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BATTLES FOR TRUTH IN A 'COUNTRY IN CLINICAL CONDITION'

In this paper I will focus on the crisis functioning of the institutions under public and media pressure. Institutions whose function is to provide truth and justice will be discussed: I will look at them in the light of one particular case which sparked incredible public debate in Bulgaria in 2001 and caused a clash between the first (the executive), the third (the judiciary) and the fourth 'power' (the media), provoked nationwide outrage, and brought Bulgaria to the brink of a political and institutional crisis in a truly unprecedented way. The focus of my analysis will be the 'truth discourses' of these branches of power, and more specifically the critical intertwining of 'truths' produced by the Bulgarian executive, media and judicial institutions about the case in question.

Let me note that like Foucault (Foucault 1878), here by 'truth discourse' I understand specific public or institutional modes of expression, a valid public rhetoric that produces 'true propositions', defines "what is truly the state of affairs" or imply 'what is true', thereby exercising normative pressure on all other social discourses and practices. Yet unlike Foucault, who focuses only on the classifying and normalizing truth discourse of science, my research subject encompasses a broad and contradictory range of different, barely compatible 'truth discourses' – public, media, institutional and others – their conflicts, contentions and hierarchies.

The present study will try to unravel this complicated knot by analyzing mainly the way in which media 'truth' is produced (as we shall see below, the media quote and therefore contain within themselves the other 'truths'), as well as the consequent roles, identities and hybrids. (about the concept of role see Stryker 1982, 1985; Gordon 1982; Gross 1958; about the ambiguous concept of identity see Brubaker and Cooper 2000; about the concept of hybridity see Mihailescu 2005). The analysis will also show how, during the

clash of different discourses of truth, the competences of certain institutions (police, investigation, court, forensic examination, etc.) are being challenged from outside and their rules, professional roles and procedures are fiercely contested by other roles and popular myths spontaneously produced by the media.

The Event

On the morning of 16 March 2001, Daniela Terziyska called the police from her home and told them that a black western car had abducted her three-year-old son Pepi. Meanwhile, Pepi's father Stoyan Terziyski, a taxi driver, contacted co-workers by radio and drivers from several taxi companies in Sofia organized a search for the boy, blocking the exits from Sofia and searching all black western cars... The boy was found dead by passers-by in the pond in Sofia's South Park, with marks of a noose around his neck. Hearing about his death, the taxi drivers blocked the traffic, drove downtown and surrounded the Parliament in protest, shouting 'murderers' and 'mafia' and demanding from the government safety for children and the interior minister's resignation. Small groups of people from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and other parties joined the protest and tried to make it political; key figures from the former secret services were seen among them.

The government (at that time, from the United Democratic Forces (UtDF). reacted quickly. Prime Minister Ivan Kostov came out to speak with the protestors; the crowd was also addressed by ministers, officials, generals, etc. Meanwhile the opposition – the leaderships of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party, supported by some other small parties promptly demanded the government's resignation and early elections. In their turn, the UtDF accused the opposition of trying to turn a purely domestic crime into a political issue.

The police reacted swiftly too. On the next day, 17 March, the police issued a press release stating that during six hours of questioning the boy's mother Daniela, who had originally stuck to the abduction version, broke down and made a full confession to an investigating magistrate and a judge. She said she had strangled the boy herself, placed his body in a black plastic bag, taken a taxi to South Park where she dumped it in the pond, then dumped the evidence – a short rope and the black plastic bag – elsewhere and went back home. Although taxi drivers from across the country were on their way to Sofia, the protest quickly lost momentum and died down.

The police claimed they had done their job and passed the case over to the

investigation, which appointed the required autopsy, forensic tests and reconstructions, as well as psychiatric evaluations of the mother who was suspected to be mentally ill. The mother was soon found to have suffered from affective schizophrenia and to have stopped taking medications for some time. After a long-drawn psychiatric evaluation, the Sofia City Court dismissed the case against Daniela on grounds of insanity, but her lawyers lodged an appeal for a retrial. The Supreme Court referred the case back to the lower instance.

The media reacted very quickly too. Breaking the news of the murder as top story on 16 March, they did not hesitate to turn the case into a large-scale symbol of rampant crime in Bulgaria, using it at the same time to launch a media campaign against the Ivan Kostov government and the institutions conducting the investigation: police, investigative authorities, prosecution, forensic psychiatrists, the court. From 17 March till the end of June, all broadcast and print media ran a huge number of items on the case, offering anything: from serious journalistic investigations introducing alternative versions about the crime, and interviews with friends and relatives of the victim, to sensational new stories and ‘facts’, as well as sensational rumors or analyses of infanticide cases, and sentimental accounts of the domestic and neighbor context of the murder. The case of Daniela Terziyska became known throughout the nation, whipping up public opinion to near fever pitch: the reason for that was the huge number of unsolved

murders, including murders of children, in the recent years. Thousands of emotional and outraged citizens wrote to the papers, politicians, experts, media celebrities, relatives of the victims spoke out in the press and on broadcast media, online discussion forums were afire; the entire public sphere was engaged in the debate. Closed by the court of first instance, the case was returned by the Supreme Court for retrial and was not completed until 2002. Daniela Terziyska was found guilty of murdering her son but she was acquitted on grounds of insanity: as we shall see, lawyers and media have consistently refused to accept that the court verdict was completely correct and just. Though less and less frequently there were publications on the topic (usually in connection with new developments around the case and the institutionalization of Daniela) right until 2006.

* * *

Next is a discourse analysis of the publications (more than 250, mostly from March to June 2001) on the subject in some of the major Sofia-based dailies – *24 Chassa*, *Novinar*, *Standart*, *Monitor*, *Sega*, analysis aimed at identifying the images of official institutions produced by the media and the type of ‘truth’ that media discourse promotes as different and in a sense opposite to the ‘truth’ reached by way of official police, investigative and judicial procedures.

* * *

The murder of the young Pepi Terziyski roused different notions of truth and justice in Bulgarian society, thus prompting different political, public and professional groups, as well as different institutions, to fight for ‘their truth’ (my interpretation of institution is based on Burger and Luckman, 1966, Douglas 1986; North 1990; Scott 2001) . The ‘truth’ about this murder has proven metonymic of an extremely powerful symbolic resource, exceeding and challenging the authority and competence of the institutions, involving basic phenomena such as power, authority, legitimation and trust in the Bulgarian society.

* * *

In the Bulgarian press, the ‘truth’ about the murder is characterized by inherent ambiguity. On the one hand, it is the search for an answer to the question of ‘who killed young Pepi Terziyski and why?’ This question is asked by everybody – the official institutions conducting the investigation, newspapers and televisions, ordinary citizens – and the attempt to find an answer gives rise to versions and counter-versions, attempts at proof and refutations. Thus, one of the polarities of truth discourses is precisely this: propositions and arguments related to the only, the particular, actual, verifiable truth about a particular event; and its genre is neutral reporting (*Peter wasn’t abducted, he was killed by his mother. We have irrefutable proof that directly incriminates Daniela Terziyska as the perpetrator of this act, said Col. Roumen Stoyanov, Director of the Sofia Directorate of Internal Affairs Standart, 18 March 2001*)

In the second meaning, the ‘truth’ does not simply concern the particular event in question: it is necessarily and invariably *the* truth about ‘all of Bulgaria’, about Bulgaria’s terrible condition, catastrophe, severe problems, and so on. The reporting of this truth is very emotional (for example affective titles from the type ‘*Shock! Mum Confesses: I Killed Him!*’); it pretends to cover the picture of the whole country. Here is one typical newspaper publication symp-tomatically headlined ‘Don’t Substitute My Motives: *The drivers had allegedly gathered outside parliament to demand that the killer be found. Let’s not kid ourselves! They protested because crimes go unpunished! Tensions have escalated because of the next one in a succession of murders of children. It would be good to find the killer immediately. **But the truth is*** [emphasis added] *that it doesn’t matter who he is. Someone kills a child every week. These base passions are unleashed by the poverty, despair, lack of prospects resulting from the current ‘competent’ government. That is precisely why [government] ministers must resign, and not because there has been yet another murder* (18. 03. 2001 24 Chassa).

* * *

How do those two truths correlate, which ‘truth discourse’ is definitive? It is for the answer of this question that the public and political battle is being fought by all means. Institutional representatives – ruling politicians and experts – rarely make generalizing, apocalyptic statements about ‘all of Bulgaria’, but such statements are commonly articulated by politicians from the opposition, media celebrities, journalists and ordinary citizens. Politicians from the government try to reduce the case to its specific, factual particularity, whereas journalists and citizens are inclined more or less to ignore this particularity (including the truth about who the actual killer is – this *doesn’t matter*, as the explicitly clear quote says) and to turn the case into a symptom and large-scale symbol of the whole: for them truth is less an object of investigation and ascertainment than of an obvious, nationwide conviction about the condition of the country as a whole. In the latter rhetoric, the facts around Pepi’s murder are only an occasion to speak, to articulate this painful truth, to express moral outrage, to protest. The changing information about the facts around this murder (for example, refutation of a given version) cannot shake this truth-conviction, which is ‘supra-specific’. In other words, in the second case we have truth-as-panoramic-picture, and not as reference to a particular fact that can be verified. Put in logical terms, in the first case truth is understood as correspondent, and in the second – as consensual; in the former it is a proposition about a particular fact, and in the latter a complex meta-description of the state of affairs.

This obvious logical difference between truth discourses is only part of much more intricate and complex differences that are not logical but rhetorical, pragmatic and political and stem from communicative, motivational, symbolic and other causes depending on who is the speaker, where are they speaking (publishing) from, what language (prestigious, non-prestigious, etc.) they are using, who are their intended audience and what is their purpose. In other words, the complex differences between various types of discourse stem from the different attempts of different public agents to use the truth (as they understand it) not according to the rules of the legal institutions but as a contested resource of power. Power here should also be understood mainly as a symbolic resource as an ability to define and evaluate a particular fact or situation; but also larger contexts – the general condition of the country or even the picture of the world. Within the different types of discourse the statement of truth (called ‘constative’ in speech act theory) (Austin 1975) is never isolated; it is never constative in chemically pure form. It is always embedded in a complex cluster of discursive practices (performatives, various ways of doing things with words) which invariably accompany it.

The Players in the Media Field: Truth Discourses

I will first sketch a provisional classification of truth discourses in the Bulgarian media. Here truth discourses will be viewed not as grounded in firm institutional procedures for fixing and evaluating the “state of affairs” but as complex and unstable clusters of performatives in which the statement of truth is accompanied by gestures, appeals, suggestions, rules, procedures, political relationships, rivalry between agents and branches of power, and so on. I will then try to study the dramatic conflict of these discourses – their correlation, rivalry, conflict potential and dynamic, changing power hierarchy, as we find them in the above-mentioned Sofia-based dailies.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will distinguish five types of truth discourses: official (of government spokespersons and of the incumbent government), expert (of institutions serving the first or the third branch of power: police, investigative authorities, prosecutors, medical and psychiatric experts), judicial (of the courts), a discourse which I will call metaphorically ‘the voice of the people’, and professional journalistic discourse.

* * *

The official discourse of the Executive aims at stabilizing the situation and, although reacting to the accusations, reduces the topic under discussion to the particular fact: a murder in which the murderer must be found quickly. Here are two typical statements of figures from the Executive: *The killer will be caught very soon, General Bossilkov promises* (subtitle of article headlined ‘Drivers [Shout] at Kostov: “Mafia!”’, 24 Chassa, 17 March 2001). In addition to this factual reductionism, however, the discourse of official truth has other characteristics too: parallel with the factual truth which it tells (or hides), it also tells other truths and exercises additional performative acts. In the first place, it represents (in the sense of the German *darstellen*) not only the facts – it also represents (in the sense of *vertreten*) its electorate. That is why, in parallel with asserting the facts from a particular perspective, it simultaneously says what the electorate wants to hear, referring to (or manipulating) its consensual truth. That is why the official public discourse must have rhetorical characteristics aimed more at making it sound trustworthy, persuasive or seductive rather than proving particular facts. Here is a typical case of discursive conflict in which Prime Minister Kostov found himself during the protest demonstration of taxi drivers on 16 March, which compelled him to switch between different strategies and registers of official discourse. He started his speech to the demonstrators by reducing the situation and the social conflict to the particular fact about which the truth can be found and a fair verdict can be passed: *We all have a stake in finding the killer*; but he is interrupted by shouts and slogans belonging more to the other, generalizing type of ‘truth’

that refuses to recognize his sincerity: *Mafia! Mafia!* Switching to a different strategy, Kostov refers to the other type of mass-consensual truth: *We are likewise shocked by this murder. We are just as shocked as you are. We are just as frightened as you are...* (24 Chassa, 17 March 2001). Then Kostov reverts once again to the particularizing, correspondent strategy and says: *What we now have is one particular murder. I believe you want this murderer to be caught and punished* (quoted from *Standart*, 17 March 2001). Later, in other statements, he makes a number of concessions to ‘the people’s truth’ declaring, for example, *I understand their grief* (24 Chassa, 17 March 2001). Parallel with that, the prime minister tries to speak unemotionally, carefully picking his words, pointing at facts and making an effort to win trust; he tries to sound authoritative, compelling, persuasive. In other words, his speech is actually meant to convey ‘truths’ at several levels and in several ways, both corresponding to facts and trying to provoke trust and respect – without provoking a conflict between these two truths, the factual and the consensual one. He wants to convey to the masses the message ‘I know your painful truth, I think about it, I share your feelings’ and, at the same time, to transform the truth of this message into a particular, verifiable fact that is within the power and control of the institutions which the prime minister is in charge of; he wants to redefine the situation, reducing it from a social conflict to one particular, solvable case.

* * *

The expert discourse is professional and, by definition, it must be politically neutral, producing only ‘auxiliary’ truths, pure and specific constatives. They are designed to be used by others – for example, in the decisions of the executive or the judgments of the judiciary branch of government. The truth produced by expert discourses is procedural, highly formalized, based on rules and on academic and professional knowledge; it is often expressed in terminological jargon that may be incomprehensible to non-experts. Such discourses require privileged and protected positions of the experts themselves, technological time for investigation, verification, forensic tests, examinations; they work with typ-izations, classifications and normalizations, their task being to announce the true results of those expert procedures. Although they are in partnership with power (in the Foucauldian sense of power/knowledge), they do not represent the ‘voice of the Sovereign’ and lack the dialogical potential of political discourse; they do not flirt with the popular doxa. They communicate only cold, politically neutral, verifiable truths attained by strictly defined formulas and referring to particular “atomized” facts. (There are exceptions – in some cases, the expert examinations were more comprehensive, producing complex versions about the actual way the crime was committed or even conclusions that sounded less as judgments than as con-

stitutions – for example, the psychiatric evaluations (see the contribution of Martin Kanoushev in this volume).

The judicial discourse of ascertaining truth is an institutional power discourse. Its truths are produced by authorized professionals and have specific consequences (convictions of those found guilty, acquittals of those found innocent). Ideally, this is a procedural discourse which must not be concerned with consensual truth either (with the *doxa*, moods and sentiments of the People) but only with establishing facts by the relevant procedure prescribed by law (judicial truth is institutionally complex, its separate components being collected by the police, by investigating magistrates, then checked during the trial by the prosecution and the defense who call witnesses; the court will accept evidence collected by lawful procedure and reject evidence that is in violation of this procedure); ultimately, judicial truth is indistinguishable from the handing down of a fair verdict. Judicial discourse is dually correspondent: it simultaneously establishes the facts and the *corpus delicti* corresponding to a particular punishment. In the final judgment, constative (establishment of the truth) and verdict (administration of justice) merge in a single gesture. In the case of Daniela Terziyska, the Bulgarian court bent its procedures under pressure from public opinion and, contrary to judicial rules, involved a higher instance, the Supreme Court of Cassation. In addition, the investigative authorities allowed the leaking of classified information and published the testimony of the mother who had killed her son; finally, under pressure from public opinion again, judicial rules were broken once again and the judgment delivered was referred back for review, only to be upheld.

‘The Voice of the People.’ I have named this type of truth discourse after the heading of a section that appeared several times in *24 Chassa*. By this metaphor I designate the interventions by ordinary citizens, anonymous or not, which express a personal opinion about what is true in the public sphere. The genres in which their discourse is manifested vary considerably: from spontaneous, direct, expressive shouts of the crowd at a demonstration to thought-out letters to the editor and interviews with relatives of the victims, witnesses in the case or random citizens. This type of discourse is characterized by a low level of formality: it is close to everyday speech, often using the laconic and powerful effect of shouts, verbless sentences, random jargon words; in the case analyzed here, it is also characterized by a tendency to skip from particular statements about the particular murder of Peter Terziyski to assertions and judgments about the Bulgarian situation in general. In other words, this discourse is a hybrid in which correspondent truth can easily metamorphose into consensual truth and vice versa and in which, similarly, description of the general situation easily merges with moral judgment.

‘Popular’ discourse never has direct access to the public sphere; it is always re-transmitted, cited, reprinted and retold by journalists or politicians who

use and manipulate it to their own ends (that is why its authenticity is always problematic), because it can be used as a legitimating resource (it is represented as the authentic voice of the Sovereign). Another characteristic of the truth according to 'the voice of the people' is that the truth is conceived of as clear and obvious, not subject to analysis and verification but capable of asserting itself by the very fact that it is shared, consensual, authentic and self-evident – that is why at the verbal level this discourse is expressively laconic and extremely contextual, inscribed within the general consensual picture of the situation. Quite often arguments and propositions are reduced to short enthymemes, the enthymemes being in their turn reduced to exclamations and shouts which, however, are loaded with meaning: *Standart* conveys this most clearly by publishing the headline 'The People vs Power: "Mafia, Killers, Scum"' (*Standart*, 17 March 2001).

Here is an example of this discourse in the case under consideration, quoted from *24 Chassa*, 18 March 2001. The title of a letter to the editor, published along with other similar letters 'from the people', is 'Things Get Even Uglier': *If it is true that three-year-old Pepi was strangled by his own mother, then the drama of our society is even uglier. If we have started killing even our own children, this means that we have become no better than animals! People outside Parliament yesterday were so aggressive because they are deeply frightened after all the murders, abductions, rapes.* Signed Ana Nikolova, Sofia, 18 March 2001, *24 Chassa*. Here one can clearly see how quick and unproblematic is the passage from a particular case to other similar cases and, hence, to a quick and coherent picture of the general situation; a picture that relies more on its self-evidence (supposedly shared by the reader too) than on solid evidence. The key characteristic of this discourse is unproblematical metamorphosis of the pronoun „I”, „me” into a general 'us' or 'we' implying 'we Bulgarians', the voice of the Sovereign (the implication in the text quoted above is that if *she* has murdered her child, then *we* Bulgarians have become no better than animals). That is also why the assertions and judgments in this discourse can easily transform into self-analyses and self-evaluations concerning the essence of collective identity, of 'us' (about identity and public sphere see Eisenstadt, Schluchter and Wittrock 2000).

The journalistic discourse is alternative to, and contesting the political discourse. According to Charles Taylor (Taylor 2004), the public sphere does not wield power directly but demands that it be recognized by those in power; its agents (journalists, intellectuals, commentators, media celebrities and so on) behave like supervisors, critics and advisors of those in power. They personify the voice of common deliberative reason (and, thereby, the resource from which modern political power must constantly draw legitimacy). But deliberation itself presupposes that there is no 'single truth' in the public sphere. That is why the media as a *sui generis* reification of the public sphere (which, in a sense, transforms and negates the latter) are many-voiced by

definition. It is a journalistic norm for publications, to cite, include and provide access to many social voices so as to represent their conflicting truths. In this plural context, the reports and commentaries by professional journalists look like only one equal discourse among many. This discourse has its own specific features: it ranges across a variety of genres, both informative (news, information, report) and analytical (review, commentary, analysis, column, discussion, talk show); but from the perspective of production of truth, the journalistic discourse should have two functions only, i.e. purely informative and analytical. This is supported also by its stylistic spectrum, ranging from anonymous and neutral statements to passionate appeals; from pure 'reporting' of 'facts' (i.e. blending information and 'truth', suggesting something along the lines of 'this is what happened') to sophisticated interpretations and commentaries; from anonymous neutrality to personal commitment; from the referring to "evident truths" to analytical revelation of the non-evident ('in fact, the truth of it was...').

Journalistic practice, however, deviates from those norms for many reasons. The most important reason is that journalistic activity is not only a matter of civic conscience and a discourse but also an institutionalized and commercialized profession, offering commodities on the media market. This radically distinguishes it from all other public voices since it does not involve simply reporting but also professional manipulation of the voices of others. Journalists act like film directors of the public sphere: they give or refuse access to social voices, select or filter them, paraphrase or cut them at will, arrange them in the layout of the newspaper page, surround them with similar or contrasting material, include other social voices that contest or support them, give them interpretative titles, complement them with nonverbal material like photos, illustrations, cartoons, different fonts and colors, place them on the front, inside or back pages of newspapers. In other words, journalists manipulate the meaning of statements in various ways – through words and structural devices, as well as through nonverbal but meaningful codes; shortly, they filter the 'truths' communicated by the other public discourses. Yet, the ideology of the profession usually claims otherwise – that sole function of journalistic reporting is passive and objective 'representation', impartial 'depiction' of reality 'as it is'. This ideology hides the meta-position and manipulative potential of the 'fourth branch of power', i.e. it hides precisely that which makes the media a power, filter and arranger, an interpreter of the truths of other discourses which, moreover, is capable of making them visible and audible. Thus, the position from which journalists speak (what is known in semiotics as site of enunciation) is hybrid because it is both public (i.e. excluded from decision-making in the Executive or Judiciary) and institutional micro-power in the Foucauldian sense. Journalistic 'truths' only seem to be equal participants in public debate where they compete with other truths; in fact, they are

professionally and institutionally privileged: the metaphor of the media as a ‘fourth branch of power’ is far from accidental.

* * *

The case of Daniela Terziyska initiated a political struggle between the two main resources: the official discourse of the Executive (the Ivan Kostov government) and the discourse of the Bulgarian media; this was a battle for control and redistribution of the main symbolic discourse, i.e. the valid public truth. However, this was not the only goal: the battle also was for control over the locus from which the truth can be articulated and accepted as trustworthy; moreover it was a battle for establishing who represents correctly ‘the people’s obvious truth’, the consensual and intuitive picture of the condition of the Bulgarian State and society in 2001. Both sides in this conflict used and manipulated expert discourses, although in different ways – thus generating specific images of the official institutions: police, medical and judicial. Furthermore, both referred not only to “expert evaluations” but to ‘the voice of the people. These images of legitimation (expert truth, people’s truth) proved to be media-constructed; their function was to create conditions for the journalistic truth to be the winner.

* * *

What was the real outcome of this battle? If it is viewed from the perspective of the practical goals of the media (discrediting the government, resignations of government ministers, resignation of the whole government, a new “strong hand” order, full and total control of public authority) the ‘fourth branch of power’ suffered defeat: the Kostov government did not fall, no minister resigned, there was satisfactory judicial resolution of the case). Yet as monopolists of the public sphere, the Bulgarian media succeeded in representing their defeat as victory, largely asserting their ‘truth’ in public and gaining new, populist legitimacy; they succeeded in conveying the message that it is they who represent and express the voice and the truth of ‘the people’ – they, and not the lawfully elected government and official institutions responsible for finding out the truth in crimes, such as the police, the investigative authorities and the courts.

Dramaturgy of the Conflict

The Alibi

The prime concern of the Bulgarian media discourse in the case under consideration is to create an alibi for itself: an illusion of objectivity understood as inclusion of all social voices and versions about the murder in the public debate. In this respect, *24 Chassa*, *Novinar*, *Standart*, *Troud* demonstrate a panoramic information policy. Its first distinctive feature is that they quote or retell all official announcements of the government, press releases of the investigative authorities and results of the medical tests and examinations in a seemingly objective manner, in detail, almost without comment. The statements of Prime Minister Kostov, Police Director Vassilev, Interior Minister Yordanov and other officials are widely reprinted and commented in detail. In addition to the official discourse and its version, the papers quote (or run specially commissioned articles by) experts – psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers. Thirdly, the most papers constantly publish apparently different opinions of various ordinary people, who may or may not be involved in the event. Especially active in this respect is *24 Chassa*, which regularly runs ‘readers’ letters’ from Sofia, Ahtopol, Varna or Bourgas (in fact all over the country), and interviews with taxi drivers, and even with children from Pepi’s kindergarten and with Daniela Terziyska’s primary-school teacher. The majority of papers interview several times the closest relatives – Pepi’s father Stoyan Terziyski, Daniela’s mother Anastasia Toutekova, Stoyan’s mother Tsvetanka Terziyska – as well as neighbors, friends, co-workers. Everything is meant to suggest an objective, many-voiced picture, an objective approach that includes different views and discusses different versions about the murder.

Politics of Suspicion

Under this illusion, however, the social voices are rearranged and their truths hierarchized.

With regard to the official political discourse and its version (even when this version was substantiated by material evidence, examinations and a court verdict), the common strategy of all newspapers may be defined as ‘politics of mistrust and suspicion regardless of official proofs, expert examinations and facts’. Using various subtle and not so subtle means, the version of the government and the official investigative institutions is covertly contested, without anyone taking the risk of refuting it directly. All means are used: from the opportunities offered by the Bulgarian language and its non-evidential grammatical mood (indirectly expressing mistrust) to alternative and inde-

pendent experts who have their own versions. Journalists also conduct their own investigations, which are represented as being more trustworthy than the official ones; a private investigator provides sensational disclosures; even, as *Novinar* reports several years later, *because of the mother found guilty of murdering her child in two court instances, a poet gave up writing poetry and dedicated himself to conducting his own investigation* (1 February 2003).

In addition to this ‘counter-investigation’ organized by the media, there were many other newspaper tricks designed to undermine trust in the official version. The papers overstressed inconsistencies in the time of the crime and speculated about a videotape (which a security company operating close to the Terziyski home gave not to the police but to Nova Television; and on which the desperate father saw his supposedly dead by then child, carried by Daniela, ‘moving his tiny feet’). They question various puzzling details (how come the hair of the dead boy was dry considering that he was taken out of the pond?), and so on. Journalists used even the layout of newspaper pages and proximity of items to convey suspicion: for example, they would surround (in the layout of the newspaper’s page) the official version with items that call it into question (a device commonly employed by *24 Chassa*); or they would insert, in an article offering a detailed police account of the crime based on Daniela’s confession, a box headlined ‘Mother Confesses under Sedation?’, casting doubt not only on the version but also on the good faith of police officers, investigators, and the judge who was present during her confession (*24 Chassa*, 18 March 2001). There were more direct manipulations too, such as Martin Karbovski’s allegation in *24 Chassa* that ‘the cops know the truth about the murder but don’t want to tell it because truth is power’.

This ‘politics of suspicion’ culminated in January 2002 when Daniela was released from the forensic psychiatric clinic after she was found to be insane and non-dangerous, and Kevork Kevorkian and the *Vsyaka Nedelya/Every Sunday* TV show made a scandalous interview with the mentally ill woman, in which she denied her confession and repeated (after a completed trial with irrefutable proof) the original version that Pepi had been abducted.

Letters of the People: The Truth in Pure Form

Parallel with the politics of suspicion, the Bulgarian media construct the image of an alternative truth which is ‘the voice of the people’ or, more appropriately, ‘the intuition of the people’. The construction of this alternative truth begins with the interviews of friends and relatives of Daniela, with taxi drivers, and so on, where the official version is constantly challenged by pointing out inexplicable ‘facts’ noticed by ordinary people and not noticed by the representatives of the institutions: *I wonder how Daniela could have possibly*

led the police officers to the bag when there was no bag at all (24 Chassa, 30 March 2001); and continues with similar rhetorical questions in articles and letters to the editor. Ultimately, the media imply that distrust of institutions is a Bulgarian norm, that every Bulgarian is as if morally obliged to check the highly questionable version of the 'power-holders': *The case of the prompt solution of the murder of the three-year-old Pepi by his mother Daniela has awakened the Hercule Poirot dormant in every Bulgarian. ... Two weeks after the incident, everyone has their own version about what happened on the early morning of 16 March at Daniela Terziyska's home and later in South Park. The police continue to claim that they did their job perfectly (Novinar, 2 April 2001).* They rely especially on a natural and intuitive understanding of truth on the part of the people closest to Daniela, her mother and her husband: *I don't believe and I'll never believe that my wife is a murderess, says Stoyan Terziyski, quoted by 24 Chassa (30 March 2001). I think this videotape will change many things around the investigation. . I have no idea why the police didn't take the tape. Maybe they didnt look for it at all. Novinar counters Deputy Interior Minister Zdravko Zafirov's statement that he is 101 per cent certain that Daniela killed her child by the following strange view of Stoyan Terziyski: At the same time, Pepi's father Stoyan Terziyski retorts: I'm two hundred per cent certain that Daniela didn't kill our son! Who is telling the truth here: the man who has lived with the ill woman for four years or the one who has seen only her picture in the papers but has the mother's evidence given on the day of the murder? (Novinar, 2 April 2001).*

The leitmotif 'ordinary people cannot believe that a mother is capable of killing her son' recurs constantly. In a letter to the editor, a reader from Varna (24 Chassa, 4 April 2004) declares the following: *Almost everyone has been left with a lingering shadow of doubt. Could a mother's hands really break this infant's neck, kissed so dearly until yesterday? Even in the most deranged mind the child's voice, 'Mum, don't ...' will find its way through the maze of an insane brain to the instinct of the mother.* Ordinary human intuition, the common sense of ordinary people, the life experience of those who were close to and know Daniela very well – all this, according to the media, is an ordinary, human and universally understandable 'truth' that clearly refutes the official version.

The official version itself was invented, in their view, with a clear purpose: to draw public attention away from the 'truth' about Bulgaria, it is a manipulation (as a front-page headline in 24 Chassa claims as early as 17 March, '[This Will Be] Just Another Cover-Up').

Contrasted with the nontransparent and probably corrupt procedures of power and institutions, the 'truth of the people' has several distinct characteristics. In the first place, it presupposes absence of distance between the audience and the 'heroes' of the tragedy: the 'ordinary people' around Daniela

Terziyska; that is why it employs the media techniques of personification and sentimental identification models coming from the popular culture. The papers start representing the tragedy of the Terziyski family in terms of soap-opera clichés. As early as 17 March, a headline in *24 Chassa* voices suspicion that it's all a 'love triangle', followed on 6 April by a lengthy feature about Daniela's life with the bestseller title 'The True Story of Daniela Terziyska' and the subtitle 'Friends of hers tell how she came to the point of emotional breakdown. When did her illness begin? Who are the other men in her life?' A mentally ill woman who killed her child (and who was earlier portrayed as deserving 'Harsh Punishment for the Murderess', *24 Chassa*, 18 March 2001), Daniela suddenly turns out to be an ordinary, good and nice girl who has had tragic love affairs but eventually seems to have found her true self, becoming a loving wife, devoted mother and perfect housewife whose life was shattered by a terrible, incomprehensible tragedy, whereas her husband is grieving inconsolably and hopelessly for the lost domestic bliss. With the passage of time, Daniela Terziyska becomes ever more of a media celebrity and is accordingly portrayed as an innocent victim – there is even a letter to the editor to this effect, which *24 Chassa* quotes in a screaming, full-page title: 'The State (Government) Machine Crushes Daniela'; the process of victimization ends with the above-mentioned interview on *Vsyaka Nedelya*.

The second characteristic has already been mentioned: this is the truth not only about the particular murder but about Bulgaria in general. The 'truth of the people' is terrible and of course overcomes every particular fact: it is an obvious picture of the perverse condition of a confused, abnormal and inhuman country in which, after a series of murders and crimes, the most terrible thing of all is now happening, something that is monstrous and breaks the oldest taboo: mothers have started killing their children. Here is a picture assembled from different pieces and titles in *24 Chassa*: it's frightening to go out in the street, killings are not an incident but an everyday occurrence, there has been a series of rapes, journalists and public figures are being assaulted, there now are unthinkable murders of children – Eleonora, Daniela, Staniela, Suvestin, Peter. (*24 Chassa*, 17 and 18 March, 2001). There is no authority, no law, no order, no justice, no security. The power-holders are lying, the Interior Ministry is wasting its time with utter trivia instead of doing what it's supposed to do, the police know who the criminals are but sit back and do nothing, they catch them only to release them. This picture, reconstructed from letters of unknown readers, is complemented by the emotional outbursts of media celebrities like Slavi Trifonov and Martin Karbovski: *Who was it who shot to death 16-year-old Eleonora – her mother or a drunken police officer? Who raped and killed six-year-old Denitsa? Who blows up three bombs a day? How come every Bulgarian has been robbed twice? Who disillusioned people? Who turned Bulgaria, this 'heaven on earth' into hell?*

This is a hybrid-truth. The constatives in it are blended with emotional out-

bursts, hyperboles, paradoxes and moral judgments: those who are to blame for this murder and everything else are not the actual perpetrators but the monstrous and psychotic atmosphere in the country (psychiatrists are asked by journalists whether the social situation can cause madness), the unbearable life in this country. Cyclophrenia is not in the mind of one person or another, it is *'Cyclophrenia in the Country'* (headline in *24 Chassa*, 19 March 2001); *This murder is part of the clinical picture [sic] in which Bulgaria has fallen. And the reaction of people, of politicians, of the murder itself – this is us ourselves. This is the wretched condition of this country. As our country so our murders* (*24 Chassa*, 19 March 2001). It follows of necessity that what the country needs are resolute measures, executions (of five, six thousand people), resignation of the government; *24 Chassa* Editor-in-Chief Venelina Gocheva, supported by various other media intellectuals (Slavi Trifonov, Rosen Petrov), initiated a campaign for a referendum on capital punishment; readers sent letters of support.

A third characteristic is the incredible, paranoiac coherence of this consensual picture, the constant description of the present unbearable situation in Bulgaria as being the result of a conspiracy. In it the power-holders, the cops, and so on, know but cover up, consciously doing nothing to curb crime. Little Peter's murder is consistently contextualized and compared to other murders, crimes, violence. In connection with several cases of assault on journalists, *24 Chassa* runs a feature about assaults on public figures committed by organized crime groups: typically, the apocalyptic picture is grossly exaggerated, and an ad hoc conspiracy theory is deduced from two cases of such assault.

The fourth characteristic of 'the people's truth' is its self-evidence, clarity and visibility. This should be understood both metaphorically (everybody knows, 'sees' Bulgaria's 'wretched condition' – the difference between knowledge, intuitive perception and 'seeing' is eliminated) and literally: truth is interpreted as being visible with the naked eye and that is also why the new visual evidence (a videotape) delivered to Nova Television by the Prima security company or the visual evidence collected by private detective Marin Marinov whip up a frenzy of excitement. A seductive logic that is suggested by recurrent phrases like 'different institutions are claiming different things, but the tapes show that... you can see... you can see very clearly.. it is obvious that...' The figure of the "obvious" is literalized and self-referential, shifting trust from institutions to the constructed 'people' and its intuitive self-verifying judgment.

That is why 'the people's truth' constructed by newspapers like *24 Chassa* and *Novinar* informs stable, uncontestable argument-chains, invariant populist figures against which there is no critical defense. By repeating them indiscriminately, the papers virtually drum them into mass consciousness. Whilst in *24 Chassa* this figure has a conceptual pretension – 'the truth is not the truth

about the particular murder but about the obvious condition of the abnormal and unbearable country we live in' – in *Novinar* it has a simple, chemically pure populist form: 'The police claim that... people, however, think t h a t.'

* * *

Roles, Identities, Hybrids: The Institutions Discredited

What kind of identities, roles and hybrids are created by the public 'production of truth' described above in the context of the murder of Pepi Terziyski? An indirect outcome of the struggle for and redistribution of the key symbolic resource of truth is the clear rearrangement of images of institutions and professional roles in the reference system of public values. The media systematically project mistrust and a negative attitude towards the Judiciary and its institutions. Here is how the latter are depicted by the journalists from *Novinar* (based on another collage of quotes): the police, investigators, prosecutors are taciturn, bureaucratic, busy and unhelpful, there are suspicions that corruption is rife among them. They do not submit relevant files to the lawyers or give them too little time to study the evidence; acting against the law, they do not allow Daniela's family to see her, they commit numerous procedural irregularities and dare take 'sudden' leave during a case that has shocked the whole nation. These official institutions are incapable of coming up with anything other than confused, useless explanations and contradictory versions: *Until recently, doctors claimed that Daniela's case was more than elementary. Two days before they are due to appear in court, however, experts are not ready with an opinion on her case. At the same time, supervising prosecutor Plamen Hristov is suddenly off on leave (Novinar, 18 April 2001).* The media image of judicial institutions is strangely split between details which are nearly professional and the opposite tendency to fail to distinguish between the bodies of the Judiciary and of the Executive, merging the two in the vague image of the 'power-holders' (or even of the 'cops').

To put it in more general and technical terms, the Bulgarian media discredit the very institution of power/knowledge by denying both its legitimacy and the technical capacity of the specialized, designed for the purpose, institutions to produce truths and judgments by legitimate procedures. They construct a coherent negative picture of those institutions and their due professional roles in which, behind the apparently articulated representation of the activities of those institutions, the latter are actually blended into a mythological, monolithic image of evil 'power-holders'.

This negative picture is of course also a means of constructing its opposite by the principle of contrast: a specific 'us', a media model of collective identity.

'Us': The People and Its Favorite Newspaper

At the surface level, this 'us' is constructed as 'us ordinary people who are neither in power nor in institutions', i.e. the 'us' identity is constructed precisely in this fundamental opposition to Executive, Judiciary and institutions, blending them into the hazy image of an evil, conspiratorial power. The definitions of the above mentioned 'us' ('people', 'the people', 'everybody') are negative: 'we' do not have access to proceedings and judgments, do not know the law in detail, do not have a decision-making or expert apparatus. What 'we' have, however, is an 'authentic soul' capable of unshakable true judgment of things. This 'people' may be confused about details, but it cannot be confused about the whole because it is the sole possessor of the truth about it.

At the same time, as we have seen, this us-identity constructs itself in relation both to patriarchal models (the nuclear family, the next of kin, the neighbors, the acquaintances, those who are ordinary people 'like me') and sentimental 'soap-opera' plots in popular culture. The media shape this 'us' as an unfortunate victim living in an unbearably monstrous and perverse world that violates the most basic norms and taboos. That is why it can suddenly be transformed from a passive and sentimental 'us' into an 'us' that can do something radical -and here models coming back from the time of the Bulgarian National Revival are included: *When they've knocked the stuffing out of you, resigned stoicism is a logical line of conduct. But nothing is known for certain, honorable ministers. Watch out, because for all you know the people might wake up from its deep heroic slumber* (a text by Martin Karbovksi, *24 Chassa*, 20 March 2001).

In addition, this 'us' has a new representative who speaks with its voice and tells its truth and from whom it can get reliable information and truth about the murder. An excellent illustration of this representative is a self-referential photo of a crowd of anonymous readers of *24 Chassa* (18 March 2001), captioned *Sofianites look in their favorite newspaper for the latest news about Pepi's murder late on Friday night*. The true figure capable of representing "the people" is not the lawfully elected government and public institutions but the media that tries to become indistinguishable from the 'voice of the people' (while keeping its right to behave like an alternative expert if necessary). This discredited knowledge/power is substituted by a contesting institution: the media-manipulated social imagination (a power which is not democratically elected but commercially asserted). It is intermingled with the solid identity of the Sovereign – 'the people', – and proclaims itself as the spokesman of its

clear ‘truths’. In her open letter ‘24 Chassa Demands Referendum on Capital Punishment’, Venelina Gocheva, Editor-in-Chief of *24 Chassa*, formulates this position laconically and clearly: the political elites have been discredited, the judicial system in Bulgaria is ineffective, coming from the mouth of blue (Union of the Democratic Forces) and red (Bulgarian Socialist Party) politicians the word ‘elections’ sounds *most inappropriate and cynical*, the people and the newspaper want a referendum. This is a hidden proclamation about a new type of populist political order in which the Sovereign, no longer relying on a democratically elected Executive, Judiciary and procedural institutions, vests its will not in the discredited parties but in this self-asserted authority which, alone, proclaims its will and its truth: the media. *My [political] party are the readers*, Gocheva declares at the end of her letter.

Media power does not produce knowledge and verifiable truths, nor does it classify and normalize Foucauldian subjects; instead, it substitutes them by mass phantasms that provide legitimacy and have actually been constructed by media power itself. This power depicts itself as the very foundation of democracy, as shared social will of a fixed collective ‘us’ that possesses the obvious and plain-as-day truth.

Conclusion: the contested institutions

This paper does not intend to defend the Executive or the Judiciary from the unfair attacks of the “fourth power”. The Bulgarian political and legal institutions are really ill-functioning, there are enough evidences¹ that political elites in Bulgaria as well as Bulgarian judges, prosecutors and lawyers are often corrupt, sometimes even involved in criminal networks. The point that this paper tries to make is that the fourth power – the media – is a part, and not a remedy for this problem.

The analysis of the Bulgarian newspapers and the images of the institutions they produce reveal this: the official institutions in Bulgaria do not exist in a calm context that would secure normal functioning of their “rules of the game”; they rather function in a difficult, conflicting, unpredictable space in which they are constantly contested in public. Their professional roles and procedures are being rejected and mocked, they are denied the normative support shared by all, the type of neutral and unbiased “truth” they produce, which should grant them understanding and confidence, is being denied (the problem of confidence as a precondition for a regular institutional

1 See for example the past several reports of EU on Bulgaria. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/key_documents/reports_sept_2006_en.htm; or <http://www.europe.bg/htmls/page.php?id=9199&category=230&translation=en>

life is addressed in many publications, for example, Giordano and Kostova 2002, Glanville and Paxton 2007): they are attacked even in their very legitimizing grounds. In other words, this is a permanent crisis regime in which the institutions act under additional pressure and in an atmosphere of total doubt, contested by public voices that challenge them. An additional problem is the fact that those voices are constructs of the media and usually there is no “public opinion” or “will of the people” behind them, but only commercial media with unclear purposes, which have never been authorized by anyone to represent anyone (and which also are not at all free of the sins of corruption, manipulative presenting of private interests as universal, etc.).

In this regime of permanent pressure, sometimes the institutions themselves – Executive, courts, etc.) act against their own rules and procedures, their institutional roles are medialized. For many politicians, judges, experts, etc., their professional positions turn into public stage performances – they start to behave like media stars. And vice versa – such a situation gives the journalistic and media stars unexpected powers and functions. They usurp rights and competencies that do not belong to them, start to behave as alternative politicians, judges, experts. Their main weapon is the image of “the People” (“us”) constructed by them and the media (based on traditional, pre-modern, patriarchal images supported by the sentimental popular culture (about the social role of the metaphors of family see Herzfeld 1997, 2006) which turns out to be the condition for hybridization of all roles, institutional and public. So, the media populist discourse penetrates into the specialized one, imitates its professionalism and procedures in order only to reject them, in the name of “obvious” family-populist images.

In short, as a sad joke, in the context of the Bulgarian never-ending, overlapping, and half-successful modernizations, this resembles a Freudian “return of the repressed”. Supported by the neo-liberal media market, a premodern „warm“ social imagination comes back, which empowers itself as the possessor of the truth and in this way it produces mistrust, and even challenges all modern institutions and organizations, their formalized procedures and alienated-anonymous roles through which this truth could be established.

Translated by Katherina Popova

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