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## Who Is To Blame? An Analysis of the Representation of Responsibility/Guilt in Croatian Print Media

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### Introduction

In its recent history, Croatian society underwent several different periods in which the societal values shifted severely. Totalitarianism versus democracy, communism versus capitalism, and Balkan versus Europe are only some of the competing notions that influenced the shaping of the country's identity. Such complex heritage makes itself clearly visible in the public discourse on individual and collective responsibility/guilt, which this article is interested in analyzing.

In Croatian media, public discourse about responsibility/guilt appears in several different themes, out of which this study will focus on the following three. The first could be labeled as criminal responsibility/guilt, such as the issue of war crimes committed by Croats throughout the war or the various corruption scandals that marked the second half of the last decade. The second theme could be called political responsibility, and within it the media often put forward economic issues, such as the failed process of privatization, the high unemployment rates, various issues regarding Croatia's approach towards the European Union, and other current political issues. The third is moral responsibility, which is the least tangible of all, because it is mostly concerned with what somebody failed to do or prevent.

According to the way a media outlet or an author treats these issues, one might argue that they are rightwing or leftwing, liberal or conservative, pro-European or nationalist, etc. But underlying all of these themes which recur in the Croatian media, some mechanisms that are routinely used by all - even in order to support the opposing point of view - give evidence of a common societal heritage.

In the first part, we will present some of the seminal works in the discussion on responsibility/guilt in post-Second World War in Europe, and also analyze some of the aspects of the former regime that may explain some of the residues still present in the current media discourse. We will use the words "responsibility" and "guilt" as alternate terms, because, as the analysis will demonstrate, the analyzed discourse does not sufficiently distinguish between the two. In the second part, we will present the methodology used in the examining of media texts. In the third part, we will analyze the commentaries published in five Croatian daily newspapers throughout one week. Finally, we will discuss the findings.

### Individual versus Collective Responsibility/Guilt

This literature review will assume a twofold direction. On one hand, it will attempt to assess the impact of Croatian transition from communism towards capitalism on the definition of the terms collective and individual in public discourse. It will also present an overview of the post-Second World War debates on the issue of responsibility/guilt.

As Zupanov (1977) explains in one of the core sociological critiques of the socialist economy of "self-governing", one of the dominant societal values in former Yugoslavia was egalitarianism. The former regime produced an "egalitarian syndrome" that, according to this author, consisted of a series of socio-economical values, which were incompatible with the values of an industrial society.

Among other things, the norm of egalitarian distribution suggested that one should not have a bigger salary nor even desire one. The "obsession with private owners" ostracized the private-business sector as a direct threat to the system, primarily because of its implicit principle: not everyone is the same. Furthermore, the former regime, according to Zupanov (1977), supported a strong anti-professional sentiment, because different sorts of knowledge also represented a monopoly of some kind, the right to be an autonomous expert in some field.

The egalitarian attitude: "I am equal to all the others," was easily transformed into another one: "I am equally competent as all the others." The consequences of such an attitude were well known ... "In our country everybody knows more than the one who does know." (Zupanov, 1977, p. 54).[(2)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm#FNT1)

This view was, logically, followed by anti-intellectualism and strong opposition to any sort of creative and intellectual work. The society, which was supposed to be advancing towards a new industrial revolution based upon the so-called tertiary professions, had a deeply rooted disdain towards that sector of the society. The concept of *uranilovka* - the claim that everybody has the same needs - resulted in a form of collectivism that favored mediocrity over creativity and ultimately rendered impossible various sorts of societal recognition of individuals: from the economic, through the intellectual, towards the political domain.

In his later work, Zupanov (2002) states that the Croatian form of capitalism, in which the state and its politics influences the economy and disables any actual political or economic independency, only strengthened the collectivist values that claim "radical egalitarianism" as a norm. But the society simultaneously rejected the communist heritage as "politically incorrect" in a more abrupt way than many other European transitional countries (Zupanov, 2002).

... the s trong heritage of collective values in Croatia could not disappear in a few (war) years. On the contrary, one could expect that some collective values - primarily the ones that Vera St. Erlich called the "heroic codex", which is culturally endemic in the Dinaric region - at the time of war even strengthened, since it had a survival value for the Croatian national corpus. (Zupanov, 2002, p. 206).[(3)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm#FNT2)

Zupanov's work is a scientific explanation of a claim that has become commonsensical in contemporary Croatian society: one of the reasons why communism failed is that it favored the collective over the individual. The discourse promoted in the communist regime supported collectivist values, which strongly influenced the notion of responsibility/guilt: if there were no individual merits, there were no individual responsibilities, either. This paper will attempt to uncover whether the residues of these values still remain in the current public discourse on individual versus collective responsibility/guilt.

The question of responsibility/guilt was strongly imposed on the intellectual debates in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the atrocities committed in the name of the nation/state - primarily, the genocidal mechanisms of German Nazism - demanded an explanation. As Schaap (2000) explains in a critical comparison of the work of two authors - Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers - the issue of responsibility/guilt of citizens is particularly acute in so-called divided societies, polities undergoing a transition to democracy and "post"-colonial states.

One of the key points that was agreed upon early in this discussion - and which is now assumed as a canon in this body of literature - was that collective responsibility should be and must be distinguished from collective guilt. Whether and why members of various communities, such as a nation/state, should be held collectively responsible for crimes committed on their behalf is subject to different interpretations.

Unlike collective guilt, collective responsibility entails the liability of citizens in various mechanisms of the reconciliation process, such as victim reparations or mutual apologies (Boraine, A. et al., 1994). The liability assumed by such responsibility is an unavoidable requirement for membership in a political community: citizens have certain benefits by virtue of their association with the state, and therefore, they should be held equally responsible for the common costs of such association. There is virtually no escape from such responsibility, because even failing to participate in state activities leads to the "atmosphere of submission, which is also a kind of collective guilt" (Jaspers, 1961). Or, as Arendt (2002) explains it, unlike personal responsibility, the political responsibility of an individual is vicarious and involuntary, but it is, all the same, inevitable.

At the time of the debate on the so-called German question, Jaspers (1961) proposed that Germans should accept a version of co-responsibility for the crimes of the state by assuming the so-called "sympathetic identification" with their co-nationals who were persecuted, tortured and killed in the Nazi regime. In the transitional period after the war he proposes a model of "purification" through spreading a consciousness of moral and metaphysical guilt among individuals. Individuals, according to Jaspers (1961), should realize that each of them is personally complicit in state wrongs.

Jaspers (1961) distinguishes between four kinds of guilt: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical. Among the four, only political guilt may be collectively incurred by all citizens, while the other forms of guilt are strictly individual. Furthermore, criminal and political guilt are subject to public judgment, and moral and metaphysical guilt may only be judged from within. Jaspers (1961) holds the two latter forms of guilt to be the key to the fundamental political renewal of Germany.

In contrast, Arendt's work draws a clear distinction between the private and the public sphere. She proposes a rather compelling argument in order to negate the possibility of a collective guilt of any society: "If all of us are guilty, then nobody is"[(4)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm#FNT3) (Arendt, 2002, p. 19). In her work, guilt is often regarded as a debilitating sentiment, for it compels members of a society to withdraw, thereby disabling them to perform as responsible citizens (Kateb, 1984). Political action should rather be inspired by a principle from without, because the "validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or any particular group" (Arendt, 1977, p. 152). This sort of disinterested concern for the world is, in her opinion, a better solution than the self-regarding sentiments of guilt or the concept of "sympathetic identification". Consequently, Arendt (1958) rejects public performances of guilt as unnecessary.

As she points out in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1964), good people do not necessarily make good citizens. Personal feelings and opinions should, therefore, be restricted to the private domain, but an individual should always publicly act as a responsible citizen. As Arendt (2002) explains, the reason for the formation of the Nazi regime in Germany lies in civic irresponsibility and the intellectual laziness of those who let their own thinking be replaced by the common moral. Once the societal moral was changed and all previously respected orders were voided, the practice of the good citizen became dangerous, and only those who dared to question the rules and regulations acted as responsible citizens (Arendt, 2002). Bureaucracy and ideology were the two major mechanisms that enabled the diminishing of the individual's sense of responsibility: the former is dangerous because it judges people by how well they perform and not by the outcome of their actions, and the latter because it rejects as anomalous all forms of thinking that do not submit to a "tyranny of logicality" (Arendt, 1996).

### Discourse Analysis I - The Excavation of Politics in Text

The media not only produce and distribute information, but they are also one of the "public forums" of public discourse which actively participate in the social process of the construction of meaning. The media's content is informed about the events that occur in other public forums, but it also influences what other public forums are about to say (Gamson, 1988). Since the press can be viewed as an example of a "forum" that reflects attitudes, ideas and beliefs (Triandafyllidou, 1999), this analysis will focus on the content of five daily newspapers. According to Rose (2001), discourse analysis is a particularly useful methodology in investigating the issue of responsibility/guilt, because it is interested in "how a particular discourse describes things...in how it constructs blame and responsibility" (p. 150).

The concept of discourse was initially developed and used in linguistics, but after Foucault's seminal works on discourse, the concept was adopted in the broader realm of the social sciences, especially in the fields of communication and media studies. In his influential paper *The Discourse on Language,* Foucault (2000) defines discourses as structured systems of language built around a specific area of knowledge and organized according to their own internal and external rules. Similarly, Altheide (1996) states that "discourse refers to the parameter of relevant meanings that one uses to talk about things" (p. 31). The issue of this "relevant meaning" - who creates it, when, where and under what circumstances - draws discourse to the contested areas of the society and the power/knowledge constellations in it. As a result, many authors investigating the discursive arena assume a critical stance by advocating 'critical discourse analyses'.

Discourse analysis, according to McQuail (2000), is appropriate in all forms of text and language, which are adapted to certain issue, location and actors involved. When applied critically, it "investigates the dominance exerted and expressed through linguistic forms that are vehicles for carrying socially prevailing sentiments and ideologies" (McQuail, 2000, p. 494). Discourse is, according to Elliot (1996), "a system of statements that constructs an object, supports institutions, reproduces power relations and has ideological effects" (p. 65). Therefore, it is an arena of politics and actors who compete for power within it, and therefore it must be examined critically (Elliot, 1996).

Drawing on the work of Foucault and other authors in the area of discourse analysis, Rose (2001) makes a distinction between what she labels as discourse analysis I, which is primarily concerned with text, intertextuality and context, and discourse analysis II, which is concerned with institutions and ways of seeing. Methodologically, this paper will focus on discourse analysis I, as Rose (2001) defines it.

Discourse analysis I is concerned with discourse, discursive formations and their productivity; it is centrally concerned with language and the production and rhetorical organization of discourse (Rose, 2001). Investigation of the rhetorical organization of discourse includes, according to Rose (2001), the following steps:

a. looking at your sources with fresh eyes,

b. immersing yourself in your sources,

c. identifying key themes in your sources,

d. examining their effects of truth,

e. paying attention to their complexity and contradictions,

f. looking for the invisible as well as visible, and

g. paying attention to details.

On the other hand, exploring the social production of discourse includes, according to Rose (2001), the institutional location of a discourse - which is also marked by the authority of the speaker - and the audience assumed by the texts. The literature review on the issue of responsibility/guilt suggested the following research questions:

a. How is the question of responsibility/guilt constructed in Croatian daily newspapers?

b. How is the question of responsibility/guilt determined in terms of individualizing the blame?

c. Is there a unifying discourse that prevails in all the newspapers, or are there significant differences among them?

### Procedure

This paper analyzed the articles of all five national Croatian daily newspapers - *Jutarnji list, Novi list, Vecernji list, Slobodna Dalmacija* i *Vjesnik* - in the period of one week - from Sept. 22, 2003 until Sept. 29, 2003. The fact that the examination was restricted to commentaries, which means that it included a relatively limited number of authors, can be justified by Elliot's (1996) explanation that discourse analysis examines "the way the language is used, not the people using it, and large variations in linguistic patterning can emerge from a small number of people" (p. 66). Also, the underlying social discourse is easier to uncover in the expressions of the so-called personal opinions and attitudes than in straightforward, journalistic reporting.

After a close and critical reading of all the commentaries that were published in the selected period, we gathered 76 commentaries that implicitly or explicitly dealt with the question of responsibility/guilt - 17 from *Jutarnji list*, 17 from *Novi list*, 13 from *Vecernji list*, 12 from *Slobodna Dalmacija* and 17 from *Vjesnik*. Most of our examples came from articles which explicitly mention words such as "blame," "guilt," "duty" or "responsibility." But we also included some texts that dealt with the issue of responsibility/guilt in an indirect, roundabout manner.

In the second phase of the research, we noted the elements of the discourse - words, expressions and catchphrases - on analytic sheets and grouped them according to several recurring themes. We organized them according to the following four dimensions:

a. Individual - when a person, considered to be guilty/responsible of something, is singled out by name

b. Individual to collective - when an article initially points out an individual and proceeds by broadening the scope of responsibility/guilt to a more collective entity.

c. Collective - when a collective body is held responsible for something.

d. Collective to individual - when an article initially names a whole collective as guilty/responsible and ends by narrowing its scope.

### Findings: The Rule of the Collective

A simple counting of the occurrences of each dimension that appeared in the overall discourse of responsibility/guilt demonstrates that newspapers used the collective dimension more often when discussing responsibility/guilt. Throughout the 76 articles analyzed, the four dimensions noted appeared as follows: "individual" 31 times, "individual to collective" 13 times, "collective" 44 times, and "collective to individual" 14 times.[(5)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm#FNT4) Thus, the number of articles that represented collective or collectivized responsibility/guilt was 57, as opposed to 45 instances in which an individual was pointed out as responsible/guilty in a matter discussed by the authors.

In the week that was analyzed, the commentaries were discussing several major topics concerning Croatian national politics:

**a. The declaration of the so-called "economic belt" in the Adriatic Sea.** The Croatian government, supported by the major political parties, intended to make this diplomatic move, although it was disputed by the neighboring countries such as Italy, Slovenia, and also the EU.

**b. The so-called "Bug affair".** The president of the leading opposition party HDZ (Croatian Democratic Party) accused the members of the ruling coalition of wiretapping. In the meantime, the party won the elections and is the single most powerful parliamentary party.

**c. The "little Ela" affair.** The story of an underage HIV-positive girl, who was isolated in her classroom because pupils' parents were afraid their children might be infected with the disease.

**d. The Gotovina affair.** The former general of HV (Croatian Army) Ante Gotovina, was charged with war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal in Den Hague and is currently hiding from the authorities.

**e. The upcoming national elections in November, 2003.**

**Individual dimension of responsibility/guilt**

The individual dimension of responsibility/guilt usually appeared in the newspapers visibly and clearly, even though the individual's identity was sometimes blurred. The newspapers referred to persons' names, positions/titles or the institutions they are associated with. Individuals were sometimes introduced by all of these elements, but they were also identified just by their positions/titles.

Most common were the examples when the name of the responsible/guilty person was stated in the newspapers in a straightforward manner, as the following examples demonstrate:

* ... *Sanader* arranged an unconvincing pre-election scandal without the minimal level of argumentation that any polite and responsible, public political communication requires. (*J. L.*, 24.09.03., S. M.: Who is Lying, then, Sanader or the Government?)
* Supposedly, *Prime Minister* *Ivica Racan* is the most meritorious for ... [wiretapping the conversations of HDZ officials] (*S. D.*, 24.09.03., D. B.: Bug and Water in the Ears)
* All the effort [of pushing Croatia towards the EU] can vanish because of - one and only person ... because of *general* *Gotovina*. (*Vj.*, 25.09.03., L. S.-N.: Fingers Crossed in Back Pocket)

But, in some instances, the identities of the individuals who were singled out as guilty or responsible were somewhat blurred, as in the following examples:

* ... As in the case of that HDZ teacher who took over the defense of northern Dalmatia as an absolute amateur, dispelled all the experts and, in several days, enabled the enemy to emerge on the Adriatic coast... (*J. L.*, 26.09.03., I. B.: Croats, be Serious)
* In a country in which a person presents himself as a martyr, stepping out from the party that was his mother and father, that gave him everything, the one who was the right hand of the person who produced real martyrs, the ones who were recognized as such by the Pope. (*N. L.*, 28.09.03., B. M.: A Vote for Pinocchio)

This " hide-and-seek" element appeared in negative context exclusively. The people to whom these descriptions referred were held responsible or guilty for something, but their identity was not completely disclosed. The persons these authors referred to were known only to those readers with a deep background knowledge of politics and contemporary history.

**'Individual to collective' dimension of responsibility/guilt**

In this dimension, the individual's responsibility/guilt was linked to collective entities, in relations such as: politician-party, Prime Minister-Government, judge-courts, etc. It shifted the attention to the organizations or institutions that stand behind the individuals who were singled out as responsible/guilty.

In the following example, the journalist comments on the question of sending the troops of HV (Croatian Army) to Iraq, a long-contested political issue that was often interpreted in terms of whether Croatia supports the EU or the United States. The commentary starts out with an overview of recent statements of several state officials - including the Prime Minister and several other ministers of the ruling SDP party - which clearly demonstrates how the attitude of those officials towards that issue changed. By the time the journalist starts criticizing the pragmatic reasons for changing such a decision, the agent was collectivized:

* *Prime Minister Racan* stated yesterday that there is no decision whatsoever on sending Croatian troops to Iraq, and then added that "we are considering participating in the reconstruction of that country in some way, but without sending troops, except under the condition that the UN takes over the commanding of military troops." .... Why did *the government*, then, change its attitude towards sending one troop of HV to Iraq so drastically?! *The government*, it seems, decided to give up sending one troop to Iraq in order not to risk the decline of the ruling-coalition parties' popularity in the face of the elections (J. L., 22. 09. 03., D. B.: Elections and the Question of Sending HV to Iraq)

Thus, although the responsibility was initially clearly focused on several officials, it was later shifted to a more amorphous entity - the "government". The following commentary was written right before the bilateral meeting of Croatian and British Prime Ministers. When the author comes to the point of describing the main political faults that represent open issues between the two countries, the agent, once again, becomes collective - "government" and "Croatia":

* *Racan* and *Blair* will have a working meeting, in which they will discuss all the important matters in this period when *Croatia* needs the support of *Great Britain*. ... *Croatia* has a problem of credibility. Because *it* allowed Gotovina to run away, and because *the government* was not brave enough to deliver the indictment to general Bobetko. (Vj., 24.09.03., B. L.: Three good news)

At the beginning, the commentary singled out the leaders of the governments as representatives of collective bodies. But when it began to criticize their political moves, the agent, once again, shifted towards a more collective entity. Such metonymical and metaphorical replacements of individuals or groups of individuals (such as a government or a parliament) by a more collective term (such as the name of a whole city or country), was present in most commentaries dealing with foreign policy.

In the following example, the journalist endorses the view that the Croatian diplomatic elite failed to recognize early warnings from European diplomats about the exclusive declaration of the economic belt. While the representatives of European diplomacy are two individuals, their counterparts on the Croatian side are represented as "Zagreb," and "Croatia."

* *Croatia* was elegantly warned, during the visit of the vice secretary of the Ministry of foreign affairs, Robert Antoine, and the vice secretary of the Ministry of agriculture, Paolo Scarpa, in July of this year in Zagreb, that international law gives *Croatia* a possibility of claiming the economic zone, but that it is desirable that *it* comes to such decisions in accordance with everybody else. (V. L., 26. 09. 03., S. T.: *Zagreb* did not Understand the Warnings)

Although the diplomats clearly warned certain individuals and not the whole city or a country, the journalist collectivized the responsibility.

**Collective dimension of responsibility/guilt**

The collective dimension of responsibility/guilt was constructed and used in the newspapers more ambiguously than the individual dimension. It was more salient than any other dimension analyzed, and it appeared in most of the articles examined. It could be stated that the overall discourse was saturated by different sorts of collectives.

The most common way of presenting the collective as responsible/guilty, was by generalizing. Many commentaries used terms such as "nobody," "politicians in general," "all ruling parties," etc. Following are some examples of such discourse:

* *Nobody* on the political scene can be exempted from the responsibility for such falling behind. (*J. L.,* 23.09.03.; N. Ð.: Elections or Referendum?)
* How to vote for *those who are*, supposedly, less dirty, less evil, less bad for us? (N. L., 28.09.03., B. M.: Vote for Pinocchio)
* Why... don't *politicians* do more for the sports persons when they are in position to do so? (Vj., 25.09.03., M. S.: Politicians Use Sports Persons for Opportunity Photos Only)
* Our *members of Parliament*, *agents* on the Croatian political scene, ... not only are they not ready, but Croatia was recently confronted with frightening immaturity and irresponsibility of *those* who would like to guide the country. (Vj., 26.09.03., K. F.: The Croatian Pre-election Craziness)
* After yesterday's mega-blamage in the Parliament, *the whole political elite* in Croatia should cover its ears and hide itself in a mice hole (N. L., 25. 09. 03., J. L.: Poor Croatia!)
* In any case, *politicians*, who do not know what they say and do not read what they wrote and voted for, are guilty. (N. L., 26. 09. 03., D.G.: European Slaps on the Wrist to Croatia)

The second way of rendering the responsibility collective and general in the journalistic discourse was by employing various indefinite forms of expression - mostly verbs used without a grammatical person - that elicit the question: who? This mechanism furthermore broadened the level of responsibility/guilt, as in the following examples:

* The conditions for a quality, thematic election campaign *were not formed*... (J. L., 22.09.03., N. Ð.: Elections or Referendum?)
* *There is* an impression that Croatia cannot afford cessions that would make Bruxelles angry (J. L., 25.09.03., A. P.: Instead of Support-Warning to Croatia)
* *How to* *become* a director in a state firm? ... In Croatia, directors are those who chose the right party at the right time (S. D., 22.09.03., S. Lj.: Political Directors)
* What does freedom mean when there is an *omnipresent Croatian syndrome* of lack of knowledge, character, and wisdom? (V. L., 27.09.03., V. S.: When Mesic Met Bush)

The third mechanism of broadening the scope of responsibility was by using the pronoun "we". In the following examples, the authors used the first person plural as a signifier of the whole nation.

* And *we* are afraid of using it [freedom] because *we* do not trust that it is accessible to *us* (S. D., 23.09.03., S. Lj.: The Shock of Freedom)
* *We* beat our breasts, announced that *we* wanted the economic belt ... (S. D., 26.09.03., S. S.: The Belt around the Neck)
* *... We* were a small, stubborn country that caused problems to the world ... Why are *we* good (to them) today? ... How much can *we* trust the international financial institutions? (Vj., 22.09.03., V. V.: Why Are *We* Good to Them Today)

Using the word "public", which was also employed when raising certain criticisms, may be considered a subcategory of the previous mechanism. Following is an example:

* The *public* wants to know that Sanader is telling lies, deceiving, and manipulating ... That is the minimum that should be given to the *public* (J. L., 24.09.04., S. M.: Who is Lying, then, Sanader or the Government?)

**'Collective to individual' dimension of responsibility/guilt**

There were several different mechanisms of individualizing the responsibility/guilt in the Croatian media. In most cases, the names of the individuals were used only as peripheral examples, while the collective remained the real carrier of the responsibility/guilt. In the following article, the journalist commented on a conference of various politicians and academics in Belgrade, organized by the radical Slovenian politician, Zmago Jelincic. During the conference many participants claimed that the Croatian Adriatic coast should be divided among the ex-Yugoslavian countries.

* Hand in hand, one next to the other, *academics*, *politicians*, *jurists*, *writers of childrens' literature*, *private entrepreneurs*, and *Serbian rebels* from Croatia were associating, philosophizing, and "scientifically" discussing the "unjust" and "communist" borders and "genocidal" Croats. ... In order to, as *they* say, ensure a long-lasting peace in the Balkans, "*Zmago* and his companions" asked from Croatia ... war reparations to all the countries that the NDH [Independent State of Croatia] had fought against. (Vj., 22.09.03., M. J.: Zmago on Dry Land)

The following is another example in which the collective responsibility was strongly assumed at the beginning of the article, and the individual names that followed were used as peripheral examples of prior statements. In this case, the author's commentary was provoked by the actions of opposition politicians, but the criticism is directed towards the political elite as a whole.

* All of *them* want to be the God-given *politicians* and *statesmen*, *leaders* and *saviors of the nation*, and *they* expect their pertaining to the privileged, political class will be confirmed. ... The *leader of the HDZ* [Croatian People's Party] loudly claims that he was bugged, but he refuses to give any evidence about it. ... His companion *Seks* claims that this is a "Croatian Watergate", and his arguments are the so-called ends of taping devices (N. L., 25. 09. 03., J. L: Poor Croatia!)

In a few articles, individual responsibility/guilt was actually assumed after collective responsibility was claimed at the beginning of the article.

* [When the silent lobbying started], the loudest were those who were hunting for votes on the issue of the economic zone. ... That plan collapsed at the very beginning, at the moment when the governments' Minister responsible for agriculture publicly threatened, in front of the voters of his party, that the economic belt will be introduced immediately, no matter what happens. (Vj., 25.09.03., B. L.: Cacophony)

### Discussion/Conclusion

As the results suggest, the newspapers demonstrated a tendency to represent responsibility/guilt collectively rather than individually. Most of the articles that were examined according to the "individual" dimension were examples of visible and clear representation of responsibility/guilt - they referred to persons' names, titles/positions and the institutions with which they are associated. It was the only mechanism that directly targeted the agent as the carrier of responsibility/guilt. The results also indicate that the criticisms of individuals were regularly supported by the so-called collective interests, among which the most salient were the various forms of "national interest," such as Croatia's joining the EU. Further research should be undertaken in order to confirm whether this is an element of the overall discourse.

Throughout this dimension, though, another strategy, which we called "hide-and-seek," was also used. Those were the instances in which authors, instead of directly naming an individual, used a vague description of persons they criticized, usually by referring to their title/position in a way that one could not be unequivocally recognized, and by recounting their disputed actions. In most cases, such descriptions were encrypted in such a way that only those with a deep, background knowledge could interpret them in a correct manner.

Such a mechanism reminds of the occasional campaigns of the former communist regime in the media, in which the ruling group, as Zupanov (2002) puts it, would accuse certain parts of the society as responsible/guilty of "social inequality". Among them there were "technocrats", businessmen, intellectuals, even abstract painters (Zupanov, 2002, p. 33). Some catchphrases, which acquired an ironic sense in Croatian everyday speech, were used on regular basis in such campaigns: "some elements," "some structures," "reactionary factors," etc. Instead of naming the perpetrators of the alleged deeds - mostly "ideological aberrations" - such campaigns had no real intention - or, for that account, even effect - but to distract the public attention from the real issues. Similarly, in the examples quoted, the author's accusing individuals whose identity is blurred serves no public good: it is just a play put on for a limited number of spectators.

We will not discuss the vast array of possible reasons for using such a strategy in contemporary Croatian media: it may be that the authors avoided naming the actual agent because the actions they associated them with would be libelous. It could be that they were trying to initiate some sort of reaction from the persons described, or from those in positions of power who should have done something about it. Regardless of reasons, such strategy de-individualized the agent to a degree, and it simultaneously alleged some sort of responsibility/guilt. For those reasons, this finding is rather incompatible with the public discourse of a civil society, in which such grey zones between innocence and guilt should not exist.

The "Individual to collective" dimension as well as the "collective to individual" should be seen as fluid, transitory dimensions, in which responsibility/guilt traveled from the personal towards a more general, collective responsibility, and vice versa. In many of these cases, individuals were singled out only as peripheral examples and not as the real carriers of responsibility/guilt. As the example of the conference in Belgrade demonstrates, the emotionally charged discourse and the strategy of "othering" a collective (in this case, primarily Serbs and Slovenians), was used at the beginning of the article. The collective discourse set up at the beginning prevailed, and the individualizing of the responsibility/guilt - by naming one protagonist of the event - that followed was only a pretext intended to reinforce the previously stated arguments. In another example cited, in which the whole Croatian political elite was harshly criticized, the political stance of the author is completely different, but the mechanism of collectivizing the blame was precisely the same.

In the articles that contained the "individual towards collective" dimension, another interesting phenomenon occurred. The carriers of responsibility were clearly located and named at the beginning, but when the criticism of the actions with which they were associated began, the agent was collectivized. In this dimension, some of the most obvious examples of dispersing responsibility/guilt were encountered.

Finally, the collective dimension was the most salient among the articles examined. The most common way of rendering the responsibility/guilt collective was generalizing. This mechanism consisted in using the pronouns such as "nobody" and "everybody" or making general statements such as "every party," "the whole political elite," "all politicians", etc. The second mechanism consisted in the usage of various indefinite forms of expression - mostly verbs without a grammatical person such as "there is no," "it is known", etc. This mechanism broadened the level of responsibility/guilt even more, for in such expressions the carriers of responsibility were completely omitted.

The third mechanism of collectivizing the responsibility/guilt was using the pronoun "we" as a signifier of the whole nation. In such instances, the individual authors assumed the role of representatives of the whole political entity. Another subcategory of such a mechanism was using the noun "public" instead of the pronoun "we". We consider both to be versions of the same strategy, because in both cases the authors were presenting their own criticisms as criticisms of a collective entity. The word "public" does assume a group of informed, conscious participants in the society, but it is, nevertheless, an entity that cannot be held responsible or guilty any more than the "nation."

It should be noted, though, that Keane (1998) suggests that the use of terms such as "this society" or "our society" (p. 52) may demonstrate the increased awareness of the members of civil society of their own responsibility and societal role. In this case, the use of the term "public" could be interpreted as an example of a collective, albeit positive notion of responsibility/guilt, in which an individual puts forward an issue as a representative of a societal group.

Another element of this collective discourse was present in the articles dealing with foreign policy, where the responsibility/guilt - metaphorically and metonymically - was attributed to whole countries or cities. It was, in fact, an example of how a common diplomatic lingo - in which the Croatian government is called "Zagreb" and the members of the EU are simply called "Bruxelles" - penetrated journalistic articles and collectivized the discourse. Apart from the figures of speech that were used in order to collectivize, such mechanism was not much different from other mechanisms of collectivization.

As most of the examples cited demonstrate, the most salient targets of criticism in Croatian daily newspapers were politicians and politics in general. It is interesting, though, that most criticisms did not pin down or single out an individual. In the period examined, the commentaries supported a discourse that presented the responsibility/guilt as collective and even omnipresent, evenly spread across the political spectrum and, more broadly, among various segments of Croatian society - from "medical lobbyists" to "humanitarians."

Our analysis also demonstrated that the concept of responsibility/guilt did not significantly vary among the five national newspapers: the examples cited sometimes came from the authors and newspapers of diametrically opposite political and ideological backgrounds. The overall public discourse is collective rather than individual; carriers of responsibility/guilt are not transparent, and there is a vast grey zone between innocence and guilt. By blurring the line between collective and individual opinions, perpetrators, and political agents, many newspapers in Croatia still do not perform one of the basic duties of the media in a civil society: informing the public. And, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt, in a country where everyone is guilty, nobody actually is.

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NOTES

[(1)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm" \l "t1) Orlanda Obad is a journalist with Jutarnji list in Zagreb, and Goran Goldberger is a free-lance researcher.  
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[(2)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm" \l "t2) Translation by authors.

[(3)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm" \l "t3) Translation by authors.

[(4)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm" \l "t4) Translation by authors.

[(5)](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/02_3/obad15.htm" \l "t5) As some commentaries contained more than one dimension, the number of articles counted according to these dimensions does not correspond to the actual number of analyzed commentaries.

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