who share the same desire to practice professional journalism commonly appears inside the controlled media. Simultaneously, they are educated, skilled, talented and devoted to their occupation, and they stick together. The term 'resistant professionals' refers to some trace of inner resistance to the implementation of the censor's will, but not an unbreakable barrier. These independent journalists hold a level of respectable professional reputation in the public. Aiming to avoid the increase of public doubt in validity of published content, the censor smoothly breaks while ignoring the standpoints of the critical group.

The censor labels those serious journalists as obstructionists of the media. They are considered "unsuitable", and the ignorance they experience provokes their silent resistance. Gathered in the same situation and with same ideas, they are opposing the demands more often than the other breakable colleagues. But unity, energy and desire to work professionally, keeps the group of journalists within the media resistant. The contract of permanent employment serves as support to their disobedience, but it is not a guarantee. If the censor decides to fire all the real journalists at once, it will logically provoke anger, legal lawsuits, demonstrations, rise of collective resistance and certainly, the fall of the media's reputation among the public. They are stronger, more influential and more visible in a group. Therefore, a periodical dismissal is a better solution from the censor's perspective.

In addition, if the public loses complete trust in those media, their importance among the financiers may decrease. Lack of money in the budget might provoke financial problems. Also, breaking the group of professionals at once would certainly draw public attention to the negative developments within the media. That is why such a process lasts longer, and the media rather tries to split and weaken the united group of journalist at the inner level, than to rush into additional complications.

"After 15 years of reporting on sports, I was transferred into the web newsroom. All of us influential journalists received a similar transfer, but in different directions. I had nothing to do there. They reduced my salary to a miserable level. Both of my kids are university students, and it was hard to explain to them why daddy goes to work and has no money. I was desperate. I tried to find another job within the media as a well-experienced and well-known journalist, but it was impossible. I am just no longer suitable for any other media environment.

Even being responded to do so, together with my colleagues, we sued the company. It was a hard decision, because this newspaper was my other home. However, I am now aware that it is the same building, but a completely different story. After the positive court decision, the delayed payments came into our accounts within two months. Further on, all of us got used to being ignored, but we are still resistant to demands. We come to work and spend eight hours of our daytime doing nothing. It is better to stay dignified. Regimes change too often. Nevertheless, it is a high price to pay. I am more than thankful for not being alone, and for having great colleagues around" (Interviewee 9).

The sign of media's intolerance to the existence of a specific group is the unwillingness of obedient superiors to tolerate it. The first step in silencing the voice of a group are individual warnings, and then comes overshooting of journalists in different sectors. This is followed by payment delays, restrictions and constant ignorance, while the media is waiting for them to leave on their own initiative.

Becoming Powerless

The rise of discontent prompted the state of powerlessness among the journalists in a controlled media environment. They are standing between professional ethics, independent journalism, morality and private life on one side, and censor's demands, compromises, expectations and rejection of substantiated principles of free information, on the other side. In addition, Serbian journalists fought passionately for the media freedom just two decades ago, and their victory has not been achieved in a manner of sustainability. Disappointed by these previous efforts, they lost their faith.

"Current ongoing are so masterly disastrous, that I may say it is worse now than it was during the war in Yugoslavia. Journalists in the 90's had a choice. They could have chosen to be independent and they would still have a place to work. Of course, the space for independent journalism was shrinking, but there were a few media outlets that represented the voice of the people who weren't "brainwashed". Today, if you want to be an independent journalist, it pretty much means you are going to end up on a street with no job. The place to publish accountable work of journalism is missing. It is not about whether one is a true journalist within the media, or a freelancer. I cannot remember when was the last time I saw uncensored

information in the media. To put it simply, the government is doing a tremendous job. No space for truth. No need for journalists" (Interviewee 1).

Powerlessness appears as a mixture of disappointment and the lack of initiative among the journalists, who struggle on a minimal wage in front of the industrial demands. Journalism is not a free-thinking intellectual occupation any longer. Apparently, even serious journalists perceive their role as insignificant, often being reminded of how easily replaceable they are. After *Interviewee 4* refused to report about an event with a strong political and marketing connotation, his editor said that there were plenty of unemployed people in the city's boulevards, who would immediately fulfill the media demands without any questions, and regardless of being journalists or not. Without any further discussion, *Interviewee 4* was sent directly to the editor in chief's office and got a simple offer – reporting and staying within the newspaper, or immediate dismissal. Fearing for stability of personal finances, he chose to conduct the task.

"I wrote a modified version of the event. In shape that didn't deserve to be published, but somehow it appeared on the cover. I was desperate. Moreover, even after I had done it, I was afraid for my future status within the newsroom. At the same time, I was angry at myself. Out of powerlessness, I took a sick leave for the rest of the week. Journalists do not hold any power nowadays." He illustrated that it was a moment of weakness, a fearful response of the one who does not have any other place to go and continue practicing independent journalism. "Resistance *to the requirements is, suddenly, widely known. So where could I, the unloyal one, go? It is better to accept the situation. Everyone is doing such commissioned tasks, and working obediently during the rest of the time. Fear of unemployment is growing. And nobody trusts the media anymore, which is the advantage from the perspective of a forcefully obedient journalist."*

Unethical reporting, disguised marketing or political media content describe the production under censor's supervision. Somehow, real journalists lost hope and interest for the possibility of changes within the media branch. Unprotected by the Unions, and familiar with the inefficiency of national courts, they reconcile and fulfill demands afraid for their future incomes. Journalists within a controlled media produce desired content, while undermining their personalities. They choose to be powerless in the media. Journalists' alternatives imply departure from journalism, and that means dramatic changes on the professional, as well as the individual level. Fear of changes holds journalists hostages of a

well-organized system of mechanisms for media control. On the other hand, their benefits to this media machinery support suppression of journalism, media freedoms, freedom of information and expression, objective reporting. But even if the serious journalists leave the media, they are replaced within a blink of an eye.

I asked *Interviewee 7*: "*Is it possible to be an independent journalist in Serbia today? Regularly, objectively and truthfully report on current developments and regularly receive a proper salary?*" Without a pause, she denied, "*At some point, all those with regular salaries had to make compromises regarding the fundamental postulates of journalism. Explanations and justifications differ, but the truth is always one. Journalists, who do not agree to write how the government / chief editor / media owner wants, have nothing to eat today. When they refuse loyalty, they often lose their jobs together with their health and social insurances. Therefore, they lose their rights to live.*"

Journalists can choose whether to gamble with personal finances in order to continue trying or practicing accountable journalism, or to reject principles of the profession by accepting new industrial conditions. Except from those engaged with one of the several independent media, others need to decide whether to keep professional dignity, or accept involvement in censorship with a stable income.

Providing Money

Complaints about miserably low wages of the journalists in Serbia are justified. Regardless of the "loyal" or "disloyal" status, their basic earnings cannot cover anything more than average living costs of a single person. Possible salary bonuses, or an extra job might improve the monthly budget. All of the interviewed for the purposes of this research, agreed that it was impossible to live comfortably just by working as a journalist. The situation is even worse for the disobedient ones, who struggle to provide at least a regular income, not to mention all the deductions for resisting control. In a nutshell, Serbian journalists may not be considered stable providers with cozy salaries. Rather, they resemble a group of the powerless living on a minimal income as a chronic diagnosis.

Journalists belong to the poorer segment of society, which is not surprising. Low wages keep them under constant tension. Somehow, I got the impression that masochism relies on the fact that journalists silently accept the status of miserable restrained payees. In addition,

Interviewee 5 also valued the financial and the emotional less than the low income. "*I would say that the average salary of journalists in Serbia is from 300 to 350 euros, which is below the Serbian national average salary of 400 euros. The psychology of underpaid press people is similar to the one described in Franz Kafka's novel "The Trial". An individual lives in constant fear without having committed some punishable criminal act. In Serbian journalists-wages scenario, it seems like they are being punished for doing their jobs, but still silently accepting to live that way for years. It is absolutely paradoxical and senseless.*"

It is quite difficult to understand what makes journalists on minimal wages continue working. For *Interviewee 9*, every attempt to change the media ended in failure, since he was labeled as disobedient. He accepted minimal wages, because the alternative was missing. *Interviewee 14* stated that he was sinking together with free journalism, because he was unable to make the expected compromises for the censors. Since the wages were minimal, and his work ignored, he was resistant: *"They cannot pay us as low, as low our productivity can go."*

Simultaneously, low wages contribute to the stability of media control. Paradoxically, while editors and superiors enjoy luxurious high salaries, journalists on minimal income support further degradation of journalism. Poverty feeds uncertainty, breaks journalist's self-esteem, increases fear and places journalists in an inferior position, in relation to the whole media system. Financial difficulties and the fact that journalists on minimal wages still work, clarify why journalism is perceived as an "undignified" occupation.

From the economical perspective, it is possible to conclude that journalists are not in demand. Their importance among the controlled media is insignificant, from the perspective of media financiers. By contrast, journalists with minimal wages are unable to find another job, so they believe that even low income is better than nothing. Some do not feel like working anywhere else, while others are afraid or lethargic. In simple words, money is not a stimulating compensation for the loss of journalism among the suppressed media.

Lacking Resistance

"Whether I decide to leave or stay within the newsroom, I am defeated by the system. The involvement in a petition against the suppression of journalistic freedom brought me only negative consequences. I regressed. Transferred among the beginners - with required tasks

and a salary, I am fulfilling absurd editorial demands and degrading myself further. Moreover, I lost my brave and smart colleagues. They were either chased away or transferred to the radio. And we are talking about the public service. Come on, where can one go if it is not safe here? Resistance brought me no good. However, I love being a television journalist, so I will remain silent" (Interviewee 6).

The upper layers of hierarchy control every segment of journalism activities. Interestingly, the actual upper layers are the political minions who went down with political changes after the year 2000. Now they re-appeared even stronger, and more determined than before, focused on remaining on top while stifling any trace of opposition. The Journalists' Associations receives so many inside information on how editors act as censors, but it is disheartening that journalists never come forward publicly after their content is prohibited because of dealing with forbidden topics or people, or when they are forced to participate in censorship. *"This is a big problem, and it is the same psychology that was present among the journalists in the late 80s and early 90s, when Slobodan Milošević came into power. The famous "personnel differentiation" was made in those years, which was a euphemism for the real Stalinist purges of politically unsuitable personnel in all sectors, including the media. This move by the government was created so as to stimulate some journalists to step forward and resign, so they could not obstruct the censorship and war propaganda in preparation. It is quite a similar situation nowadays, along with the lack of transparent disagreeing"* (Interviewee 5).

Except for pure silencing of the influential disobedient voices, censors tolerate some level of ripple among journalists, but only within the harmless zone – away from the public sphere. By doing that, journalists experience a certain level of fake freedom in closed groups, that dilutes their anger and possibility for stronger resistance. Additionally, if journalists accept to stay within the suppressed media environment, they remain tied and forced to accept such an environment.

On the other hand, opposing journalists find it quite difficult to switch to a different media. Shifting from one suppressed media environment to another, does not provide an opportunity for releasing the shackles, and practicing independent journalism. Leaving for the freelance journalism introduces an uncertainty, a period of adaptation, turbulent personal finances, and a possibility of failing. Moreover, a number of journalists who were involved in the sharp struggle for freedom of press at the end of the previous millennium, now feel deeply

disappointed by the current events in the media environment. General atmosphere among the real journalists is hopeless, which breaks the collective spirit and completely paralyzes the possibility for efficient resistance. General recovery and proper organization are essential for the rise of counteraction.

STRATEGY II: SHIFTING WITHIN THE MEDIA BRANCH

Loss of space for exercising accountable journalism pushes journalists into alternative directions. Those aware of losing their place within the media coordinate the system, but convinced that the media branch is who they are, switch to involvement in the industry from a different perspective. Journalists are scattered around non-governmental organizations, marketing companies, public relation offices, while some are involved in political parties. The common valid explanation for those actions lies in the preservation of personal morality and dignity. If one is not allowed to report according to the principles of ethics, than one is not a journalist any longer. It is more honorable to provide money by transparently fulfilling the demands of the industry, than to do that same work behind the pretense of journalism.

"I was one among those who succumbed to the media. I realized that I do not want to be a journalist in such a rotten environment, though I was terribly hurt because my colleagues stayed there to fight for free reporting about the real issues. At the time, I had the feeling I abandoned them and ran away. I blamed myself for the decision to leave TV, just because of the uneducated superiors who betrayed the beauty of journalism. I began to hate journalism, although it was not even journalism" (Interviewee 1).

Journalists within the controlled media environment are disrespected and manipulated. They suffer from chronicle disappointment, hopelessness, loss of journalistic personality and professional ideals. In addition, they lack money for private life expenses. The search for a new workplace is the need of those determined to leave the controlled media. The decision to leave maintains a satisfactory level of self-esteem, and opens a possibility for performing a different role within the society.

"The profession of journalists in Serbia is completely degraded, so they search for dignity. Journalists are searching for their purpose. Risking to be declared as a fan of conspiracy theories, I could sign that devaluing of the importance of journalism is conducted intentionally, with the goal to destroy credibility of the media- as one of the, no matter how

pathetic it may sound, fundamental pillars of democracy. In Serbia, all poles of democracy are deliberately compromised. I am talking about independent auditors, while primarily thinking about the executive branch of government, to which the media and journalism serve as important instruments for control over the public opinion, or implementation of desired values into the public opinion" (Interviewee 5).

Journalism is a disrespected call in the Serbian society nowadays. Journalists are commonly equated with liars in the public perception, and generally treated with disrespect. Presence of media censorship, self-censorship and involvement of a large proportion of journalists in the process of concealing information, while neglecting the ethical postulates of the profession, contributed to the contempt of journalism. As *Interviewee 2* said: *"It makes it easier to satisfy political and economic interests when the only expected sources of common sense – media and journalists are considered to be social damage."* It is even easier when true journalists leave the broader picture.

Additionally, the transfer of journalists to other branches related to media does not encounter negative connotation. It is considered to be a moral necessity of common sense, and is often practiced and socially approved. Except in the case when a journalist starts working for the censor - since that refers to a transparent rejection of independent journalism by a professional, who becomes an accomplice in further destruction of journalistic principles.

Adapting

The stage of changing the workplace, even within the branch, involves a period of adjustment to the new business environment. Former regular day of a journalist included a certain level of informalities, and plenty of space for individual work. A common newsroom is associated with the working comfort and plenty of room for socializing, discussions, dilemmas and joy, small talks between journalists during the hectic days, or short breaks. Unlike the media, other jobs refer to a different working routine. The level of experienced freedom to individually control productivity during the working hours, will almost certainly not re-appear.

Non–governmental organizations offer a majority of newsroom characteristics. Similarly, a team of people is involved, and they are supposedly creative, productive and professional, as well as deliberated from the strict working hours routine. A certain level of independence is allowed, collective spirit is present, and the atmosphere allows space for

socializing among the employees. Still, a former journalist may find the business demands challenging. As *Interviewee 1* said: *"We are laughing till tears, and crying together, but still I have never felt so associated with the new team, as I was with the team on television. Simply, the NGO I work for is a small business organization. We burn while fulfilling deadlines and suddenly, the awareness of time shapes us all into the managers – which is not characteristic of journalists. Projects and their budgets are constantly hanging over my head. In addition, people in offices sit a lot. To be honest, my back and legs never fully adjusted to sitting."*

Another challenge for some former journalist is the lack of socialization between the new colleagues, or the use of more formal communication. They need to adapt to the presence of competition among the new colleagues, and to a higher level of discretion regarding some, previously concerned, trivial information. What is more, one adjusts to the fact that their work does not change the external world any longer, but rather produces a possible echo in the public. An ex-journalist constructs a new network of associates, while re-shaping the professional personality within the new circumstances.

Through the period of adaptation, a former journalist may feel excluded or unaccepted. For instance, if one does not find a pattern to overcome difficulties, when without a proper job in the media, adjustment to the new branch may become a long-lasting unsuccessful process. Feeling unadjusted to the office work, unaccepted by co-workers and slightly marginalized in the lack of contact with the inner society seems tough. *«I felt like I missed my importance. Unable to define true problems of real people, I could not stop observing the society. Office tasks were too mechanical, and I envy people who can sit among paper piles for eight hours, five days a week, for forty years. They will never experience the desperation of a forcedly silenced journalist"* (Interviewee 12).

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Switching to NGO Activism

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"Unsuitable" journalists find the NGO sector to be a fertile soil for personal improvement. Progressive career is also a challenging possibility. Former journalists find a chance to use the skills and knowledge gained to contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals. NGO activism erases the idea of internal control, and offers opportunities.

Non-governmental organizations provide budgets for projects that are transparent by default. Financiers are well-aware of how their money will be exploited within a project

framework, but they are not acting as censors, rather as supervisors with the same intentions. In order to succeed, the organization and the journalists are obliged to follow duties and timelines. Direct pressures on the people involved in the project exclude the imposition of the will of the financiers, and rather focus on project completion within the announced timeline. Censor, fear and hopelessness, do not suppress former journalists in the new circumstances. As *Interviewee 1* states: *"Today, when I look at all this media mess, I'm glad that I left television. I think I'm much more able to contribute to the freedom of speech and journalism when working in the NGO sector, then I would have been if I stayed within the media."*

Even if the non-governmental sector offers a possibility for work, not every former journalist possesses the required skills. Further on, there is literally a handful of journalists who are able to get involved within NGOs, and continuously provide decent salaries. The organisations are commonly not financially sustainable. Work is project-based, and the budget relies on the skills of the employees to provide finances from the available resources. The economical sustainability is determined by deadlines, so the fear of uncertainty appears at the end of each project.

Considering the organisations which deal with development of media freedoms, there are independent funds which provide support for various Serbian NGOs and independent online portals, but not as many as there were during the '90s. Currently, it is possible to obtain financial support for projects focused on independent media reporting, researches and similar, but those investments become more complex for the applicants, because Serbia is no longer a high-risk country. Foreign organizations, which helped build free media in Serbia during the 90s, are a bit disappointed. They did not expect that the scenario similar to the one in the 90s could repeat itself. For all the money invested, those financial supporters certainly believe that the result of their investments in Serbia was a failure. Therefore, there is less money offered, and the way of getting financial support for projects is much more complicated. Nevertheless, there is still financial assistance of independent funds for the media projects in Serbia.

"The Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV), its internet portal "Autonomy" as well as the research centre, are exclusively financed through projects, and that is how independence is maintained. The Association does not want Serbian commercial advertisers, because it does not believe in their philanthropy. Freedom of media lies in independent

financial support; even though it does not guarantee long-term economic stability. Nevertheless, I am not sure if anything could provide a stable long-term financial stability anywhere in the world any longer, particularly in countries such as Serbia. So, it takes a lot of effort, knowledge and continuous learning about the application processes to various funds, which support the work of the NGO sector" (Interviewee 5).

Journalists within NGOs are finding another role, while discovering new opportunities and personal potentials. Even if the sustainability of private finances fluctuates, it is related to the project density, and not to the media practice of punishments and rewards. Interests of external sources have different connotations, funding is transparent, while the level of stress and personal inconsistencies is significantly lower. Finding a suitable role is a remedy for the hopeless former journalist.

Sharing the Knowledge

Well-experienced journalists get an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills. Commonly, they train groups of participants throughout the seminars financed by independent sources, and organised by non-governmental organisations. Unless they are educated lecturers in some field other than media, they do not take part in the state educational system. A lecturing engagement refers to a permanent activity, or an additional source of income for an active journalist. Regardless of the frequency, it is a valid substitute for professional satisfaction.

In another role, a journalist has the opportunity to share his or her knowledge and experience with a group of people who are interested in the topic, and could potentially benefit from it. Additionally, trainings and teaching provide enough freedom and space for creativity, so that the journalist can express his or her thoughts and ideas as a lecturer. One gets a chance to directly debate about important issues with course attendants – as a representative of one public stratum. It is a dynamic and intellectually demanding role, and a dignified source of income.

Involvement in teaching non-formally obliges the journalist to continuously follow the atmosphere in the media environment. Adequate knowledge about daily events and situation within the media industry, influences the quality of teaching. It increases its attractiveness. Also, the journalist-lecturer remains connected to the media environment. Moreover,

journalists work as communication trainers across various companies - sharing their knowledge and skills about the adequate use of communication tools.

Additionally, some of the journalists get the opportunity to consider teaching as a source of permanent income. At the beginning, a chance to empower the household budget becomes a logical choice. *Interviewee 10* decided to seriously reconsider her involvement in education, after the informative show in which she was involved was removed from further broadcast on a regional public service, due to a political inquiry.

"Political control over the media is not just rampant, it is aggressive and arrogant. Simply, I have no more desire to waste my life waiting for new political changes, so that I can continue working as a journalist. I love both journalism and working with the youngsters, so I will soon enrol in teaching about the media in high schools. It is a long-term project developed by a non-governmental organisation, financed by a foreign organisation, and approved by the Serbian Ministry of Education. Besides the fact that I will earn a salary, I hope I will learn teenagers how to watch the news properly. I am more than excited, because of the fact that I will have a chance to receive live feedback and public opinion regarding some journalistic issues. And above all, it is a moral and ethical call."

Trainings, panel discussions, and seminars are mainly project-based activities. As those projects shift, trainers rotate as well. Those who demonstrate high quality of work obtain a chance to last as trainers. Depending on the level of personally gained education, they might become full-time lecturers within the state-owned educational institutions.

Servicing Media Censors

Illustration of the media mechanism map seems incomplete without the illustration of its communication vessels. From a broader perspective, general environment is in a subordinate position to the state apparatus, political organisations and tycoons, who hold the power and control over the media environment. These external factors and media in particular, are cross-connected through a network of marketing agencies and PR offices, financed and established by the control bodies.

Journalists, who decide to service the censors, usually switch from media to a network of control agencies. Unofficial job description within the new workplace includes controlling the flow of information, and shaping releases for the media according to the taste of the

censor. Since the former professional journalist possesses the necessary knowledge for differentiating news from the piles of unimportant information, they use it with the opposite purpose. They pack desired content into a proper form, so that the obedient journalists can automatically transfer it to the appropriate media format, without changing the essence, and share it with the public. Therefore, a flexible journalist who does not obtain the right to practice free journalism within the media, finds it more ethical and profitable to work directly for the censor. In contrast to colleagues in teaching, or those from the NGO sector, former journalists in service of the censor may secure a stable income on a long-term basis. Depending on their abilities and practical knowledge about the media processes, they can even progress career-wise.

What comes into question is the personal ethics of a defector. Former journalists are well-aware of how their new role contributes to degradation of independent journalism and free media. They should know that they are acting in support of censorship, self-censorship and propaganda within the media, which directly contribute to degradation of the society they live in. It destroys the trust in media, institutions, system, and strengthens the process of separation between the media and the society. Control over the content of information flow undermines stable democracy, and on a basic human level, it undermines the status of other true journalists, who remain working in the media. However, working for the censor is a legal, complex and demanding call. Most importantly, it is a well-paid job.

"If a journalist contributes to marketing and censorship, then he or she is no longer a journalist. It is more honourable to call the occupation by its real name- "propagandist". It is more dignified to switch transparently to the censor's side, and focus on the production of ridiculous pamphlets, than to sign a pre-ordered article. One just needs unscrupulousness to switch to the other side, but eventually it all falls into place because everyone forgets everything too fast. Nevertheless, it is a disgrace for true professional journalists" (Interviewee 6).

Current media in Serbia serve as channels for distribution of adequate information to the auditorium. Media still has an opium effect on the masses, and constructs the social picture from its own perspective. Two completely different universes bounded by the same borders, exist within the country - the people's and the media's reality. They share the same time zone, same space and location, but show two diametrically opposite images of reality.

Both journalists in the media and those servicing the censors, contribute to the creation of that image.

Changing Sides within the Media

Journalists actively involved in the media under control also switch to positions of internal controllers. Whether one becomes an obedient colleague, informer, loyal editor, editor's assistant, maybe a prolonged arm of an obedient editor, or an internal informer, this type of person uses the knowledge and experience gained to help suppress the information freedom inside the media, and may be not considered a journalist.

It means that an individual finds it more beneficial to follow the interests of the parties close to the censor, than to practice ethical journalism. From the perspective of journalists, such a person is perceived as a snitch. Even though his or her role is officially kept a secret, it becomes recognizable at some point. Commonly, the censor's journalist is present within the newsrooms, receives additional earnings, acts obediently, and avoids sanctions.

"For more than two years others in the newsroom didn't know that she was an active member of the ruling party, and that she earned twice as higher salary than others. She was more than close with the editor, who was a pure puppet of those in power- afraid of his own shadow. Both of them, somehow, appeared in the office at the same time. They had their private meetings behind closed doors, and as time passed, she took over all the topics of public importance. Not one critique was written among the lines she produced, and her journalistic skills were modest. She did not ask questions and she enjoyed great working conditions. Snitches are like soldiers in journalism – determined to fulfill editorial orders at any cost" (Interviewee 4).

Another "successful" example of obedience are journalists upgraded to the rank of editors. Acting as if they had never worked as journalists before, they blindly obey the orders coming from their superiors, aiming to keep the atmosphere within the newsroom as quiet as possible. In return, these editors enjoy high salaries and a good reputation among the censors. They explain their new role as a professional need to follow the industrial changes and demands.

The duties of obedient editors resemble managers in charge of creating the atmosphere of fear between journalists, so as to support obedience and destroy free

journalism. The main goal of journalists in service of the censor within the media is to satisfy the aims of media controllers. Real journalists accept transfers of these former colleagues with contempt, and a sense of disgust.

Starting a Business

Reaching the stage in which it becomes obvious that the abstraction of journalism in practice does not satisfy personal and professional needs, an alternative for journalists is to register their own business. The goal is not developing the journalistic potential, but offering professional services to some parties related to the media industry.

The idea of *Interviewee 13* is a professional, silent assistance of an experienced journalist to independent parties in crisis. *"Clients are law offices that deal with litigations of public importance. Since the media follow certain judicial processes, I assist in sharpening their media announcements. Professional service is needed in urgent situations and during crises. I take care of the rhetoric in public announcements, protecting the media interests of my client. Essentially, I use my rich experience as a journalist to recognize future sequences of events."*

In theory, it is a simple business model, while in practice it is quite complex. The risk of being sustainable on the market provokes a multitasking efficiency of an entrepreneur. Former journalists have experience with a dynamic working environment which occurs in the media as well, but the level of business and financial risk is an innovation. With a desire to last on the market, and regardless of the type of business, new entrepreneurs need to continuously provide high-quality services to the clients, in order to achieve success. Development of a private business relies on the individual's skills to manage potentials and risks, so as to achieve profit. *"I am devoted and engaged in the business. The level of stress I experience now is challenging, while the amount of stress I experienced while working as journalist was far more frustrating. My attempts to practice serious journalism were too often unsuccessful, due to the obstruction of superiors. Now, I finally represent my own work without the involvement of ridiculous censors"* (Interviewee 13).

The main concern of journalists who search for a business idea is how to remain profitable, active and productive at the same time. Becoming an entrepreneur involves administrative tasks as well, which became the major obstacle for *Interviewee 12,* when she decided to register her small business. After two decades of being a journalist, she started a

marketing web portal about dogs. *"Earnings cover my private life expenses, so I am satisfied. Yet, I miss being involved in various events. It is like swimming in a swimming pool, after experiencing an aqua park. In fact, I left journalism and now I feel a bit imbalanced."*

Dilemma of becoming an entrepreneur lies in the need for a good business model. It is not predestined for success. Additionally, devotion to a business idea questions the former journalist's need for freedom and independence. The factor of risk remains, while the potential possibilities depend on the owner's skills, as well as on the overall network of additional circumstances.

Freelancing

Being a solely independent journalist in Serbia is still a tendency rather than a possibility. Simply, it is not sustainable in terms of continuous source of income. Only a limited number of journalists who have an additional, stable source of income have the opportunity to offer their services as freelancers, as they can afford the luxury of freelancing.

Potentially, journalists who have lost their space for practicing accountable journalism, find an opportunity to share their work through some other independent and accountable Internet media. Since those portals are struggling with continuous funding as well, journalists get periodical, minimal or symbolic fees for their contributions. Part-time freelancing is more about the moment of freedom, and a little extra on the monthly budget.

Journalism and journalists are endangered species in Serbia, trying to find some new territory, on which they could build some sort of space for themselves. This space is called the Internet. In fact, only on the Internet in Serbia you can find something that resembles journalistic content. This refers to investigative journalism, analytical and critical journalism, and people who may use authority to help the Serbian population understand the social processes around them. The problem lies in the fact that the Internet media lack funds for hiring freelancers.

"Journalists are some kind of the Mohicans. The only question is whether they will be the last of them, or will somehow manage to fight for that new space dedicated to different rules - in which there is a code of journalism, which can and must be managed as a basic pre-requisite, and financed from the so-called independent sources. That is the area for independent journalism, with less or absolutely no commercial advertisers" (Interviewee 5).

Finding the appropriate model for practicing sustainable freelancing points to the fact that freedom of journalism must be generally respected. While the sphere of information falls under control of political and economic power, every other upgrade is unfounded. Without a secure base in the form of serious journalism within the present media scene, at this point, freelance journalists are almost condemned to failure in terms of economical sustainability.

<u>Finding Moral Satisfaction</u>

Valuing pros and cons of working as a journalist in a suppressed media environment, and shifting to another position appears, above all, as a moral act. It is healing, especially for those with firmly grounded knowledge and belief in the fundamental principles of free journalism. In addition, the search for an alternative is the need of unsatisfied professionals who lost places for practicing serious journalism.

By contrast, those who remain in the newsrooms and become propagandists instead of journalists, justify their decisions by claiming that their families would have nothing to eat if they lost their jobs. However, if an argument relies solely on financial needs, then it is not a valid excuse. Miserable journalistic salaries may not be a valid explanation for subjecting to pressures. In fact: *"It is more honorable selling fruits and vegetables on a traditional market, than selling fog through media. It is as if the doctor who practices medicine does not respect the Hippocratic Oath, under the pretext that he or she wants to earn more money for raising children. Also, I suppose there are some sanctions such a doctor had to bear. In journalism, unfortunately, excuses still exist without any serious punishments for professional immorality. Journalists agree to work in the media in a manner that suits the political figures, under the excuse that they have to ensure the existence of their children, and whether these children will be ashamed of such a journalist - does not matter"* (Interviewee 5).

Journalists lose the right to report in a truthful, objective and unbiased manner. If it depends on the state apparatus and the commercial interests which neglect the public interest, then it is honorable to leave the media. Since there is no opportunity for practicing independent journalism and ensuring a decent income in another media, the search for a new role is an expected move from the ethical standpoint. Leaving introduces various new challenges and possibilities, without a prolonged degradation of personality. It provides moral satisfaction.

STRATEGY III: LEAVING THE MEDIA

Labeled as disobedient and without a place to publish, journalists are being silently forced to leave the media. Without a secure chance to continue working in the near future, they become professionals who are giving up their jobs, identity, lifestyle. Beaten by the system in their efforts to change the society for the better, many define withdrawal as an honest decision. Future career seems like a challenging task, and the current on goings as an obvious collapse of democratic principles within the country.

"Being a sea fish in a regular water aquarium means that the environment is killing me. I reject the introduced media circumstances with my entire being. If I do not leave, the fish tank will suck me in or, eventually, reject me as a foreign body. Leaving is a moral precaution." (Interviewee 2) The wave of those who do not believe that the future will fix the stifling of freedom in the media industry, or that the control will vanish, try to find a different side of their personality. A different job, environment, a different role or duty.

"Courage, burnout or impatience?!" I asked. *Interviewee 4* replied: *"Common sense."* The majority of active journalists in Serbia experienced sharp turbulences during the past three decades. *"I felt an upswing of belief only at the beginning of the democratic regime establishment. Now, journalism has fallen lower than ever. Without any sense, control took over all strata of society. Authoritarianism retook over the media. Before, I worked stimulated by the desire to make a difference. I have no more trust and energy to fight against demagogy, while surviving on minimal wages. No more strength to silently watch lies served in plastic gift bags. If one convinces oneself that baking cakes makes the world a better place, than this desire will overcome other personal difficulties"* (Interviewee 4).

Decision path through the possibilities points to the exit. Former journalists who completely left the newsrooms, needs to recover, silence their journalistic voice, calm the temper and examine the opportunities. One may be unemployed for a while, or choose to continue with education, completely change the branch or leave the country. In addition, rejection of the previous lifestyle occurs, and the professional perspective changes.

<u>Losing Hope for Journalism</u>

After being conditioned to create a lie about how Serbian youngsters refuse to work, even though there are plenty of jobs available, *Interviewee 11* decided to quit working as a TV

journalist on a Regional Public Service. Before leaving, on an advertising board in the hallway, she posted a note saying: *"Censorship lives here"*. Someone removed it within an hour. *"Paradoxically, and as an illustration, me and my editor had received the European award for the best "news magazine", for the episode about the genocide in Srebrenica. This happened just one week before we were informed that our informative show was cancelled. A purely political decision. Simply, working in a suppressed environment is no longer an option."*

Generations of journalists passed through numerous turbulences in the Serbian media during the past three decades. Hope vanished, and reappeared in waves during the past twenty years. It arose with the introduction of democracy. Afterwards, faith in journalism was never so vivid as before. *«Expectedly, disappointment appears as the result. The media miss journalists, reporters miss guts, both of these lack money. First ones buy real journalists, who, in contrast, would never sell themselves to the first… We are just a long way from press freedom. And this theater has lasted for years."* (Interviewee 2)

Instructed by the experience of older colleagues, young journalists do not wait for the circumstances to change for the better. *"I will not waste much more time and patience on this. I wish to have private life as well, and not spend myself on some broken ideals. Journalism will never recover, so I must stop daydreaming about changing the society and the country. In fact, I must stop being a journalist and I am terrified"* (Interviewee 10).

The social status of journalists is degrading. They are not allowed to work independently, they are struggling on minimal wages, and being subjected to internal and external pressures. As any other employed person, a journalist is also trying to secure financial existence. At the same time, he or she is juggling with diametrically opposite standards of independent journalism on one side, and the media needs on the other.

While talking with *Interviewee 7*, at one point she suddenly stopped, took a deep breath, made a short pause, and said: *"Demands destroyed journalism. During the last year, I was seriously considering dragging. Not because I was not a productive journalist anymore, but because journalism in Serbia lost its sense. I'm not a quitter, and as long as there was a glimmer of hope that situation could change for the better, I fought. But in vain, because the Serbian media system is conducted in a manner in which the journalists are not necessary. For that reason, I am considering buying a house and some land. I might start producing wine. Right now I have no idea how to do it, but I will learn. I could provide enough money for a proper life, and save a bit of health and nerves for the future".*

Displeasure, disappointment and exhaustion appear as a result of journalists' struggle. They are tired of working in an environment with low respect, or complete disrespect of the ethical standards of journalism. In addition, those who left the controlled media environment describe their decision as moral and valid. The period that followed introduced a search for personal and professional realization, filled with emotional turbulences until the reconciliation.

Healing

Leaving journalists experience various phases in the process of departing from the media. After the saturation of negative energy and disappointment, liberation and healing begin. Journalism does not refer only to the occupation, rather it is a lifestyle that shapes specific personal characteristics of those involved in it. Individuals adjust their habits to a dynamic lifestyle, full of social activities and various people in the stream of numerous information and arousal. Stepping away from that kind of harmony or disharmony concentrated on a daily basis, introduces an enormous emptiness in the life that follows.

Trained to mark every inconsistency in the society, some former journalists found it difficult to accept living with social issues, without the power to make them public. The healing period represents a struggle with the lack of dynamics in life, and the search for personal purpose. "Meaningless" is the word which best describes the feeling that a jobless journalist experiences after the loss of workplace, and the space for publishing accountable journalism.

"After five years of not being a journalist, I am still disappointed. Today everyone can work in a newsroom, as long as they play by the orders. After journalism, I began working in the office, and it was kind of a nightmare for me. I missed dealing with plenty of information. Sitting for eight hours exhausted me, and I felt trapped. After two years I resigned and registered my own business. Being independent again feels good" (Interviewee 12).

Having been prevented from performing a whole range of tasks, while giving their whole personality, former journalists deal with a complex loss. It is not just a financial difficulty. Journalism insists on passion, complete devotion, extra time, continuous engagement. Losing it requires in return a good business idea, adaptation to the new circumstances, time flow or an adequate substitute from the perspective of devotion. *"An*

ideal solution to me was becoming a parent. By giving birth to my daughter, every trace of emptiness after losing the job as a TV journalist was gone. It is a ridiculous fulfillment in comparison to parenthood, so I was instantly healed. I was flooded by a stimulant of higher intensity, and I had no time to grieve over my career. After my second child, I hanged my BA Journalism diploma on the wall, and decisively enrolled in a school for massage therapy" (Interviewee 15).

Within free competitive media environment, one could expect to heal dissatisfaction by shifting to a different media. In Serbia, possibilities for journalists to change the media were present even during the 90's, whereas nowadays the general market is contaminated. All the doors are closed, especially if one is labeled as disobedient.

"Inside of me is still that childish hope that something will change for the better. If I was different, I would probably drown in despair. Even more frightening is a humble withdrawal from the unprofessionalism of superiors, who know less than the journalist forced to leave. A blessing in disguise is that many good journalists are now in the same situation. The curse is that no one has a proper solution. We rely on the strength of united force. Even if no one actually cares now, our status must attract attention at some point. I will heal from journalism, but I will never lose hope in media deliberation." (Interviewee 10)

The combination of removing a serious journalist from the newsroom, and domination of the silent media control, does not entirely silence the voice of the first. Even in the process of healing, even if satisfied at some other level of life, serious journalists use every opportunity to share the opinion and knowledge regarding the on goings in the media industry. It does not mean that one is not healed, simply that the insurgency or the hunger for spreading the truth hardly dies after one has experienced journalism.

Reaching a Breaking Point

If fear develops as a result of mental and physical exhaustion, anger appears as a healing reaction. As a relief for disappointed journalists. *Interviewee 13* illustrated one shape of its appearance. *"As my maternity leave ended with unemployment instead of return to the newsroom, and after years of reporting for daily newspapers on a maximum capacity, I returned as an active honorary associate, but did not receive any payments for four months.*

When all of my knowledge, beliefs and hopes vanished, I became furious. Anger helps overcome all turbulences that follow. Anger leads to recovery."

After experiencing the stress of losing a job, or professional identity, and due to the impossibility for a decent settlement, some former journalists experienced a rise of rage. It is reflected in the fact that one conciliates with inconsistencies in the media branch, by leaving them completely behind. Aware that the issues are not about to be solved in the near future, one focuses on personal needs and possibilities.

"I was not thinking about the consequences, or where I was about to end after that. Enough was enough. I stood up, furious at the fact that I reached the bottom of my being. Not even turning off my PC, I went straight to the editor's office and said "I resign". I will never forget his cozy eyes. Not a bit of support. That made me even angrier, but determined to leave after all the wasted years and fulfilled demands. I took a sick leave during the month of the resignation period. I needed to heal. Better unemployed with dignity, than psychically destroyed with a miserable salary." (Interviewee 4)

Anger appears when the personal dignity collapses. Its best purpose is to serve as a channel for faster recovery of the leaving journalists. Unfortunately, not all of them experience it, so not every journalist can use it as a healing method. It emerges as a response to powerlessness, exhaustion and disappointment of a true professional.

Experiencing Unemployment

While the jobless status is quite depressing for laid-off journalists with a huge desire to contribute, burned-out colleagues use it as a healing period before the appearance of new challenges. Accumulating the energy and harmonizing thoughts and emotions, is necessary before one can decide which road to take. Unemployment offers the space necessary for overcoming personal doubts.

Status cycling from the active reporter to the unemployed journalist refers to a dynamic change on the professional level. Additionally, emotional aspects, plans and intentions are involved. Former journalists had been used to continuous stimulation, and then seemingly indefinite silence occurred. A dynamic working environment keeps an individual socially involved, even during the phases of productivity lull. Loss of a workplace makes a sharp cut to the lifestyle of a journalist.

After the very act of leaving the media, a former journalist is still in some kind of relation to the newsroom. Interlocutors, informational sources, and curious colleagues will hold the life a journalist vivid for a while longer. Afterwards, before the final ending, unemployment bureaucracy starts dominating one's daytime activities. *Interviewee 4* needed almost a whole month between the resignation and the awareness. He illustrates: *"For three weeks I was not aware that I was out. My comrade colleagues often called, and we analyzed my move and the events that followed. Practically I was yesterday's news in the company that same afternoon, but from my personal perspective an after-shock illusion had lasted until I woke up three weeks later, and realized the emptiness. My phone did not show missed calls or messages. I finished my morning coffee just by watching TV. I woke up from journalism and it was one completely forgotten morning. It felt healing"*.

As the time passes, a former journalist needs to make a decision about his future path. Refusal of the imposed rules within a controlled media environment, places one on the crossroads- staying and accepting the pressures within the branch, or moving into the opposite direction. Such an important decision commonly refers not just to the conscious calculus, but also to the individual initiative and a present network of positive promising circumstances.

Shifting Branches

Entirely changing the occupation is a solution for the journalists who are sure that the media environment does not offer possibilities for independent work any longer. In addition, they believe that they cannot perform any other work within the media industry, and do not have faith in positive changes, needed for the recovery of journalism in the near future. Complete turnover of occupation represents the need of former journalists to exclude themselves from the system in which they were considered unnecessary.

The decision is reinforced by anger, excessive stress and hopelessness. It refers to the resignation of common sense, in front of the media control establishment. The amount of courage is required. As *Interviewee 14* illustrated his experience: *"Grandfather's land, that I had inherited, waited too long for the collapse of journalism. I confess that I needed to learn more about agricultural techniques, and it seemed a bit challenging. Before my 40th birthday,*

I thought that being a farmer was the most boring occupation in the world. Obviously, I needed maturity and a full carriage of broken ideals to realize how relieving and demanding it is."

The factor of challenge inflames the desire of a former journalist to dig into a different business field. Except for the pure need to make profits and the effort to survive at a new workplace, one must find certain stimulation within the new tasks in order to achieve positive healing.

"Faced with the fact that my job did not exist, I returned to studying as a 50-year-old former journalist. I passed five missing exams, and became a graduated sociologist. Three months later, I felt stage fright in a classroom full of school kids. The trick is to not allow them to tap into your insecurities. I got it by now. After returning to my first passion, I feel completely recovered" (Interviewee 9).

If the factor of satisfaction with the new role is absent, then the loss of opportunity for independent journalism may turn into a lasting trauma. A different job may be perceived as a permanent occurrence. Long period of devotion and development in journalism may present an obstruction on the former journalists' road to achieving their full potential in some other field. Desire must be involved in the decision to perform different tasks. In other words, the sole need for regular income is not sufficient for professional satisfaction.

Moving Abroad

Permanently leaving the country is not a decision founded on one single life aspect. People leave dissatisfied with the social environment, working conditions, lack of perspective for achieving life goals, or because of discrimination and similar. Also, migration can be triggered by positive occurrences, such as an emotional relationship with a foreigner. But when a native speaking journalist decides to move from the country of origin, then motifs are strong.

In the introductory lecture of journalism studies, *Interviewee 10* remembers being welcomed along with the other colleagues, by the respected professor. He had a sharp statement: *"If you are considering leaving the country after these studies, then it is wise to leave this institution immediately. Globally, journalism is a privilege for a small number of colleagues. And, to be honest, it would be easier to* find *a job abroad as a mechanic. Do not waste your time."* She stayed, and for the following twelve years never thought about moving abroad. *"Seven of my closest colleagues migrated, and I cried at each farewell party. But since*

all the journalists, including myself, have been removed from the media, I am also considering leaving this mess. I won't go far away. The region seems reasonable to me."

Journalists residing abroad rarely get the opportunity to work within the branch again. Except for those who speak the language of the country they move to, all the others experience a language barrier at the beginning. In addition, media associates and correspondents on a global level become more and more useless, since the media can hire a freelancing expert on a short-term, and for less money. The problem of newcomers is the fact that they rarely have wide and detailed knowledge about the history and the present of that specific society. Therefore, it is even challenging to enter a local newsroom. On the same start line, they lose the race to other domestic colleagues.

Migrating out of dissatisfaction and hopelessness that the working conditions will change for the better pushes journalists into various directions. *"I am aware that I will not be a journalist in Sweden, but I will search for another way of social engagement"* (Interviewee 11). Around ten percent of her colleagues from the journalism department moved abroad since graduation, so she is informed about the challenges and opportunities. *"They all continued studying and absolutely shifted the branch afterwards. For example, from journalism one ended up being a cabin crew manager in the "Emirates" Airline, the other is a professional sommelier in Miami, and the third one is a tour guide in Rome"*.

Adaptation to the new way of life requires time. Depending on the personality, some former journalists will quickly get used to the new life environment. In contrast, others may regret the loss of time and patience spent on the path of becoming a journalist. Regardless of the status, moving into a new country excludes constant presence of friends and family, which introduces a new wave of emptiness. Recovery and new beginnings insist on a high level of motivation, so one needs to find a way for social inclusion. Otherwise, another opportunity is wasted.

Silencing the Journalistic Voice

The final phase of reconciliation with the loss of place for exercising ethically justified journalism is an arbitrary suppression of the inner journalist. Silencing the journalistic voice refers to the most demanding step towards full recovery of a former journalist.

"They (the censors) received my resignation, but they will never kill my ambition to advocate the betterment of the society. Whistling from a crowd of people with violated rights is who I am. Fighting for the better world is a responsibility." (Interviewee 11)

Depending on the personality, not all of the interviewed former journalists want to keep their voices loud. The explanation lies in the wish to finally complete the traumatic healing from journalism, or in belief that holding information without a possibility to share it publicly, negatively impacts the possessor and slows down general recovery. Professional journalists covertly forced to leave the media, are victims of the system. Innocent refugees from the media. *"Being removed is a favor. It is an official recognition towards the high quality of my work. I was a journalist from the earliest childhood. Knowing everything about the people around me was my talent, but I kept the information to myself. That is what I am doing now. Blissful ignorance. Completely painless to me"* (Interviewee 13).

In fact, former journalists decisive to leave the branch, need to adjust to a life without involvement in the media production. From the perspective of public spokesmen of truth, they became part of the public they used to inform. However, the journalistic voice will not completely vanish. Eventually, it finds its path to be released. Social networks represent an opportunity for the consumers to share their opinions within a private, or public connection network. A topic of interest is discussed on private blogs of the former journalists. Depending on the person who is being silenced, the need for sharing may not last forever.

"For a couple of years I used Facebook to share topics that disturbed my journalistic temper. However, it did not help me feel better. Instead, I was discussing issues with a group of people who shared my point of view. It was neither a contribution, nor an eye-opening action. It was just a desire of an individual to share something. Zero effect" (Interviewee 15).

After all, silencing the journalistic voice is a possibility within a traditional media environment. However, in accordance with the personality of the silenced one, this characteristic hardly gets completely eradicated. It may exist covertly, inside the individual, waiting for its chance to come out.

CHAPTER 4: WEAVING THE THEORY INTO EXISTING LITERATURE

While considering what is new in the theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media, and in comparison with theories offered in the existing literature, personally I find plenty of new perceptions. From the initial idea until the finalization of this thesis, I failed to find literature in English or Serbian that deals exclusively with the status of journalists in a controlled media environment, in the context of a country with the status of long transition into a fully implemented rule of democracy. In fact, the closest to my topic of interests was the comparative research about journalistic self-censorship conducted by Marc Jungblut and Abit Hoxha (2015). They interviewed journalists from Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia and compared findings in the effort to understand why, and how journalists in former Yugoslavian countries auto-censure their work. Their focus of research slightly resembles my actions, but the research techniques, methodology, the topic and the outcomes of the research significantly vary. In fact, the theory conceptualized in this thesis presents current and future work possibilities of the journalists who lost their working environment due to business demands and political control. On the other hand, Jungblut and Hoxha observe the self-censorship phenomenon as a legacy of warmongering and propagandist journalistic practice under the former autocratic regime.

Generally, when controlled media in transitional societies are in the focus of interests, then authors commonly discuss the rule of different political regimes. For example, as Rade Veljanovski does in the *"Media and State in Transition"* (2009) or James Curran in the *"Media and Society"* (2010), they judge a level of achieved rule of democracy within a society, in accordance with the level of achieved freedom of information. In fact, information control and media science are topics often related to political theory. Therefore, the endangered role and importance of the media and journalism are characteristic for literature that digs into the problematic of communistic countries, as well as into the media systems of totalitarian regimes.

Endangered status of journalists is often observed through the prism of a system's failure to comply with the rule of law. Neglect and suppression of press freedom are linked to disrespect of the basic human rights. Censorship appearance is theoretically perceived as a mechanism for strengthening certain political power. It is also defined as a pattern for stifling

free flow of information and ideas, and as a sign that democracy collapsed in practice – as recognized by author Želimir Kešetović (1998) or Rade Veljanovski (2012).

Additionally, literature that deals with journalists in various socio-political circumstances usually draws conclusions regarding how much they obey, or disobey professional ethics and principles of accountable journalistic practice- as Johan Retief writes in *"Media Ethics*" (2002) and Kovach and Rosenstiel in *"The Elements of Journalism"* (2007). Inconsistencies in objective reporting, as well as the complete news production is labeled as the responsibility of journalists, and insufficiently questions the impact of editors, media or the business model on the news content. "Journalists make the news just as carpenters make houses and scientists make science" (Curran, Schudson, et. al 2010: 165). Yet, plenty of advice on how to deal with various challenges is offered to the journalists (e.g. John Wilson *"Understanding Journalism"* (1996)). However, observation from the perspective of journalists as human beings and not only the messengers of the truth is often neglected.

Contrastingly, the theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media which is introduced in this thesis, exclusively strives to understand the status of journalists within complex unfavorable circumstances in the Serbian media. The existing literature already offers detailed insight into what a democratic society should expect from journalists, and how they should overcome the challenges while aiming to practice accountable journalism. Yet, the theory offered in this thesis provides insight into what actually happens inside the controlled newsrooms. It does not observe journalists simply as the defenders of truth, democracy and professionalism, but rather as a group of skilled individuals in front of the great issue. Loss of place for publishing accountable media content strikes their personalities, personal lives and expectations. Yet, such or similar theories I did not find. Some resemblances may be recognized in relation to employees who lose their workplace in some other closely specialized branches, or outdated industries, without a real possibility to find such a job again. Also, extinction of some sectors of the economy resembles the loss of free media space.

However, the complete insight into the current on-goings is not possible without encroaching upon derived postulates of independent accountable journalism, and the importance of such an ethical practice to the society. In addition, establishment of free journalism in the ideal democratic social circumstances negates any trace of informational censorship, regardless the fact that it did not hold a negative connotation throughout various

periods of history. Therefore, the following paragraphs of this chapter offer a theoretical overview of the censorship in media content production and the fundamental journalistic principles. In fact, these stand as counter- arguments to the current inconsistencies on the Serbian media scene with purpose to distinctively enlighten the presented theory of Journalist Adjusting to Controlled Media.

CONTROLLING THE INFORMATION

The presence of media censorship indicates that fundamental principles of journalism have been violated in Serbia. In fact, a high proportion of propaganda and marketing in the news illustrates that journalism loses its role in confrontation with the new business demands. Serbian public is missing real news, as the controlled media rejects objective journalism. At the same time, journalists lose the autonomy and the opportunity to work by ingrained principles. In such circumstances, the influence of the interest group grows stronger in the media, and the censorship practice progresses.

The following section provides insight into the understanding of media censorship and self-censorship. It is conducted in accordance with the relevant facts provided by the existing literature, and with my own research findings. The main intention is to clarify the basic characteristic of censorship as the control pattern that denies ethical and accountable journalistic practice in the context of a democratic society.

Decomposing Censorship in Media

Seemingly, censorship[33] is a very simple mechanism for prohibiting or protecting, (depending on the context and the perspective) public or institutional, written and spoken word. It refers to the controlling tendencies of the state power elites towards the social environment, since they hold such an opportunity, and use it to ease the intentions to stay in power. In a nutshell, the mechanism of media content control suppresses the freedom of speech and expression. It hinders the smooth circulation of information and ideas, and interferes or restricts

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[33] The term censorship is derived from the Latin verb censeo (to- tax, value, judge; to- conclude, decide, determine), The *Oxford Living Dictionaries* (2016)

responsible journalism. The presence of censorship undermines democratic processes within a society- covertly, or under the pretext of business demands.

Universal definition of the term censorship encounters difficulties. The phenomenon stood for various concepts throughout the epochs, so the term "censorship" holds a number of positive and negative interpretations[34]. Yet, the theoretician Michael Scammell offers a definition applicable to connotation of the media censorship in a democratic society. "Censorship, for all practical purposes, is the systematic control of the content of any communications medium, or of several or all of the media, by means of constitutional, judicial, administrative, financial or purely physical measures imposed directly by, or with the connivance of, the ruling power or a ruling elite" (1988: 10).

In the narrow sense, media censorship refers to an act of forming the economic and state power alliance in order to prevent writing, publishing, broadcasting, or distribution of certain information. It is a wall between the business demands, and the public sphere.

Official censorship is based on a law or decision of state authorities in a particular legal form and procedure. Unofficial censorship does not draw power from the law, but from the conviction, or inexorable economic and political pressure. Scammell (1988) states that censorship may be accompanied by violence, it may include propaganda, and it may be absolute, but not necessarily. If all communication media are in force, then censorship is total. "Partial" or "selective" censorship appears when the control is exercised selectively, yet "random" censorship intends to intimidate and inhibit. However, regardless of the strength and frequency, once practiced media censorship is hard to eradicate.

The role of the censor commonly belongs to the state and its institutions, but also to the church, various social institutions and individuals. It can be performed by the public or loyal citizens as well. However, the latter is recorded in areas with low levels of literacy among the population, and in authoritarian political cultures without democratic traditions and institutions. Censorship is usually in the hands of authorities, and it demonstrates dominance

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[34] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines censorship as: "The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security". The *Webster's New World Dictionary* define censorship as the a) Act or a system of censoring; b) the work or position of a censor; (1976:230); By *The Encyclopaedia of Political Culture*, the censorship is a policy of restricting public expression of ideas, thoughts, conceptions and impulses that undermine (or are able to do so) the ruling authority or the social and moral order which protects the authority." (1993:139)

of the censor's power over the message recipient. Apart from having priority access to information, the censor holds a privilege of selecting and distributing those to the public.

The essential elements of the notion of censorship are: a) the censor (state and its institutions, market, the author); b) the message (idea, information) whose content is unacceptable for the censor; c) the media as a distributor of the message; d) the recipient and the sender of the message; e) the acts of bans created in a way to prevent the seeding of messages (Kešetović, 1998: 19). Throughout its long historical presence, censorship is divided into three basic types: preliminary (preventive) censorship, retroactive (suspensive) censorship and self-censorship. Although self-censorship is often excluded and defined as a separate phenomenon, its impact and importance are by no means negligible, especially within the context of journalism. Equally, all three types share the same degree of danger to the media freedom.

Preliminary Control

Control interventions of the censor before publishing or broadcasting refer to the preliminary, or preventive, censorship. This classic form includes a ban on the publication of specific content. Work of an author passes through the control of responsible authorities prior to being released into the public sphere. "The prohibition applies to all formal and informal procedures of "critical reading" of the unpublished materials. Although the process opposes the modern conception of human rights, it is applied in many countries" (Kešetović, 1998: 29). It is an obstructive mechanism of selective informational transmittance, as well as a shield between the objective news production, and the public.

In relation to the daily press, this control protocol largely triggers negative economic aspects. For example, a delayed publication of information initiates the loss of exclusivity and public trust in that print media. With the decrease of quality, such newspaper loses its market attractiveness and profit. Contrastingly, preliminary news censorship is easier to conceal among the electronic media, due to a faster exchange of information. Finally, the mechanisms of preventive censorship rely on the censor's guidelines and directives followed by the media owners and editors. Usually, there is no written proof of arrangements between the ordering party and the executors, thus those are hard to document.

Retroactive Control

When a censor reacts towards already released media content, the retroactive or suspensive censorship is in practice. The censor puts pressure on the media or the author, because he/she personally disagrees with the publication, or disapproves it. In fact, this type of control may involve any legal action against the disputable material already available to the public. This includes destruction, burning, and seizure of means by which it is created (computers, video cameras, voice recorders, etc.).

Democratic systems legally approve suspensive censorship, by entrusting censorship functions to the courts – as the law-abiding institutions (Kešetović, 1998). Ideally, a court treats the case, equally respecting the public good, the censor and the material. In some other systems, the decision regarding the seized material is only in the hands of the censor.

The latter described behavior was practiced in Serbia under The Law on Public Information from 1998[35]. The government created a flexible law, in support of its tendencies to exercise the media control in accordance with political needs. Under the pretext of producing content aimed against the public good, journalists among the opposing media suffered a whole range of legally approved punishments (abduction, imprisonment, threats, bans, even assassinations, such as the one of a reputable independent journalist Slavko Ćuruvija in 1999[36]).

Defining Self-Censorship

The concealed tendency of an author to adjust the content to the taste of a censor refers to self-censorship. It is a silent and powerful threat to the freedom of information, ideas and establishment of democratic rule. Self-censorship is an individual act of an author who is very familiar with demands in the current socio-political or economical context, yet limits himself/herself with or without clearly identified threats.

It is: "the individual self-restriction of one's freedom of speech. In specific, journalists realize that reporting on something would do more harm (to themselves or to others) than good and therefore refrain themselves from covering particular events" (Jungblut and Hoxha,

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[35] Law on Public Information, adopted by National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on 20th October 1998
[36] Committee to Protect Journalists'

2015:5). In fact, the authors are "toning down the truth or even ignoring stories" (Retief, 2002:222). By self-modifying its work, one is avoiding possible preliminary or retroactive censorship. In addition, tailoring information potentially shields a whole range of private matters- finances, workplace, family, career, etc.

The act of self-censorship is rooted in a repressive media environment. It actually illustrates the level of non-achieved freedoms within the context of journalism. "Self-censorship appears when a journalist or writer is faced with a brutal choice in case of disagreement with the views of the censors: either he remains silent, thus disqualifying himself from his proper work and condemning himself to helplessness and penury, or else he suppresses or disguises those of his views and ideas that he knows will not pass the censor" (Scammell, 1998: 17). In other words, the author produces with the aim to satisfy a possibly dissatisfied censor, while disrespecting ethics and professionalism. Theoretician and journalist Marko Lopušina (2015), sees self-censorship just as an additional tool for strengthening the media control mechanism. Self-censorship practice absolutely annuls the respect of fundamental principles of journalism.

Creating an Illusion of Reality: Reflection in Practice

The basic process of information selection is a common, regular media activity. In fact, decision-making activities regarding the length of content, classification of important and redundant news, are part of everyday journalistic practice as well. In a non-suppressed media environment, such activities are conducted towards the public good. Such process of information selection presumingly prioritizes the real issues of public importance.

On the other hand, censorship is an act of creating the illusion of reality. Its practitioners are involved in propaganda, advertising, cover-ups, self-censorship, and participate in extinction of ethical journalistic practice. It annihilates the importance of public interest and truthfulness above all. Additionally, negative connotation of the media censorship nowadays refers to a disrespect of democratic freedoms. Censor's interests are a priority, and independent journalistic voices are redundant.

Entertainment, infotainment, political propaganda and irrelevant news content dominate among the traditional mass media in Serbia. Except for the news seeded by independent online media, based on an emerging trend during my research, traditional

Serbian mass media environment seriously lacks accountable journalistic content. Commonly, information is transferred from state news agencies or Public Relations offices, without an additional verification of the facts. The ruling party is in focus, the interlocutors are commonly non-rebellious figures, and the other side of a story is often missing.

The lack of serious journalism is beclouded by political propaganda, and extensive advertising of the media financiers. Notably high presence of the black chronicle topics serves to divert the attention of the audience from the most pressing issues. In fact, small trivial news are usually concise and true, so they dilute the concentration of censorship. An average citizen must possess skills of selective access to information, in order to get informed objectively. Since not everyone is competent to read between the lines, controlled media outlets serve as tools for manipulation of the general public, while the respect towards the fundaments of ethical and accountable journalism are being neglected.

PRACTICING JOURNALISM

Journalism relies on a set of fundamental principles that remain the essence of responsible professional practice, regardless of the socio-political organization within a society. Presumingly, news production should always be consistent with the respect of ethics, accurate, free from external pressures, oriented towards public interest, and without an option for compromises in relation to truthfulness. Regardless of the focus of the media industry, a journalist in democratic regime should always act for the general public good.

Despite the ingrained belief that these elements are the fundamentals of journalistic practice, censorship occurrences within the information industry in transitional Serbia prove the contrary. Within a developed network of intertwined socio-political and economic aspects, the media are subjected to financial pressures of interest parties. Responsible journalism becomes a collateral damage under the weight of business demands. News content illustrates a collapse of objective reporting. For that reason, the following overview of the fundamental elements of accountable journalism unveils inconsistencies in the on-going practice. This section discusses the most important elements of reliable journalism and

serves as a theoretical counter-argument to the appearance of media censorship[37], since it audits the essential duties and responsibilities of every journalist.

Socially Responsible Occupation

In the ideal garden of democracy, journalism theoretically refers to much more than just a pure reflection of the established social freedoms. "It should contribute to the public search for the common good, portray different realms of public life, encourage those with different values and interests to express themselves, and essentially support varying types of discourses" (Baker, 2006: 119). In such circumstances, media supports journalistic processes by monitoring public affairs, and ensuring that elites do not cross their power limits.

Essentially, journalism relies on its purpose to provide people with the information they need in order to be free and self-governing. Aiming to fulfill this task, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: 5) define ten main elements of accountable journalism.

1) Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.

2) Its first loyalty is to the citizens.

3) Its essence is a discipline of verification.

4) Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.

5) It must serve as an independent monitor of power.

6) It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.

7) It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant

8) It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.

9) Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.

10) Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to news.

The problem with applying the theoretical model of journalism in practice, appears when the higher levels of state authority violate the rule of law. Instead of deliberating the media system, the power intensifies control over the news production.

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[37] Chapter 3 of the Thesis

Rights, Obligations and Professional Ethics

The role of journalists is to objectively and truthfully inform about the reality in accordance with the professional principles, ethics, law and personal conscience. Adapted to the ongoing social circumstances, journalists are obliged to protect the freedom of idea, opinion and expression[38] as one of the fundamental civil and political rights. Journalists should be referred to as the autonomous professionals of integrity, who act ethically and responsibly. Their goal is finding out the truth on a path towards accountable reporting. At the same time, they are balancing between the public need for information and the potential harm that transparent reporting may cause[39]. Obligation of a journalist is to serve the public, while avoiding the influences of additional interest parties.

According to the "Declaration of Rights and Obligations of Journalists" approved in Munich in 1971, and adopted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the essential obligations of journalists engaged in gathering, editing and commenting news are to report only on verified facts, and respect the public right to know the truth. The professionals must defend the freedom of information, comment and criticism and rectify any inaccurate information. The use of unfair methods to obtain the news, as well as giving out confidential data, is not allowed. Legal offenses are plagiarism, calumny, slander, libel and unfounded accusations, as is the acceptance of bribes in any form in consideration of either publication, or suppression of news. In sum, journalists must never confuse journalism with advertising and propaganda, and accept direct or indirect orders from advertisers or politicians. They are obliged to resist every pressure and accept requests only from their superior editors.

In fact, "everything that a journalist does has ethical dimensions, to a lesser or greater degree. It is certainly not only the editors who take those big ethical decisions to publish, or not to publish. In fact, even minor journalistic exercises have ethical implications" (Retief 2002: 4). The work of journalists and their editors has an impact on general population through the media channel. Therefore, respecting the professional ethics is of vital importance for the public good. Moreover, journalists are responsible only to the public, and

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[38] UN "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights"; The right to freedom of opinion and expression has been restated and implemented in International Covenant for the Protection on Civil and Political Rights in 1966[th]which was signed and ratified by more than 140 states
[39] Society of Professional Journalists, "SPJ Code of Ethics" (2014)

not the publisher, owner, state or interest groups and their private, economic, political and other interests[40]. Ethics in journalism provides guidelines for objective reporting. It supports truthfulness and accuracy of media content. Simultaneously, it protects the entire process, from the stage of data gathering until the stage of finalizing a journalistic story. "Ethics are woven into every element of journalism, and we sense this as citizens often more acutely than do journalists themselves, who often cordon ethics off as an isolated topic" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007:232).

However, a clear distinction between "right" and "wrong" may become a complex dilemma from the perspective of journalists. Gaps between the choices may offer a limitless spectrum of options, partially in support of both. This situation challenges analytical skills and experience of a journalist. In fact, every decision-making process is subjective by definition. It is a process of choosing between right and wrong, regardless of the situation. Therefore, the ethics in practice rely on subjective perception[41]. Defining the instructions for ethical behavior in each situation, would be a challenging task. However, some general questions in journalism, such as truthfulness, independence, respect of privacy, authorship, honor, and similar, are definable.

Accountability towards Public Interest

Journalists should be accountable for their own actions. The level of responsibility may not be ignored in any case. In ideal social circumstances, when journalism achieves complete autonomy, journalists are utilitarians[42] who practice deontological[43] ethics.

Utilitarianism recommends acting with the aim of bringing benefit to the general public. The operation should contribute to the greatest possible number of people, and the actions should rely on the principles of obligations. In addition, journalists should behave in accordance with deontological ethics. "It gives precedence to the issues of fairness, rights,

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[40] Press Council, UNS and NUNS, "Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethic", (2006)

[41] Retief Johan (2002)

[42] "Utilitarianism gives priority to concern for everybody's good, including the individual's, which is factored into the total overall good. If self-interest conflicts with the overall good, self-interest is set aside." (Duska, et. al, 2011:52)

[43] Deontology (term derived from a Greek word "deon", which means duty) is an ethical system developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). It explains acting out of duty, while satisfying the general public good

and commitment, and advocates doing the right thing – no matter what the consequences to self and others" (Duska, et al. 2011:52). According to deontological theory, the final outcome does not justify the means. By occupation, law and personal responsibility, journalists are obliged to act with the purpose of the common good. It is expected that one follows ethics in the process of realizing the truth, and practices accountable journalism in its bit. At the same time, one must value the public interest above all others.

On the path towards satisfying public interest, the professional needs an autonomy. Independence from pressure influences is the path towards answering the challenges of professional journalistic practice. Autonomy of a journalist supports the search for factual truth, and protects from censorship threats. However, reaching independence is a complex task. In addition to liberating themselves from the interests of those they cover, journalists need to refrain from assumptions and achieve an independence of mind.

"The meaning of freedom of speech and freedom of the press is that they belong to everyone. But communication and journalism are not interchangeable terms. Everyone can be a journalist. Not everyone is" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007: 121). Only the responsible journalist freed from control holds the right to be considered a spokesman of the truth. Independence insists on the implemented knowledge and responsibility for demonstrating liability. An individual needs to be determined, and confident in terms of possessing the adequate professional skills.

Accuracy and Truthfulness

The essence of news production is based on facts. "Accuracy is a fundamental value of journalism, deserving to be understood and always applied as rigorously as reporters and editors" (Wilson, 1996: 52). In practice, it is often hidden under the excuse that true data should not destroy the possibility for a good story. The critical approach is often subjected to compromises. Objective accountable journalism relies on reliable information. It cherishes a true reflection of events described in the news. From a different perspective, reliable reporting builds the public trust in the media system. Vice versa, respect of accuracy confirms and strengthens the relationship between the media and the public sphere.

However, the premises of truthfulness are often being taken for granted. "Journalism is a practical or functional form of truth. It is not truth in the absolute or philosophical sense.

It is not the truth of a chemical equation. Journalism can-and must- pursue the truths by which we can operate on a day to day basis" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007: 42). Journalists follow the principles of accuracy in accordance with subjective understanding of the facts. The higher truth may be debatable when observed from different angles, even in legal and scientific areas. In fact, when based exclusively on respect of accuracy, journalism cannot achieve its full potential. It strives for functional truth, reliable facts of the events and correct data.

Verifying information is a journalist's responsibility on the path towards gathering the elements of truth. The fact-checking process separates the news from fiction, propaganda, entertainment or art (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007). It is the essence of objectivity, truthfulness and accountability in the news production. It enables a responsible journalistic practice, protects the importance of dignified journalism, and strengthens public trust in the media. Attractiveness of a story based on unverified facts should not stand on a path of fact-checking. Moreover, tight deadlines, sensationalist tendencies, or the race for profit are not an excuse for false reporting about events.

Separation of Media Business and Journalism

Finally, due to a strong media influence within the society, it is highly important that journalism is practiced responsibly. Although this standpoint remains constant, the question which arises is: are the media and journalism still liable to the same objectives?

Sole responsibility towards the well-being of the general public seems hard to achieve in the context of complex transitional capitalist economies[44], such as Serbian. "Capitalism is an economic system characterized by comprehensive private property, free-market pricing, and the absence of coercion" (Sternberg, 2015: 385). It is often associated with democratic social and political systems, and confounded with democracy. Even though they can support mutual co-existence, the systems are only contingently related. In fact, capitalism strives for free market and space for spreading, which democracy cannot secure.

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[44] The comprehensive private property that is essential for capitalism has three elements: a) requirement that well-defined ownership can be established over all kinds of assets, real, tangible, and otherwise, b) such ownership includes all the liberties and powers normally associated with 'full liberal ownership', e.g., the ability to use one's property, to control it, to earn income from it, to exclude others from it, to dispose of it, etc. c) all assets are owned by private individuals, singly or in groups formed by express consent. (Sternberg, 2015: 386)

In practice, the media is responsible to business interests of the financiers. In fact, media conglomerate owners operate in a union with the ruling powers. The business model serves their mutual political and business interests, rather than the public interest. Independent news production is not beneficial for such an environment. The situation points to the ongoing process of separation between the media industry and good journalism, caused by disharmony of interests and tendencies.

In such a business model, journalists are simply qualified as literate productive engines of the industry, who juggle between the business and public interests. "The shift in emphasis created confusion and moral problems inside news organization and in restricted the ability of journalist to provide the news without fear of favor" (Kovach and Rosenstein 2007:52). The declining importance of journalism provokes the situation in which journalists are considered unnecessary. Although it does not change the fundamental principles of journalism, accountable news production becomes redundant in such circumstances. Above described visions of ethical practice are hardly applicable to the journalistic practice among Serbian media. Simply, these are so far from reality. Therefore, the media environment transforms into a fertile ground for spreading and entrenching of censorship and self-censorship.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Practical Use of the Theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media

Modifications of the traditionally perceived role of journalists appear as the consequences of shifts in the business interest among traditional mainstream media. The most recent industrial changes frequently denigrate the principles of freedom of information, and fundamental journalism. In addition, they overflow the professional and private life of the journalists involved in news production, and raise the need for their adaptation to the new circumstances.

The theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media demystifies how journalists handle the presence of censorship among the newsrooms, and the increase of pressures to satisfy the needs of media financiers. It defines the patterns for resolving concerns in relation to the lack of media space for publishing responsible journalistic content. The theory helps in overcoming professional dilemmas by offering possible solutions. It should encourage and motivate journalists in a controlled media environment to start thinking about their actual role, professional responsibilities and future career ambitions. What is more, the theory highlights the emerged difficulties in relation to independent journalistic practice, stifled under the weight of complex business demands. Viewed through the prism of journalistic perception, it explains their involvement in censorship, occupational degradation, negligence of public interest and the importance of journalism. Moreover, the theory of adjusting offers possibilities for avoiding involvement in the non-ethical practice.

Journalists in need of solutions, due to the lack of independent media space, reflect the problems of society they belong to. By their status, they question the capability of such a society to respect freedom of information as the basic postulate of democracy. In simple words, media subdued to their financial appetites serve the state and the economic interests. They lose the opportunity to report about the topics of public importance. The state power grows stronger, and the public sphere becomes manipulated by propaganda, infotainment or advertising. Independent journalism and journalists become needless, unattractive investments for the controlling power sources. At the same time, the gap between the state authorities and the public sphere expands.

Based on all of the above-mentioned facts, the theory of journalists in the process of adjusting to controlled media holds an importance for understanding the current challenges

of journalists involved in the news production. It is a valuable source of knowledge for all involved in the media industry, as well as for the general public. By understanding the occurrences on a micro level, the wide perspective of media environment and the role of journalism within it, become clearer on a broader scale.

Research Relevance and Validity

During the research analyses, through a constant process of comparing, the derived theory of journalists adjusting to controlled media arose naturally from the collected data. The theory is based exclusively on empirical data, and for that reason it fits the substantive area, and precisely reflects the described phenomenon in reality. Only by allowing the ideas to emerge undisturbedly, and by logically analysing them, the researcher is able to develop a theory that is valid and relevant.

"The grounded theory arrives at relevance, because it allows the core problems and processes to emerge. A grounded theorist does not have to spend time convincing others that his focus is relevant. He need not explain how he deducted the focus, or why his interest can be seen as a general enough to be worth of research. Rather, he spends his time modestly, but assertively, searching for and discovering the relevance of his data" (Glaser, 1978: 5). A presumption of the outcomes is an obstacle for smooth derivation of the theory. In fact, the researcher is obliged to follow the natural tempo of the process in the effort to realize the main concern, and conceptualize the hypothesis based on relevant data. Likewise, that is the only pattern for achieving research relevance.

Recognizing Possible Limitations

The theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media arose from the rich data and provides the theoretical concept that resolves the main concern of journalists – the loss of space for publishing accountable journalistic work. Regardless of the high quality cooperation of the interviewees, as well as the fact that the data collecting process was successful and productive, the final outcome may involve certain limitations.

First of all, the research context of a transitional democratic society slightly biases the general, global application of the theory derived. On the scale of developed freedom, a transitional media system is placed between the media in authoritarian regimes, and those in

the well-established democratic countries. Journalists in a transitional media environment have quite a unique experience. They are not controlled governmental machinery, nor an autonomous service of public interests. Ideally, they tend to reach independence from the system, but they are still in the process of just thinking about it.

Further on and in terms of education, 13 participants in the interviews (87%) obtained minimum university education, while the other two interviewed journalists enrolled in the university studies, but did not graduate. Among them, six (40%) graduated from the media department. Considering that the majority of the interviewed participants are competent to discuss changes in the media environment, on a micro and macro level, as well as to understand my intentions as a researcher, the results miss information provided by the layer of non-educated or non-qualified active journalists. They could possibly, but not certainly, have a different perspective.

Raising Questions

As the relationship between the media and journalism collapses due to a split of interests, the productive content engine cracks. In between the changes in the business model, and the journalistic principles in an unaltered state of aggregation, appear journalists. Whether they decide to adjust to the new circumstances, withdraw from journalism, or leave the entire media environment, their current dilemmas question the real role and purpose of the media in today's society. If the business changes reduce the need for journalists and objective news content, then what are the duties and obligations of the media in such a coordinate system of influential interests?

The theory of Journalists Adjusting to Controlled Media raises questions about the real definition of journalists in the media system nowadays. It implies that independent journalism principles are disrespected in practice. Furthermore, it indicates that financial interests dominate among the traditional mass media, and pinpoints the inconsistencies in the relationship between the public and the media sphere.

In both cases, by adjusting to the censorship or by leaving such a controlled environment, journalists transparently signalize disbelief that conditions in the media environment will change for the better. They raise a question towards the future of media industry. Leaving journalists find it more beneficial to withdraw, or completely change their

personal beliefs and lifestyle, than to wait for the establishment of an independent media system. In contrast, compliance of the journalists with the new media environment negates the principles of freedom of expression and information. It is a victory of censorship as well.

Public interest is forgotten, as the messengers of truth are disabled and in search for regular income. Without the properly informed public, achieving the reign of democracy is questionable. In fact, the future of journalistic practice and role of the media within it, is unknown. New technologies provide space for objective reporting, however new media still fail to provide a stable financial cover for the needs of journalism, so the public interest is not yet completely pleased.

Theoretically, journalism remains consistent to its fundamental principles despite the business demands. However, spheres of the media industry which involve an active human factor, succumb to introduced pressures. Paradoxically, traditional mainstream media and adjustable journalists make compromises towards the financial needs, while neglecting accountable journalistic practice. Responsible, objective reporting is silently avoided and concealed under piles of unimportant information, or censored news. The real journalistic content is in deficit. The reasonable question is how it is possible that such occurrences remain unpunished, and what consequences such occurrences will leave on the journalistic practice.

Final Thoughts On the Theory

Putting aside the fact that the theory of adjusting is based on the phenomena emerging within the context of transitional society, I believe that journalists nowadays globally adapt to business interests, to a greater or lesser extent. If they are not compromising towards the accountable journalism, then journalists need to adjust the level of productivity, increase the speed of releases, remain creative, engaged, informed and innovative, in order to survive in the hectic media chase for profit. It appears that the presence of journalists in media depends on their willingness to adjust the activities to industrial demands.

At the same time, journalists feel betrayed by the media system. Juggling between the needs, they miss the satisfaction. The decision whether to stay or leave, appears as an inevitable occurrence. And they feel defeated anyway, since they lost or did not have any opportunity to perform substantial journalism.

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