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# Remembering Tanjug: Analysing the Re-Articulation of Journalistic Roles at the National News Agency of Socialist Yugoslavia<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

## IZVLEČEK

### SPOMINJANJE TANJUGA: ANALIZA REARTIKULACIJ NOVINARSKIH VLOG NACIONALNE TISKOVNE AGENCIJE V SOCIALISTIČNI JUGOSLAVIJI

*Vloga novinarstva v družbi je zgodovinsko vezana na prevladujočo konceptualizacijo svobode tiska ter specifične družbene, institucionalne in materialne pogoje produkcije novic. Študija proučuje samopercepcije novinarjev, ki so delovali v obdobju socialistične Jugoslavije, in sintetizira njihove spomine na novinarske usmeritve in delovanje z vidika položaja novinarstva v družbi. Študija temelji na ustnih zgodovinskih intervjujih z nekdanjimi novinarji, ki so od poznih petdesetih do devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja tudi kot uredniki in tuji dopisniki delali pri tiskovni agenciji Tanjug, ki je veljala za informacijsko hrbtenico zveznega medijskega sistema v Jugoslaviji in agencijo z mednarodno veljavo. Z združevanjem študij »novinarskih vlog« in raziskav »zgodovin poklicnega življenja« ima študija dvojni prispevek. Prvič, opredeljuje prilagodljive strategije spominjanja, ki jih intervjuvani novinarji uporabljajo, da se legitimirajo kot profesionalci in relevantni interpreti novinarstva v SFRJ. Drugič, razkriva več odtenkov znotraj običajnega, pogosto poenostavljenega razumevanja novinarjev kot sodelavcev oblasti v času socializma in prepozna tri novinarske vloge:*

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*privilegiranih posredovalcev, nadzornih analitikov in razsvetljevalcev, ki so specifične manifestacije sodelovalne funkcije novinarstva.*

*Ključne besede: novinarske vloge, zgodovine poklicnega življenja, intervjuji, Tanjug, Jugoslavija*

## ABSTRACT

*Historically, the role held by journalism in society is linked to the dominant views on freedom of the press as well as the specific societal, institutional and material conditions of news production. This study explores self-perceptions of journalists working in the period of socialist Yugoslavia and synthesises their recollections of journalistic orientations and performances with respect to journalism's place in society. Methodologically, it is based on oral history interviews with former journalists, who also worked as editors and foreign correspondents from the late 1950s to 1990s, at the Tanjug news agency, considered to be the federal media system's information backbone in Yugoslavia. By combining 'journalistic roles' studies and 'occupational life history' research, this study makes two contributions. First, it identifies the adaptive strategies of remembering used by the interviewed journalists to legitimise themselves as professionals and relevant interpreters of SFRY journalism. Second, it reveals nuances within the common, often simplified understandings of journalists as collaborators with power during socialism, and highlights the roles of privileged disseminator, monitoring analyst, and educator as particular manifestations of the collaborative function.*

*Keywords: journalistic roles, occupational life histories, interviews, Tanjug, Yugoslavia*

The League of Communists of Yugoslavia has always paid great attention to journalism, knowing how important the social and political role of journalists is in a democratic and free self-managing society. Journalists have never been asked to be blindly obedient, but we have always reacted in those cases when there was not enough objectivity in presenting the socio-political situation in our country and when journalistic articles could have a detrimental effect on our development or Yugoslavia's reputation in the world.

President Tito, November 1970, *Naša Štampa*

This is how President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito (1970/1980) addressed journalists upon the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federation of Journalists of Yugoslavia (SNJ).<sup>1</sup> His address not only shows how political power defined the place of journalism in society, but the boundaries of journalists' institutional

1 Josip Broz Tito, "Od novinara se nikada nije tražila slijepa poslušnost," in: *Tito o informisanju*, ed. Miroslav Đorđević (Beograd: RTB. 1970/1980), 179, 180.

position in the political arena. Tito regularly interpreted the normative foundations of journalism, reflected on media representations of society, and gave moral lessons to journalists. For instance, in the aftermath of the ‘Croatian Spring’ reform movement (1967–1971), Tito expressed his dissatisfaction with the work of the press, stating that it “discourages us from believing that we can go forward despite all the difficulties”.<sup>2</sup> Later on, after the 6th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Cuba (1979), he praised journalists, “In a word, you did a great job. And the task was not easy, neither for you nor for us”.<sup>3</sup> Such public reflections by Tito shed light on complexities in the journalism–power–citizenry nexus, what was solidly in place and what caused tension, along the continuous re-configuration of Yugoslav journalism.

The place journalism held in socialist Yugoslavia was fluid and changed with the position of the media vis-à-vis the state and the Communist Party, fluctuating between liberalisation and coercion in different periods.<sup>4</sup> Although journalism was normatively conceived through Marxism-Leninism, the discussions on journalistic orientations revealed that they not only stemmed from the official ideology, but from various, even contradictory influences during the re-institutionalisation of the media in Yugoslavia. In the changing political, economic and cultural context, the notion of journalists as ‘socio-political workers’ was continuously re-negotiated against the normative foundations, professional and political ideal(isation)s, media practices and journalistic (self-) perceptions in the multi-national society,<sup>5</sup> and even contested in the later years of SFRY.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop, the main goal of this study is to explore journalistic role orientations and performances in socialist Yugoslavia based on occupational life histories of Tanjug news agency journalists. Combining theoretical, methodological and analytical approaches to ‘journalistic roles’<sup>7</sup> and ‘occupational life history’ research<sup>8</sup> permitted us to examine complex historical dynamics within journalism and reconsider its place in society. Namely, the occupational life history approach allowed us to not

2 Josip Broz Tito, “Ne slažem se sa štamptom kada dramtizira pojedine slučajeve,” in: *Tito o informisanju*, ed. Miroslav Đorđević (Beograd: RTB. 1971/1980), 191.

3 Josip Broz Tito, “Novinari odlično obavili posao u Havani,” in: *Tito o informisanju*, ed. Miroslav Đorđević (Beograd: RTB. 1979/1980), 243.

4 Zrinjka Peruško, Dina Vozab and Antonija Čuvalo, *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems* (London, New York: Routledge, 2021), 76–131. Melita Poler Kovačič, “Normative Role Orientations of Yugoslav Journalists,” *Prispевki za novejšo zgodovino* 62, No. 1 (2022): 67–69.

5 Gertrude J. Robinson, *Tito’s Maverick Media* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 124–27. Mitja Gorjup, “Ponuditi moramo svetu nov tip informiranja,” in: Mitja Gorjup, *Samoupravno novinarstvo (Izbor govorov in člankov)*, ed. Vlado Jarc (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1975/1978), 59–66. France Vreg, “Jugoslovsanska šola novinarstva,” in: France Vreg, *Demokratsko komuniciranje, izbrana dela*, eds. Slavko Splichal and Igor Vobič (Ljubljana: Založba FDV, 1983/2020), 111–24.

6 “Slovenski novinarji nočejo biti družbenopolitični delavci: iz razprave na posvetovanju DNS,” *Teorija in praksa* 25, No. 5 (Maj, 1988): 627.

7 Thomas Hanitzsch and Tim P. Vos, “Journalism Beyond Democracy,” *Journalism* 19, No. 2 (February 2018): 146–64.

8 Oren Meyers and Roei Davidson, “Interviewing Interviewers,” *The Communication Review* 20, No. 4 (October 2017): 277–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2017.1377952>.

simply study journalistic “narrated roles”<sup>9</sup> in the fore<sup>10</sup>, but also to consider journalistic roles as both “referential” (i.e., telling a story about the past) and “evaluative” (i.e., linking these stories to the present moment in which the story is narrated)<sup>11</sup> regarding the place of both journalism and Tanjug in socialist society. The national news agency Tanjug (established in 1943) was the information backbone of the federal media system in Yugoslavia<sup>12</sup> and the coordinating agency of the Non-Aligned News Agency Pool (NANAP) (established in 1974) with considerable international relevance in the global news system.<sup>13</sup> Tanjug held a central position in the institutional framework of journalism, thus making it a relevant case for a historical study of journalistic roles. For that purpose, the authors adopted the method of oral history interviews to conduct semi-structured conversations with former senior journalists, who had also worked as editors and foreign correspondents at the news agency from the late 1950s to 1990s.

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## Theoretical Framework and Historical Context

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### Journalistic roles in socialist Yugoslavia

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Journalistic roles refer “to the way journalists perceive, articulate, and enact generalized expectations as to how journalism is serving society, both in normative and descriptive terms”,<sup>14</sup> while their remembering entails additional referential and evaluative dimension.<sup>15</sup> We therefore understand remembered journalistic roles as forms of ‘present’ personal perceptions and articulations of the roles that journalists performed in ‘past’ practice. In other words, they are narrated as reinterpretations against, to paraphrase Hanitzsch (2019), what journalists *should have done* (normative role orientations), what they *(cl)aimed they did* (cognitive role orientations), what journalists *actually did* (practised role performance), and what they *thought they did* (narrated role performance).<sup>16</sup> Journalistic roles thus, as a “retrospective mechanism” (ibid.), become a more complex reflection of changes in norms and ideals as well as journalistic practices and (self-)perceptions. Understood in this way, journalistic roles are connected to the historical conditions and journalism’s place in society, here socialist Yugoslavia.

In the post-war years in early socialist Yugoslavia, journalists were normatively conceived as collective agitators, propagandists and mobilisers according to the

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9 Thomas Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” in: *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, eds. Tim P. Vos and Folker Hanusch (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2019): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0029>.

10 Hanno Hardt, “Newworkers, Technology, and Journalism History,” *Cultural Studies in Mass Communication* 7, No. 4, (1990): 346–65.

11 Meyers and Davidson, “Interviewing Interviewers,” 281.

12 Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo, *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*, 111.

13 Christian Vukasovich and Oliver Boyd-Barrett, “Whatever Happened to Tanjug?,” *International Communication Gazette* 74, No. 8 (October 2012), 693–710.

14 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1.

15 Meyers and Davidson, “Interviewing Interviewers,” 281.

16 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1–9.

mystified Marxist-Leninist understanding of the role of the press.<sup>17</sup> Later on, following the introduction of socialist self-management, journalists were re-institutionalised as “socio-political workers” through inner normative contradictions, as an analysis of the ethics codes indicated.<sup>18</sup> The normative foundations of Yugoslav journalism included the salient journalistic roles of advocate of the proletariat and facilitator of the development of socialist society defined by self-management, Yugoslav patriotism, and ideas of non-alignment. At the same time, journalists aimed to provide ‘objective’ information, to be critical of the acts and ideas of technocratic bureaucracy, liberalism, nationalism, and individualistic opportunism, as well as to intervene in social life by contributing to education and development. As previous research shows,<sup>19</sup> embedded within the media that struggled to function as open socialist tribunes and drivers of established societal goals, journalistic roles were (re)negotiated between what appeared as informational-instructive and facilitative-collaborative roles.

Over time, the normative eclecticism of the “Yugoslav school of journalism”<sup>20</sup> was changing along with the media sphere’s gradual liberalisation and journalism reorientation to critical openness, undogmatic Marxist analysis of reality, professional ethics, and by refuting state centralism in the information system and bureaucratic apologetics. Journalism’s place in society was re-articulated with ideas arising from different journalistic traditions, such as detached observation, promoting deliberation, monitoring and criticising the holders of power, and being aligned to commercial interests and alleged audience needs.<sup>21</sup> The idea of the press as a political tribune with journalists providing chronicles of the socialist reality, monitoring and revealing social relations while heralding progressive tendencies among the self-managing workers seemed pivotal in journalism’s idealisations.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, a survey conducted by SNJ in 1969 showed that a large majority of journalists answered a series of questions in line with the role of “apologists” in political reporting, while only a small number aligned themselves with the role of “critic”, indicating difficulties in independent journalistic conduct with respect to the (in)formal political power.<sup>23</sup> While almost two-thirds of the journalists in SNJ were party members, only about one-fifth were actively engaged in socio-political action beyond the newsroom.<sup>24</sup> This was seen in journalistic conduct mostly reproducing the contradictions of the one-party political system<sup>25</sup>, in which “the political elites believed that the press should be written by party officials

17 France Vreg, *Demokratsko komuniciranje* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1990), 205–16. Robinson, *Tito’s Maverick Media*, 16–19.

18 Poler Kovačić, “Normative Role Orientations of Yugoslav Journalists.”

19 Robinson, *Tito’s Maverick Media*, 118–27.

20 Gorjup, “Jugoslovska “šola” novinarstva,” in: Mitja Gorjup, *Samoupravno novinarstvo (Izbor govorov in člankov)*, ed. Vlado Jarc (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1975/1978), 56, 57. Vreg, “Jugoslovska šola novinarstva,” 111–24.

21 Dina Vozab and Dunja Majstorović, “The Transformation of Normative Approaches to Journalism in Croatian Academic Literature,” *Croatian Political Science Review* 58, No. 2 (2021), 17, 18.

22 France Vreg, “Tisk in družba: Ali je Leninova misel o vlogi tiska zastarela,” in: *France Vreg: Demokratsko komuniciranje, izbrana dela*, eds. Slavko Splichal and Igor Vobič (Ljubljana: Založba FDV, 1957/2020), 68.

23 Robinson, *Tito’s Maverick Media*, 125, 126.

24 *Ibidem*, 118–27.

25 Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), 27.

rather than professional journalists, a belief congruent with the dominant conception of the media as means of education and propaganda”.<sup>26</sup> During the decay of socialist self-management and the Yugoslav state in the 1980s, tensions in the political realm intensified, retrospectively showing that journalists as socio-political workers were interpellated as “agents of bureaucratic class struggle”.<sup>27</sup>

### The Tanjug news agency in different information periods

In this diverse socio-historical context, the Tanjug news agency belonged to a small category of news agencies that were operating as ‘intermediaries’ between world and national news agencies, “serving both a national but also a significant international market, reporting the latter from a broader perspective than that of domestic interest”.<sup>28</sup> In her seminal work, Gertrude Robinson identified different “information periods” related with the Tanjug’s growing organisational and financial autonomy in its institutional history.<sup>29</sup> In the first post-war years, “all content was censored” and Tanjug’s function as a government instrument – fully owned and financed by it – was to “propagandize the socialist order”, while monopolising all news flow to the fledgling press and radio in the country and developing its international presence as importantly defined by the Cominform break in 1948. With the beginnings of corporate autonomy and media re-institutionalisation in Yugoslavia, official pre-censorship was abolished at Tanjug, now partially financed by the media. Throughout the 1950s, it operated as a “transmission belt” for official texts, namely, the word-for-word reproduction of plans, reports and speeches, while the political news remained relatively undiversified and served governmental needs for justifying the “Titoist self-management philosophy” and its search for an independent political stance in international relations. In the 1960s, the political filtering was moved from outside of the agency to internal Tanjug councils, where the agency set its own filtering criteria. Political news was subject to the limitations imposed by “internal socialisation”, the government’s influence on Tanjug news production was indirect through boards, while the importance of the party ‘aktiv’, an institutionalised voice for the opinions and interests of both functionaries and party members, was in decline at the agency. In the 1970s, the handling of political information became once again much more sensitive after the League of Communists’ return to centralism, following the ‘Croatian Spring’, among other political, economic and cultural factors. Financed by the media, enterprises and the government in almost equal shares, Tanjug strengthened its international coverage and emphasised federal and inter-republic reporting with (again) more carefully defined filtering criteria, also (re)affirming which subjects were ‘taboo’, like nationalism and criticism of self-management.

26 Ibid., 69.

27 Rastko Močnik, “V boj za svobodo javne besede – danes,” in: Karl Marx, *Cenzura in svoboda tiska*, ed. Rastko Močnik (Ljubljana: KRT, 1986), 18.

28 Vukasovich and Boyd-Barrett, “Whatever Happened to Tanjug?,” 695.

29 Robinson, *Tito’s Maverick Media*, 81–85.

Besides the official celebratory self-portrayal of Tanjug (1983),<sup>30</sup> little is known about its organisation and function in the late period of socialist self-management when the notion of journalists as socio-political workers was contested by journalists themselves, eventually removed from the professional code of ethics, while journalists started to see themselves as “public workers” who were “not accountable to the working class or the League of Communists”.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on the theoretical reconsiderations of journalistic roles, the changing socio-historical contexts of journalism’s place in society during socialist Yugoslavia, and Tanjug’s complex relationship with power and the citizenry, we address this research gap by posing the main research question:

How do former Tanjug journalists re-articulate their roles as they remember their role orientations and performance during socialist Yugoslavia?

This historically and theoretically informed study has two aims. While it seeks to analyse the correlation between “orientations” (norms and values) and “performance” (practices and narratives)<sup>32</sup> of former Tanjug journalists, its primary focus is on the process of remembering not only to locate the historical accounts of their occupational lives, but to unearth “how past occurrences are remembered, shared or consciously or unconsciously interpreted and reinterpreted over time by those who lived through them”.<sup>33</sup>

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## Methodology

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To address the main research question, the “collaborative (auto)biography interview”<sup>34</sup> method was adopted, which allowed us to explore the dynamics between the personal, institutional and societal in Tanjug’s history. By collecting and analysing “individual histories”, potentially contaminated with faulty memories, opinions and forgotten details,<sup>35</sup> this study goes through “a kind of Rashomon” with various voices and versions of the ‘grand narrative’.<sup>36</sup>

Sampling was established through a combination of snowballing and controlling for different periods of Tanjug’s development (1950s–1990s) and news agency figures holding experience not only as journalists, but also editors and foreign correspondents to address the agency’s organisational structure and diversity. Initial informants from academia and journalism were used to nominate interviewees and each interviewee was then asked to suggest names of former Tanjug journalists according to the control criteria. In the periods before, between or after their foreign correspondent positions, all of the interviewees were journalists and editors for Tanjug news services for Yugoslavia and for other countries, economic information, and information

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30 Tanjug, *Tanjug: Četiri decenije*. (Beograd: Tanjug, 1983).

31 “Slovenski novinarji nočejo biti družbenopolitični delavci: iz razprave na posvetovanju DNS,” *Teorija in praksa* 25, No. 5 (Maj, 1988): 627.

32 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1–9.

33 Miranda J. Banks, “Oral History and Media Industries,” *Cultural Studies* 28, No. 4 (March, 2014), 547.

34 Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2005).

35 Banks, “Oral History and Media Industries,” 545, 546.

36 Ibid.

publications and other services. The interviewees' educational background is in the social sciences and humanities, with most holding a law degree and having been members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. Some had reservations about having their full names published and we thus decided to anonymise all interviewees.

Table 1: The interviewees

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Period with Tanjug</b>	<b>Foreign Correspondent: Place and Period</b>
int1	14/03/2017	1975–2005	Cuba (Havana): 1975–1983
int2	14/03/2017	1959–1997	GDR (Berlin): 1968–1972; Soviet Union/Russia (Moscow): 1978–1982; 1995–1996; Czechoslovakia (Prague): 1985–1989
int3	15/03/2017	1966–1994	Sweden (Stockholm): 1984–1988
int4	03/03/2017	1975–2005	Mexico (Mexico City): 1979–1983; Cuba (Havana): 1987–1991
int5	08/03/2017	1975–1992	West Africa: 1982–1987
int6	01/03/2017	1972–1992	Italy (Rome): 1985–1989
int7	18/02/2017	1959–1980; 1981–1994	Soviet Union (Moscow): 1970–1974; China (Beijing): 1976–1980; 1991–1993
int8	20/03/2017	1957–1996	Soviet Union/Russia (Moscow): 1968–1970; 1992–1996; Czechoslovakia (Prague): 1980–1984; GDR/Germany (Berlin): 1988–1991
int9	04/03/2017	1965–1996	Kenya (Nairobi): 1972–1975; Italy (Rome): late 1970s; United Nations (New York): 1986–1989; Belgium (Brussels): early 1990s
int10	09/03/2017	1959–1996	United Kingdom (London): 1975–1980; France (Paris): 1984–1988; 1992–1996
int11	22/02/2017	1978–1994	Romania (Bucharest): 1985–1988; 1991–1994
int12	24/02/2017	1969–1995	Ghana (Akra): 1977–1981; Kenya (Nairobi): 1984–1989; Italy (Rome): 1992; Switzerland (Geneva): 1994–1995
int13	07/03/2017	1970–2006	Egypt (Cairo): 1982–1986; Israel: 1987–1991; Switzerland (Geneva): 1995–1998; Belgium (Brussels): 2001–2005
int14	06/03/2017	1969–2010	Sweden (Stockholm): 1981–1985; Greece (Athens): 1987–1991; Turkey (Istanbul): 1994–1997

Each interview conversation was both ‘structured’ with an interview guide developed around the main problem-centred themes (biographical history, journalistic roles, journalism–power relations) and ‘open’ by letting the interviewees “set the course of the interview, within reason” and included follow-up questions to interrogate the process of remembering.<sup>37</sup> The interviews were conducted in Belgrade in public places like cafés and journalistic clubs, and in private spaces like interviewees’ offices and apartments, had an average length of 1 h 52 min (shortest: 1 h 17 min; longest: 2 h 58 min). The interviews were conducted in-person in the Serbian language, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The anonymised transcripts are available from the Social Sciences Data Archive in Ljubljana.<sup>38</sup>

The exploration of remembering journalistic roles entailed three levels of analysis. First, we used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo ‘to node’ the journalists’ statements according to the six elementary journalistic functions identified by Hanitzsch: informational-instructive, analytical-deliberative, critical-monitorial, advocative-radical, developmental-educative, collaborative-facilitative.<sup>39</sup>

Second, after we identified the collaborative-facilitative role as the most prominent one, we focused on the referential (i.e., journalists’ accounts of the Tanjug socialist past) and evaluative (i.e., interrogating those accounts of the past with the present interview context) dimensions of a journalist’s memory<sup>40</sup> to reveal their adaptive strategies of remembering.

This led us to the third level of analysis where we considered the collaborative role in greater depth with respect to (in)consistencies noticed in the journalistic narrated roles. The focus on adaptive strategies and ‘new’ negotiations of ‘old’ institutionalised orientations and practices meant three distinctive articulations within the collaborative journalistic role could be identified.

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## Results: Remembering Journalistic Roles at the Tanjug News Agency

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### Collaborative journalists, but not socio-political workers

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The interview analysis indicates a lack of correspondence between normative foundations defining journalists as socio-political workers and the interviewees’ remembering and making sense of journalistic ideals, practices and perceptions during socialism. Most interviewees regarded the notion of socio-political worker as “ridiculous” (int3, int5, int13) or “irrelevant” (int2), presenting it as an idea imposed from the

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37 Mike Conway, “Oral History Interviews,” *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies* (December 2013): 155–78, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444361506.wbiems177>.

38 Igor Vobič and Ana Milojević, *Novinarstvo novinske agencije Tanjug u periodu socialističke Jugoslavije, 2017 [Podatkovna datoteka]* (Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, Social Science Data Archives, 2022), [https://doi.org/10.17898/ADP\\_TANJUG17\\_V1](https://doi.org/10.17898/ADP_TANJUG17_V1).

39 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1–9.

40 Meyers and Davidson, “Interviewing Interviewers,” 281.

outside and characterising it as the counter-notion of a “journalist” (int3, int4, int7) or “professional” (int10), “It was going in one ear and out the other, it didn’t concern me much, simply because I didn’t have my personal, internal affinities to be a socio-political worker, and I didn’t care” (int2). Some interviewees discussed the notion as “a phrase” (int2), “a formula” (int9) or “slogan” (int14) used by political power to define the place held by journalism in the political realm, as a means of limiting and surveilling journalism, particularly critical journalists, while stating that some colleagues were willing to accept it. Only one journalist stressed that he openly regarded himself as a socio-political worker, “I accepted that in the sense that I did responsible social work, which influenced the formation of public opinion, and with that work I informed the public in my country about the circumstances and political processes, and about the economy, sports, culture in the country where I lived. In that sense, I was a social and public worker” (int8).

While the interviewed journalists generally refused to align themselves as a socio-political worker, the interview narrations indicate the dominance of the collaborative function in Tanjug journalists’ (re)assessments of their roles during the SFRY period. Namely, the interview analysis reveals a dominant understanding of Tanjug journalists as “political partners” (int5) and their journalistic conduct as “supportive of the main political line” (int7) of the SFRY government, involving their “integral” function in the development not only of self-managed socialism as a social system, but as “part of the general state policy with respect to national affairs and international relations” (int8). These inconsistencies allowed us to outline the adaptive strategies of remembering and different roles in collaborative journalism.

### **Adaptive strategies of remembering collaborative journalism**

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As the interviewees remembered the collaborative function as having been dominant, they re-articulated the thematic boundaries of their journalistic conduct as the “untouchable values” (int5) and the “limits” (int2), which were not imposed but informally identified within newsrooms by journalists and editors (int8) or were “simply known” (int2). Subjects not to be questioned and to be reported on with particular sensitivity were President Josip Broz Tito, the National Liberation Struggle during the Second World War, the idea of Brotherhood and Unity in Yugoslavia, Self-Management as a social system and philosophy, and the idea and movement of the Non-Aligned.

Unbelievable ... I mean, none of us ever slipped off that path. Nobody told us anything, they didn’t force us, they didn’t punish us, but everything went well. The policy of the state is like that, and in a way, I have no idea, a special, inexplicable way we knew it was like that, and we all behaved like that. I really can’t even explain. (int11)

However, the interviewees acknowledged that editors and journalists identified these boundaries also through the socialisation of newcomers. In one instance, an interviewee had written a commentary about the SFRY’s decision to write off the debt of some Non-Aligned countries. The commentary was accepted by the editor-in-chief

and published without the author's name. When the chief of staff in the government cabinet read the commentary aimed at a top state official, he called the managing director of Tanjug and demanded that the author be "thrown out" (int13).

Then the director (...) called the editor-in-chief and asked, "Who wrote this?" He said: "This young man of ours". And then he [the editor-in-chief] called the chief of staff and said, "Listen, you will have to remove me, because I take responsibility". (...) Then, the next day, the secretary of the editor-in-chief told me that he had rewarded me with 40,000 dinars because of that comment. My salary, for example, was 120,000 dinars at the time. I said, "Okay". After half an hour, the secretary of the director called and said: "The director has given you a 60,000 dinar fine". I asked, "Why?". She said, "I'll put him on". And he spoke through his nose. I said, "Comrade Director, what is this?". "Kid", he said, "let this be a lesson. You are still at the level of ordinary news and you dare to write a commentary". (int13)

Not only across the interviews, but also within them at least three adaptive strategies of remembering were identified with respect to the thematic boundaries Tanjug journalists acknowledged in news agency production. These mechanisms were adopted by the interviewees not to normalise Tanjug's collaborative function so much as legitimise themselves as professional journalists in SFRY and to validate themselves as present interpreters of journalism during the socialist self-management. The first adaptive strategy was 'appropriating' the notions of 'truth', 'news' and 'accuracy', mending them with respect to the established journalism–power relationship in the country at that time and the national interests of SFRY.

Everything that was covered and everywhere Tanjug reported from regularly, I must say, was true. With the following note: it was true in accordance with the reporting criteria at the time. So, what Tanjug did not dare, but the journalists knew about it, was considered not their fault that they did not write about it. In that sense, everything that Tanjug reported was true. (int2)

You know what, we were always told from the top of the state, from the state, party, political or whatever, "We are working in the interests of this country and we are all doing the same job, you just do it in a different way". Let me tell you something, at that time we did not lie. We kept some things quiet. We emphasised some things, we emphasised other things a little less, but we did not lie. (...) You could write about anything, about mistakes and I don't know what else, in a way that you did not compromise your country and your people and their interests, and still tell the truth. (int8)

I stuck to what Stane Dolanc [one of President Tito's closest allies] once said. I thought the man was right. He said something like, "Not all news, even if it's good, is necessarily good for the state". (int13)

In addition, one interviewee used this strategy to add legitimacy to his journalistic work for Tanjug by appropriating the notions of 'professionalism' and 'skill'.

If you have accepted to work in journalism, don't dig around, you can, but you won't last long. Yet, within the frame you could do whatever you want. You could be a good professional, and skilful. (int5)

The second strategy of adaptation saw the framework of ‘deciding what’s (not) news’ as part of ‘business as usual’, legitimising their other “critical reports” (int2) for the Tanjug news agency and the boundaries in their conduct as “normal” (int8) and “without a dilemma” (int14).

You could write critically about anything that was happening in Yugoslavia, except Tito, (...), Non-Alignment, you also did not dare [to criticise] the Yugoslav National Army, but the League of Communists you did. There was criticism, even harsh [criticism]. Nobody went into experiments; we just knew what we could do. (int2)

The briefings were at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I frequently went there. This is done everywhere in the world. We come from all national affairs newsrooms in the country without foreign correspondents, and the minister said, “Please, we are interested that our state announced this, that, this and that”. And, “Please ask this question”. That was a completely normal thing and is everywhere around the world. (int8)

The third adaptive strategy of remembering was to self-reflect on the thematic boundaries of Tanjug news production by using the notion of ‘self-censorship’, legitimising their past journalistic conduct as well as their current reasoning of it.

We just knew it. It was self-censorship, of course. We just knew what not to write. If you write that, they will either delete it for you, or they will release it somewhere, so you will have to answer for it in some way. (int2)

I never lied. I guess my colleagues also did not lie. Maybe they kept quiet about some things. (...) The truth can be told in different ways. Well, they announced that truth in such a way that it was not in conflict with state and party interests. It was self-censorship. It meant moving within the general framework of state and national interests. (int8)

One interviewee stressed that “keeping quiet about some things” was not enough, you also had “spit on the other side” (int14). A similar adaptation was expressed by another interviewee, operating with the notion of “propaganda” to discuss journalistic objectivity with respect to the thematic boundaries, while self-labelling Tanjug journalism as “regime” and “Titoist” (int12).

There was, foremost, objectivity as a kind of given framework in which you move because you do not know the full truth. And then what you learned and saw you tried to adjust it a little as befitted the propaganda. (...) As far as the propaganda moment is concerned, it was exclusively Titoist in internal political journalism. (...) Most seem to have believed that I was a regime journalist based on what they could read. (int12)

### Three collaborative journalistic roles

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As a higher-order structure, the dominant collaborative function defined the journalistic roles the interviewees constructed through ‘new’ re-negotiations of ‘old’ institutionalised orientations and practices. Three collaborative journalistic roles were articulated in the interviews: privileged disseminator, monitoring analyst, and educator.

**Privileged disseminator.** This role of disseminating information was central in the interviewees' narrations, expressed through a contradictory mix of the idea of journalists as detached observers, the aspiration to provide objective accounts of news, and the concept of a mouthpiece relaying and curating official information. On one hand, the interview data indicate Tanjug journalists disseminated news in line with the "dual role" (int5) of the 'General Service', that is, informing about general news with its federal and international network of offices and correspondents, while having the "privilege" as a national agency to exclusively access and disseminate news of great societal or state importance.

As time went on, the media scene developed more and more, newspapers and stations began to ask the state authorities for some information, there were situations when they said: "Wait for Tanjug". We conveyed the official government position. (int5)

We had to take care not to go out of certain frames and so on, but we had the freedom to process and interpret the words of the highest-ranking officials, looking for [relevant] information. And that is what was most important in our work, that information. (int6)

One interview explains the dissemination status of the Tanjug news agency with an example of when an 'official secret' was published by mistake. He had been late for a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce.

The topic was the debts of the Non-Aligned countries, all due to Yugoslavia. I sat down and wrote [what the chamber president was saying], Iran owes so and so, Iraq so and so, Libya so and so, everyone owes us [SFRY]. I came back to Tanjug, sat down and wrote the piece. The next morning, all of the newspapers published the story on their front pages. (...) The director, the editor-in-chief, called me and said, "Are you normal? You have revealed a state secret". (...) I had been late [for the meeting and had not heard] the president of the chamber declare "This is not for publication". (int11)

On the other hand, Tanjug journalists also disseminated news solemnly to the state leadership and high officials as members of the 'Newsroom for Information Publications and Services' (RIPS), which produced special thematic 'bulletins' and the 'Direct Telegraph Service' (DTS). Through these channels, they provided news that "should not have been published in the General Service" (int2) and "should not have reached the press according to some criteria" (int5), but was relevant for the state leadership, for instance, what was being written about SFRY in the international press.

In fact, all of us journalists vetted ourselves in some way. Because there we transmitted agency news, which was very unfavourable to Yugoslavia, to Tito. But there was no censorship. Interesting. Sometimes, that service was three times better than the general service. (int13)

One interviewee explained that a derivative of RIPS was 'censorship' of the international press if there was "a negative text about Yugoslavia" (int4):

I worked as a censor at Tanjug for a while. There was a group of us journalists who received all the Western press before it was distributed in Yugoslavia and, if there was for instance news about a quarrel between Tito and Jovanka [his wife], that copy did not

go out to the kiosks. It was a privilege for us because we could look at magazines and newspapers that others could not. And then to review it all. (int4)

**Monitoring analyst.** This salient role involves explaining events in the news or a certain relevant phenomenon in SFRY or other countries by describing the background, revealing the details and curating the statistical data gathered in order to scrutinise existing power relations, respond to misconduct or exemplify social paradoxes. On one hand, regarding this role the interviewees referred as Tanjug's correspondents from other countries, portraying their work as 'critical', yet closely bounded by the position of SFRY in international relations.

I had the luck, rather than misfortune, of publishing a lot from East Berlin [as a correspondent]. Because they criticised us [SFRY] and I treated them in the same way, within what is allowed in our occupation, of course. (int2)

In January 1985, I went as the Tanjug correspondent to Bucharest. (...) [By the end of the decade] I was the most western correspondent there. They were all from the countries of the Warsaw Pact, and I was from Yugoslavia, I did not fit in, I was disobedient. Because I was constantly critical. They were looking for various ways, through the party, through the state, through the government ... And in the end, our people [Tanjug] pulled me out. (int11)

Some journalists stressed that it was common for a journalist to attend a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "not to get assignments", but for "a consultation" about the current problems of the country they were going to cover as a correspondent (int8). In this context, the interviewees stressed that through their news and analysis of other countries they were indirectly critical of SFRY.

In this way, the comparison became a matter of public opinion. When I was writing about the elections, it was written about the multi-party system, it could not have been avoided. The readers here [in SFRY] could conclude, "Yes, it's not just one party. You see, there are countries". So, by the nature of things, foreign news journalism provided many possibilities.

[W]hat I reported on from Africa was a critique of the cult of personality and dictatorship of one party. So, on two occasions, risking being returned [to Yugoslavia], I criticised from Africa what was happening in Yugoslavia and in Titoism. (int12)

On the other hand, this role refers more directly to social relations within SFRY, covering, for instance, breaches of workers' rights based on the idea of self-managed labour, corruption and crime, with a view to revealing what "endangers the achievements of the revolution" (int5).

Well, that's how it happened, in economic topics, not only at Tanjug, everywhere in journalism, to expose a director of [a certain company] for restricting the self-management rights of workers and then list economic indicators that have nothing to do with self-management, but show that this one is running the company badly and so on. (int5)

In all that, you could really write about irregularities, about the corruption that was then, something small relative to today's corruption, about thefts, bad directors, you could write about everything without any problems. (int3)

**Educator.** This role refers to the pedagogical function of journalism whereby journalists educate, spread knowledge, and raise awareness of the implications held by certain events or processes. The journalistic role of educator is marginally articulated by the interviewees with respect to ‘oral news’ performed in factories, mines, or army academies – not only by journalists of Tanjug, but other media as well. The editor-in-chief from the late 1980s stressed that oral news was “not part of the Tanjug editorial policy” (int1), but only done occasionally, while journalists from previous periods described it as “regular” and performed “by mutual agreement” (int2).

A few journalists gathered and then the oral news was announced and then those journalists talked about what they would write in the newspaper. They tell some interesting things, present political texts and so on. For example, I took part in one, as a Tanjug journalist, on the [Yugoslav Navy training] ship Galeb [used as an official boat by President Tito]. We were with the cadets of the military academies who were sailing from Split on a trip around the Mediterranean. (int2)

In 1974, when a new constitution was adopted, we who were working as political journalists were engaged and asked to go to collectives and explain what these changes in the constitution bring, how they affect everyday life and so on. (int8)

While explaining the main societal role of journalists in SFRY, one interviewee stressed “being present among people” (int10) and gave an example of oral news.

So, we went to a company, a mine, and we told them about foreign or domestic policy. There was always one journalist covering international affairs, one for the current affairs, and then you had a conversation that lasted for hours. They asked about politics, about everything. / ... / It was actually a nice exchange with those people and then we prepared an article. (int10)

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## Discussion and Conclusion

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This study aimed to determine how former Tanjug journalists re-articulated their roles as they remembered their role orientations and performance based on the occupational life history approach. During the oral interviews, the authors tried to guide the former journalists to reflect on their own work, the institutionalised practices at Tanjug, journalism practice in socialist Yugoslavia more broadly, as well as the normative foundations and professional ideals as they remembered them. Although the interviews were guided to distinguish between these levels, our respondents flattened them in their recollections, making it difficult to separate role orientations from performance while analysing their responses. The portrayals of journalism’s place in society during socialism emerged as condensed assessments reduced to compact representations devoid of subtle distinctions and variations, largely resting on simplified relational generalisations in a diachronic and synchronic sense between journalism ‘then’ and ‘now’, journalism in Yugoslavia and ‘elsewhere’, and the journalism of Tanjug

and other media. Throughout the data, inconsistencies, tensions and contradictions were apparent in the interviewees' narrations between the normative foundations of professional journalism in socialist Yugoslavia and beyond, dominant institutional values, attitudes and beliefs regarding the place Tanjug held in social communication, and their remembering of their performance as Tanjug journalists, editors and correspondents.

Moreover, it must be considered that we examined a long time period and journalistic work in a socio-political system that was changing considerably during its trajectory, ending with the breaking up of Yugoslavia along with the fall of socialism. Historically, the place of journalism in society has always been re-negotiated with respect to the prevailing views on freedom of the press, the materiality and contradictions of news production, and the institutional re-affirmation of journalism. Regarding this, the findings support previous research into Tanjug's diverse institutional development as concerns the news agency's organisational and financial autonomy and its integral position within the changing journalism–power–citizenry nexus in SFRY.<sup>41</sup> The occupational life histories we gathered confirm the general trajectories of Tanjug's reconfiguration as a "transmission belt" of the state, the news agency's gradual autonomisation, and diverse (re)affirmation of 'taboo subjects' throughout its development in SFRY.

Observed within the boundaries of a national agency setting, the findings correspond to the broader transfigurations of journalism in Yugoslavia. The literature review shows that journalists in SFRY had difficulty attaining independence from the (in) formal political power and were inclined to perform as apologists rather than critics in the political realm.<sup>42</sup> While such role performance was congruent with the idea of journalists as socio-political workers and the dominant conception of the "media as a means of education and propaganda",<sup>43</sup> it was gradually contested by journalists as socialist self-management went into decay. Journalism's normative underpinnings and its idealisations were altered alongside the structural and ideological changes occurring in politics, the economy as well as international relations.

These historical gradual dynamics surfaced in our interviews when dismissing the notion of a socio-political worker as "ridiculous", "irrelevant" and the counter-notion of a "journalist" or a "professional". Further, journalists were remembering the "idea of a socio-political worker" as imposed from the outside and used for surveillance and disciplining, especially of critical journalists. However, against this de-alignment, we found the collaborative function to have been dominant in the Tanjug journalists' narrations. This kind of ambivalence might illustrate contradictions between orientation and performance, narration and practice, collective and individual in general, and journalistic articulations of their roles during the SFRY period, vis-à-vis the temporal re-evaluation of the journalism and society during socialist self-management in particular.

41 Robinson, *Tito's Maverick Media*, 81–85.

42 Ibid. Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism*. Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo, *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*.

43 Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism*.

Against this backdrop, this study makes two original contributions. First, by identifying inconsistencies in journalistic reflections the study reflects on the remembering of journalistic roles as forms of ‘present’ personal perceptions and (re)articulations of ‘past’ orientations and performances. These inconsistencies proved to be valuable for identifying the adaptive strategies of remembering the journalists used to legitimise themselves as professionals and relevant interpreters of SFRY journalism. As the main adaptive strategies, we identified the appropriating of the notions of truth, news and accuracy, correcting news values, and interrogating self-censorship with respect to the journalism–power relationship inside the country and the position of SFRY in the international arena. Second, our analysis revealed more nuances within the common, often simplified understandings held by journalists as collaborators with the party and the state in socialist regimes. Here, the journalistic role conceptualisation and the analytical framework based on elementary journalistic functions<sup>44</sup> proved to be fruitful for highlighting more specific manifestations of the collaborative function (i.e., privileged disseminator, monitoring analyst, educator). The study thus contributes to the journalistic roles scholarship by introducing a historical approach to exploring journalistic reflection as a “retrospective mechanism”,<sup>45</sup> operating against norms, ideals and media practices as well as the synchronic and diachronic complexities of personal, institutional and societal articulations of journalistic roles.

Still, we must acknowledge that human memory is generally associated with incoherence and inconsistency in our interviews could be even more specific because they relate to understanding socialism from a contemporary perspective, from which the socialist politico-economic system and journalistic collaborative-facilitative function might entail varying connotations. Namely, we analysed journalists’ recollections of a system that is radically different from the one they are living in today, and that fact surely skewed their perceptions, at least somewhat. Therefore, the adaptive strategies and contradictions arising between embracing and dismissing the collaborative role in the journalists’ narratives could be discussed much further relative to the question of journalism freedom from external and internal sources of influence, especially the ideology in a given system and historical context. Although we believe such an endeavour would generate interesting insights, that lies beyond the scope of this study.

This study also exposes the limits of oral history interviews, condensing institutional and societal complexities through personal reflections based on simplified relational generalisations. To overcome such limitations, we took them into account and analysed the inconsistencies, tensions and contradictions in the interviewees’ narrations against a firm theoretical basis and profound contextual background. Still, our view is that further historical research into journalistic roles should not only interrogate professional remembering (interviews with former journalists), but also explore their historical re-articulations by investigating institutionalised values, attitudes and beliefs (i.e., analysis of internal media documents) and examining media performance

44 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1–9. Hanitzsch and Vos, “Journalism Beyond Democracy,” 146–64.

45 Hanitzsch, “Journalistic Roles,” 1–9.

(i.e., content analysis of news). Given that, like in the political and academic realms, journalism's place in society during SFRY was chiefly positioned with simplified monolithic descriptions, theoretically informed and methodologically diverse scholarship is essential for shedding light on diversities.

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## SPOMINJANJE TANJUGA: ANALIZA REARTIKULACIJ NOVINARSKIH VLOG NACIONALNE TISKOVNE AGENCIJE V SOCIALISTIČNI JUGOSLAVIJI

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### POVZETEK

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Vloga novinarstva v družbi je zgodovinsko vezana na prevladujočo konceptualizacijo svobode tiska ter specifične družbene, institucionalne in materialne pogoje produkcije novic. Študija proučuje samopercepcije novinarjev, ki so delovali v obdobju socialistične Jugoslavije, in sintetizira njihovo spominjanje novinarskih usmeritev in delovanja z vidika položaja novinarstva v družbi. Študija temelji na 14 ustnih zgodovinskih intervjujih z nekdanjimi novinarji, ki so od poznih petdesetih do devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja tudi kot uredniki in tuji dopisniki delali pri tiskovni agenciji Tanjug, ki je veljala za informacijsko hrbtenico zveznega medijskega sistema v Jugoslaviji in imela veljavo v mednarodnem prostoru. Intervjuji so bili opravljeni pozimi in spomladi 2017 v Beogradu. Prepisi intervjujev so v celoti dostopni v Arhivu družboslovnih podatkov Fakultete za družbene vede.

Z združevanjem teoretskih, metodoloških in analitičnih pristopov v raziskavah »novinarskih vlog« in »zgodovin poklicnega življenja« ima študija dvojni izvorni prispevek. Prvič, z ugotavljanjem nedoslednosti v novinarskih refleksijah odraža spominjanje na novinarske vloge kot denominacije »sedanjih« osebnih zaznav in reartikulacije »preteklih« novinarskih usmeritev in delovanja. Te nedoslednosti so se izkazale kot dragocene pri analizi napetosti med osebnim, institucionalnim in družbenim, ob prepoznavanju prilagodljivih strategij spominjanja, s katerimi so intervjuvani novinarji

legitimirali sebe kot profesionalce in relevantne interprete novinarstva v socialistični Jugoslaviji. V odgovorih intervjuvancev se tako kažejo strategije prilagajanja raziskovalnemu in zgodovinskemu kontekstu, in sicer skozi apropiacijo pojmov resnice, novic in točnosti, prilagajanje kriterijev objavne vrednosti novic in preizpraševanje (samo)cenzure. Drugič, analiza razkriva več odtenkov znotraj običajnega, pogosto poenostavljenega razumevanja novinarjev kot sodelavcev oblasti v času socializma in prepozna tri novinarske vloge kot specifične manifestacije sodelovalne funkcije novinarstva: novinarji kot privilegirani posredovalci, nadzorni analitiki in razsvetljevalci. Študija tako prispeva k raziskovanju novinarskih vlog z uvajanjem zgodovinskega pristopa k proučevanju novinarskih samopercepcij kot »retrospektivnih mehanizmov«, ki delujejo v odnosu z normativnimi načeli, idealizacijami in medijskimi praksami ter sinhronimi in diahronimi kompleksnostmi osebnih, institucionalnih in družbenih reartikulacij novinarskih vlog.

Čeprav intervjuji potrjujejo splošne poti organizacijskega razvoja Tanjuga od zgodnjih povojnih let, ko je bila agencija glasnik države, do razgibanega procesa njene avtonomizacije, skozi katerega so se protislovno potrjevale »tabu teme«, študija poudarja tudi omejitve ustnih zgodovinskih intervjujev. Te se kažejo v poenostavljenih strnitvah institucionalnih in družbenih kompleksnosti zgodovine Tanjuga skozi osebne refleksije nekdanjih novinarjev, ki temeljijo na poenostavljenih relacijskih posplošitvah med »nekoč« in »zdaj«, med Jugoslavijo in drugimi državami ter med Tanjugom in drugimi mediji. Da bi jih presegla, je študija metodološke omejitve upoštevala in analizirala nedoslednosti, napetosti in protislovja v intervjujih glede na teoretsko razumevanje odnosa med novinarstvom, oblastjo in državljani ter kontekstualno poznavanje razvoja novinarstva v socialistični Jugoslaviji.