

What a Difference Does Time Make? Framing Media Discourse on Refugees and Migrants in Croatia in Two Periods

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Media framing of Othered groups has become an important area of research in sociology and political science. This paper focuses on analysing media discourse on refugees,

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migrants, and asylum seekers in Croatia in 2015-2016 and in 2018. Taking into account the media framing theory as the main theoretical underpinning of our research, the content analysis was used to gather data. The focus is on four daily newspapers in their printed versions in two periods, corresponding with terms of two ideologically different governments. Articles are used as units of analysis. While the predominant frame in both periods remained neutral, as per norms of journalistic profession, the change in ideological stance of the government - from social democrats, who put humanitarian elements first, to conservatives, whose focus was security-based – coincided with the relative rise in the number of articles with a negative portrayal of the migrant issue.

Keywords: refugees, migrants, Croatia, media framing, the Balkan route, securitization

1. Introduction

The focus of the paper¹ is on the similarities and differences in media portrayal of refugees/migrants² arriving in Croatia on their way to Western European countries. Two separate time periods have been chosen. The first period corresponds to the so-called Balkan route refugee wave³ (2015–2016), and the second one to the irregular border-crossings on Croatia–Bosnia and Herzegovina border (2018). Being traditionally an emigrant country, this was the first time ever Croatia experienced an encounter with a large number of refugees/migrants, which poses a rather interesting question of

¹ The research for this paper was done under the auspices of the project “Refugees in the Eyes of the Social Elite”, 2016-2018, funded by the University of Zagreb.

² The terms “refugee” and “migrant” are not used as synonyms. However, during the research it was noticed that in this context societal actors and the public at large used them interchangeably. Together with the term “asylum seeker” they form a trifecta of naming practices that both obscure and lead to confusion about who the individuals they describe actually are. The theoretical framework gives a deeper insight into the process of naming Others and explains our use of the refugee/migrant label throughout this paper.

³ Although the authors deem the term “wave” to be derogatory and pejorative, in this case they have accepted it as a proxy some media outlets used to depict refugees/migrants arriving in a country. The authors do not approve of the usage of that term.

how this new situation was perceived and managed by key social actors and the general public (Župarić-Iljić, 2016). In addition, over the course of a few years, many changes occurred in Croatia and in Europe, depicted by phrases *from open to close borders* or *from humanitarianism to securitization*. Simultaneously, the number of refugees/migrants wanting to reach Europe (and consequently to pass through the Croatian territory) has not diminished, along with a growing EU pressure of reallocation of asylees to various countries and an increasing number of migrants who, though passing the border illegally, wish to apply for asylum in Croatia.

The interpretation and construction of this new social situation in the media is a key question of this paper. More specifically, the main research questions encompass the media portrayal of the situation with migrants/refugees on the Balkan route once they had arrived in Croatia, and the effect of differentiating circumstances on their portrayal (the change in the ideological background of the government, the daily number of arrivals, the stance of the European Union and member states toward migrant flows, etc.) in the two observed periods. Furthermore, the focus is also on whether there was any difference in the attitudes of media portrayal of refugees versus migrants, and if there were any differences among analysed newspapers. Two national newspapers (Jutarnji list; Večernji list) and two regional newspapers (Novi list; Glas Slavonije) have been compared. The role of the media is analysed using the media framing theory that reveals how Others (refugees/ migrants) are represented, and which aspects of this new social situation are exploited by various newspapers in different periods.

After the introduction, the paper provides a detailed description of the theoretical approach linked to framing of media narratives and their impact on both the elite and the public response, with particular focus on the cases of migrants/refugees. Next, the social context is provided with the aim of describing these two time periods and some general features of the Croatian society. The following two sections deal with data gathering methods and data analysis. The concluding part of the paper gives a research summary and discusses possible further research.

2. Theoretical Approach: Media Framing Theory

Why is it important to understand the interplay between the media framing and people's perception of a (marginalized) social group that the media is portraying? The main reason is that our attitudes towards the others are not made in a vacuum nor are they built independently. They are, for

the most part, socially constructed. “We are all influenced by our history and cultural context, which, in turn, shape our view of the world, the forces of creation, and the meaning of truth” (Mills, Bonner & Francis 2006, p. 26). Frames are practical manifestations of socially structured contexts, because “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). “The world consists of multiple individual realities influenced by context” (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006, p. 26). These realities are immanent to each individual and depend on both the context of their lives, and on other societal actors contextualising a specific issue in a specific way.

The media are one such actor, with a powerful position of not only being able to influence a contextualised reality of an individual – a viewer/reader/listener – but of building completely new realities by focusing on specific contexts (e.g. plight of refugees that asks for a humanitarian approach), and ignoring others (e.g. fear of terrorist attacks that would ask for securitization of the refugee question). The media do it through the use of frames, by focusing on some aspects of reality while obscuring the others, which can and usually does lead the audiences to different and differing reactions (Entman, 1993, p. 55). What the media decides to show and how they decide to present it, hence, matters. Extant literature shows a strong link between the media’s portrayal and society’s tolerance of groups deemed as Others, especially in the case of migrants/refugees (Kamenova, 2014).

In particular, the media have an important role in the process of representation of Others (including migrants) in the public discourse by framing the interpretation for the audiences’ future use, while key events not only lead to the rise in coverage, but also shape any subsequent coverage. Even the “objective” news can be seen as interpretation by an actor, as the presentation of the news, the title, and the visual aids (like photographs or illustrations) allow us as the audience to interpret information according to our preconceived ideas framed through the media. “The media not only produce and distribute information, but are also one of the “public forums” of public discourse that actively participates in the social process of the construction of meaning” (Goldberger, 2004, p. 11), i.e. of naming, defining, and assigning characteristics to specific groups.

The process of naming⁴ is especially influential because it allows quick categorization of the new and the unknown in people’s minds. Thus, it

⁴ Although, as said, the terms migrants and refugees are used by the media interchangeably (hence the authors’ decision to code for both), these two concepts differ. Ac-

is important how people coming to a country asking for help have been named and portrayed, as previous research shows that the term “refugee” is mostly seen as a positive description, while the term “asylum seeker” has most often been linked to stories with negative effects (Klocker & Dunn, 2003, p. 83; Medlobi & Čepo, 2018). Similarly, people act more positively towards refugees than towards economic migrants, especially if those refugees are framed as “non-threatening victims” that need our help (Kyriakides, 2017, p. 1). Hence, the question of who counts as a deserving migrant and what the consequences of using specific definition matters are (see more in Anderson & Blinder, 2015).

The specific type of framing refugees and migrants in the media usually develops under the influence of the existing (or mythologically constructed) narratives already present in the society at large, while the change of frame occurs due to exogenous reasons. The question of whether a dominant group would view Others positively or negatively has many complex answers. However, it is inextricably linked to the concept of belonging and the manner in which the process of “othering” excludes one from belonging. That idea builds on proposition that “belonging implies political competition between collectives like nation-states and migrant communities, where such groups, defined by their self-perception and possibly external ascription as ethnically separate entities, engage in making claims on the state” (Christiansen & Hedetoft, 2004, p. 3).

As extensively discussed in the literature, this is mainly connected with the perception of threats Others demonstrate, regardless whether we are talking about economic, cultural, social, security or health threats (Mayda 2004; Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coender, 2002), which in turn can construct them as undesirable in a specific community (Huot et al., 2015). Recent research on the attitudes of the public in Croatia towards migrants/refugees during 2015–2016, shows the link between higher national identity expression and negative attitudes towards refugees and migrants (Medlobi & Čepo, 2018). This can lead us to believe that identity reasons remain

According to UN Migration Agency (IOM), a “refugee” can be defined as “a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”, while a “migrant” is “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” (see https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf).

latent yet prevalent (for more on manifest vs. latent content of framing of and discourse about refugees, see Peović Vuković, 2017).

Although some research shows refugees being framed as the radical Others (Grubiša, 2017), the same quantity (Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Kyriakides, 2017), including this one, shows people are more keen on viewing refugees positively if compared to other types of people on the move. One of the reasons for such a perception could be that it is easier to accept refugees because of their lack of agency, i.e. because of the idea that they would not be here if there were no conflict in their home country. On the other hand, people might maintain a negative attitude towards migrants due to both their active decision to leave the home country and resettle somewhere else and because their action of moving is not the goal in itself but just a means to achieve another, more direct goal – economic betterment of their position. Because of this, migrants do not find their identity in motion (Hedetoft, 2004, p. 37), which can lead to cultural clashes between ethnically different migrants and the dominant host community.

Previous research (especially in traditionally immigrant countries) on the influence of the media on building narratives on refugees and immigrants shows that specific domestic or international news linked to these two groups have a significant impact on their public depiction. These narratives can be both positive and negative, and are mostly influenced by elections, apparent crime spikes, disasters striking refugees and immigrants, terrorist attacks, etc. (Goldberger, 2014). “The terminology used in description of asylum seekers was more sympathetic in the post-drowning⁵ phase” (Klocker & Dunn, 2003, p. 81), is a good example of the positive change of narrative describing a migrating group after it has been struck by negative circumstances, such as drowning. Similarly, apparent crime spikes (like the stories of New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in Germany), or terrorist attacks (like those in Istanbul or Paris) lead to more negative terminology. “Both security worries and cultural and national-identity issues are key non-economic factors affecting immigration opinions. Security concerns are related to the perception that immigrants are more likely than natives to be involved in criminal activity” (Mayda, 2004, p. 21).

If negative stories prevail in a society (as is the case in Hungary under Orbán government), asylum seekers, as one of migrant groups, start to

⁵ Shocking images of the drowning of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, while crossing the Mediterranean galvanized the European societies into more sympathetic position towards migrants/refugees. S. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-34158221>.

be viewed as a security threat, which leads to the securitization of migration and the use of security discourse (focused on deviancy, crime, etc.). However, it only happens when they are constructed as a threat and interpreted as a problem. The media, we argue, take part in this constructing, depicting refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers as Others, linking them with stories focused on threat of crime or deviance (Klocker & Dunn, 2003, p. 81), as well as those that are linked to the preservation of or an imagined threat to cultural and/or national identity. As Goldberger (2004) showed, the original narrative surrounding migrants in the United States was framed through the lens of societal need (USA *needs* migrants in order to sustain its economic success), while the post-9/11 frame changed from need to fear. This is an important finding because the comparison of our two time periods – and refugee vs. migrant framing political elite and media used – will enable us to compare the importance of the symbolic, terminological, language used to depict Others.

3. Social Context

The paper focuses on media representation in two periods: 2015/2016 and 2018. During the first observation period, between September 2015 and March 2016, around 700,000 refugees crossed through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia in order to reach the countries they preferred (primarily Austria, Germany, and Sweden) (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). This route, called “the Balkan route”, opened when the Hungarian government decided to close its border with Serbia and lasted until March 2016, when Macedonian government closed its border with Greece (D’Angelo et al., 2017). In the case of Croatia, 658,068 refugees entered its territory between 16 September 2015 and 5 March 2016 (Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016; Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018). During this phase, the priority of both refugees and the Government was to ensure their speedy and safe transit through Croatia. This was expressed straightforwardly by the Minister of the Interior at the time, R. Ostojić who said that “the Croatian priority was to safeguard the smooth transit of migrants through the Croatian territory. First, we wanted to secure free transit. Thus, the Government wanted to show that Croatia could take responsibility and that it had the capacity to assist the migrants with food, temporary shelter, and medical care” (Ostojić, 2016, p. 4). Because of their intention to reach Western European countries, only a very small number of refugees applied for asylum, which coincided with the apparent reluctance of the

Government to grant asylum status to refugees (s. Valenta, Župarić-Iljić & Vidović, 2015).

The situation has become much less straightforward since 2018. Although refugees and migrants were still arriving through the Balkan route, there was neither structural support nor technical infrastructure for their transfer. Once they ended up in Serbia, some of them moved to Bosnia and Herzegovina and tried to reach the European Union at the closest point – from the town of Bihać. They usually did it with the assistance of smugglers (Novak, 2018), or they tried to navigate the “green border” (crossing the mountains and rivers between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) on their own (Kamber, 2019). They were met with the resistance of border guards, police officers, and even local population. Hostile environment was highlighted by refugees/migrants’ accounts – corroborated by civil society organizations – of physical abuse, theft of property, and disregard of legal claims of asylum by the Croatian police (CMS, 2019). This was strongly denied by police sources and the Minister of the Interior, before the President of the Republic all but acknowledged it by admitting that Croatian police uses the tactics of “pushback” in order to return all migrants back to Bosnia and Herzegovina, including entering the neighbouring country’s territory. The second period differs in this regard because the migrants arriving irregularly to Croatia wanted to apply for asylum (at least in greater numbers than during the first period), especially when caught by the law enforcement. However, they were denied this right, according to the reports of several domestic and international civil society organizations (including both domestic and international media) reports (HRW, 2018).

Simultaneously with the change of manner in which refugees arrived in Croatia, the political majority changed. In the first period, the centre left coalition led by the Social Democrats was in power, while during the second period all levers of power in Croatia were held by the HDZ, a right-of-centre political party and a dominant political actor in the political system. Not only did the ideology of the two governments shift from social democracy/liberalism to conservatism/nationalism, but also their attitude towards migrant issues changed. While the social democratic government focused on humanitarian approach, seeing refugees/migrants as people in need of help, even if that help was limited to their fast transit through Croatia, the conservative government increasingly used the security lens, seeing migrants/refugees as a security and cultural threat. In the end, the change of attitude of the European Union also helped the change of Croatian government’s approach towards migrants in these two periods. In

the first period, the intensity of the crisis pushed the EU and some of its member states to suspend or ignore official policies (such as the Dublin regulation), while in the second period there was no interest either of the European public(s) or of the political elites to expedite the entrance of migrants into the European Union. In the second period, the focus was on safeguarding the Schengen Agreement by protecting the external border and returning to the policy of “legal migration” from external hotspots (predominantly Turkey and northern African countries). This allowed the Croatian government to claim that their activities were linked to safeguarding the EU borders and that all their activities had legal basis in the Schengen rulebook (Jutarnji.hr, 2019).

However, analyses done so far have questioned the perception of clear differences between these two periods. While it is true that the government and the media put forward the humanitarian approach in the first period, probably due to collective memory Croatian citizens had as refugees not long ago, it is argued that this should be understood as a kind of opportunistic humanitarianism. “This assistance does not stem primarily from the fulfilment of international human rights, refugee protection and/or humanitarian standards and principles, but from the *mere* opportunity for various stakeholders to act in a *human(itarian)* manner, providing hasty and temporary aid and assistance” (Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2019, p. 145). Humanitarianism developed as a reflection of invisibility of migrants due to the so-called closed transit system the Croatian authorities provided, which prevented almost any contact between refugees and the Croatian population (Čapo, 2015). With some notable examples, civil society organizations, including various religious organizations, worked in complete silence, providing humanitarian help and not framing themselves as public actors on behalf of migrants/refugees and their rights (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018.) Hence, it is relevant that the perception of immigrant workers and asylum seekers as threats were recorded even before large scale public encounters with migrants and refugees since 2015 (e.g. Gregurović, Kuti & Župarić-Iljić, 2016; Župarić-Iljić & Gregurović, 2013).

4. Methods

In order to find out how the media presented the information about the situation on the Balkan route, and how those attitudes changed over time, the content analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, was implemented. The latter was used when the frequency of analysed terms was measured

in regard to different time periods and newspapers, and the former was used for interpreting attitudes towards refugees/migrants depicted in selected articles.

In the first step, the data from four daily newspapers in their printed versions were gathered and data content was analysed. A newspaper article was considered to be a unit of analysis, and the inclusion criterion was that the title of the article contained the key word migrant and/or refugee (in Croatian root words - *migrant*^{*}, *izbjeglic*^{*} and *izbjeglič*^{*}). We did not discriminate between the types of articles. Thus, we treated news, op-eds, comments, and wire news in the same fashion. Selected newspapers were two national (*Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list*) and two regional dailies (*Glas Slavonije*, *Novi list*).

The main reason for including several newspapers was their specific representation and local orientation. While the *Večernji list* and the *Jutarnji list* are some of the most widely read newspapers in Croatia, the *Glas Slavonije* is a newspaper of the Croatian region where the transit of refugees took place in 2015-2016 and that is poor and conservative. On the other hand, the *Novi list* is a newspaper from Rijeka, a city in the western part of Croatia known for its progressive and liberal attitudes, and one that the refugees did not affect at all. Therefore, it was possible to expect different approaches and dominant attitudes with respect to the source of the article.

We have collected articles from four daily newspapers within two distinct periods. The first period of research was from September 2015 to September 2016. The reason for setting this period and key words is clear – we were interested in changes and the course of media reporting on refugees and the entire situation from its inception to the formal closure of the Balkan route and subsequent (apparent) stabilization. The second research period was from July to November 2018. The reason was the escalation of irregular border crossings from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, which showed us that the Balkan route was still very much operational, albeit without the involvement of government officials. This allowed us to see whether the media representation of refugees/migrants altered with the changed political climate (new right-of-centre government) and changed circumstances in the international arena.

With these assumptions, we started the second part of our research and analysed the frequency of media publications about migrants/refugees in different periods and among different newspaper sources, given the social context, the difference between newspapers and their attitudes. We were

also interested in specific ways in which articles name groups of people who were transiting through Croatia, and how they depict attitudes regarding refugees and migrants (and the entire international crisis that was happening at that time in Europe) in Croatia. Hence, we were focused on the frequency of the usage of terms: refugee, migrant, refugee wave, migrant wave, economic migrant, as well as on the use of term depicting the ethnic origin: Syrian, Afghani, and Iraqi. All of these terms are a visible proxy for the concept of Others, as they clearly show to the public that the people whom the articles are talking about do not originally “belong” to Croatian society.

In the last part of our research, we analysed attitudes towards migrants/refugees depicted in selected articles. Positive attitudes were based on using a humanitarian point of view when talking about refugees/migrants. Negative attitudes were based on depicting refugees/migrants through a lens of deviancy (e.g. smuggling, violence, crime, security risks, etc.). Neutral attitudes were detected in those articles that only provided informative or fact-heavy data (e.g. the number of migrants/refugees, information on transiting through Croatia, information on their needs and their overall physical or mental state, etc.). These were presented by showing their frequency, but also by quoting specific titles of articles exemplifying positive, neutral, or negative attitudes for better understanding of our thought process.

5. Analysis

In the initial step of the analysis, we detected 1,138 articles in the sample of four daily newspapers limited to the period from September 2015 to September 2016, with the title and/or text containing words migrant or refugee (in Croatian). Comparing newspapers, we can conclude that they are similar, as the number of relevant articles among daily newspapers varied only slightly. The *Večernji list* stood out with 367 articles, while the remaining three daily newspapers ranged from 253 to 263 articles, respectively. The topic was mainly covered in the form of reports (56%) or news (30%), whereas it was considerably less represented in the form of comments (9%) or interviews (4%).

In the second research period, we included the publications of four daily newspapers from July to November 2018. Out of a total of 268 articles, most of them were published in the *Večernji list* (105), followed by the

Glas Slavonije with 63, the Novi list with 56, and the Jutarnji list with 44 articles. The distribution of the type of articles about refugees and migrants was quite similar to the one from the first period. Reports made 67%, followed by news with 20%, while the topic was least represented via comments (5%) and interviews (4%).

From September 2015 (total number of articles 293) to the end of the year, the number of articles in all of the analysed newspapers decreased, and in December 2015 there were only 63. At the beginning of 2016, the number of articles again rose to 87 in January and 92 in February 2016. From that point on, towards the end of Croatia's participation in the refugee transit and the closure of the camp in Slavonski Brod, the number of articles gradually decreased. In April 2016, there were only 52 articles about this topic, while in August refugees and migrants were mentioned in 28 articles. We recorded small changes (58 articles) in September 2016, a year after the beginning of the refugee crisis.

The analysis of articles from the second research period (July–November 2018) has shown that almost two years later, the representation of refugee and migrant topics in articles has almost uniform monthly frequency – from the smallest number of publications (43 articles) in September to the highest number of 67 articles in November 2018.

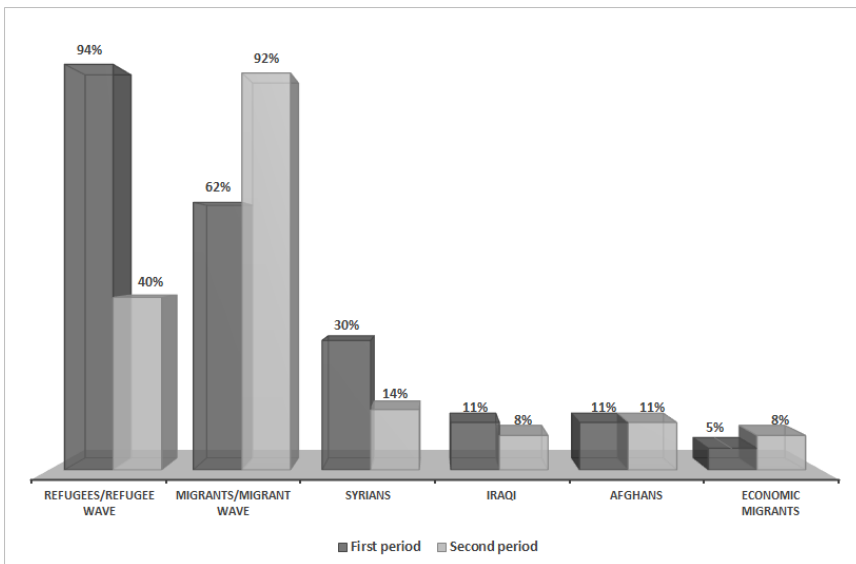
Figure 1 shows that the term “refugees/refugee wave” was the most common term used to describe people coming to Croatia during the first period. The term “migrants/migrant wave” was also used frequently, usually as a synonym for refugees. In fewer articles when the term “migrants” was used it was underlined that among refugees there were also those who did not escape from war/conflict/terrorism but were using this opportunity to achieve a better life in the West. Still, the term “economic migrants” was used very rarely: in just 64 articles, out of which 17% were in the Novi list, 22% in the Glas Slavonije, 27% in the Jutarnji list, and 34% in the Večernji list (see Figure 2). The Večernji list stands out from other newspapers in using all the terms (“migrant” and “migrant wave”, “refugee” and “refugee wave”, and “economic migrants”), with more than 30%.

In terms of ethnic belonging, few articles specifically mentioned the information on ethnicity of refugees and migrants. Among those that did, Syrians were mentioned to a greater extent compared to other nations. Overall, 332 articles included the word “Syrians”, while “Iraqis” and “Afghans” were mentioned about 130 times each. The Glas Slavonije, along with the Večernji list, stood out in using ethnic terms.

We found almost the same range with regard to terms “refugees” and “refugee wave”. Thus, we can conclude that journalists used these differing concepts in equal measure and as synonyms. The larger number of articles on refugees and migrants can explain a higher percentage of the Večernji list’s articles which used these terms in comparison to the other analysed newspapers (see Figure 2).

The analysis of articles published from July to November 2018 (second research period) showed a different trend – 92% of articles referred to migrants as migrants, and only 40% spoke of them as refugees (see Figure 1). Moreover, considerably fewer articles mentioned “Syrians” (14%, compared to 30% in the first research period), “Iraqi” were mentioned slightly less often (8%, compared to 11%), while the word “Afghans” remained constant in both periods of analysis (11%). Only 8% of articles mentioned “economic migrants”, an increase from 5% observed in the first research period.

Figure 1. Share of key and related words (topics) in articles



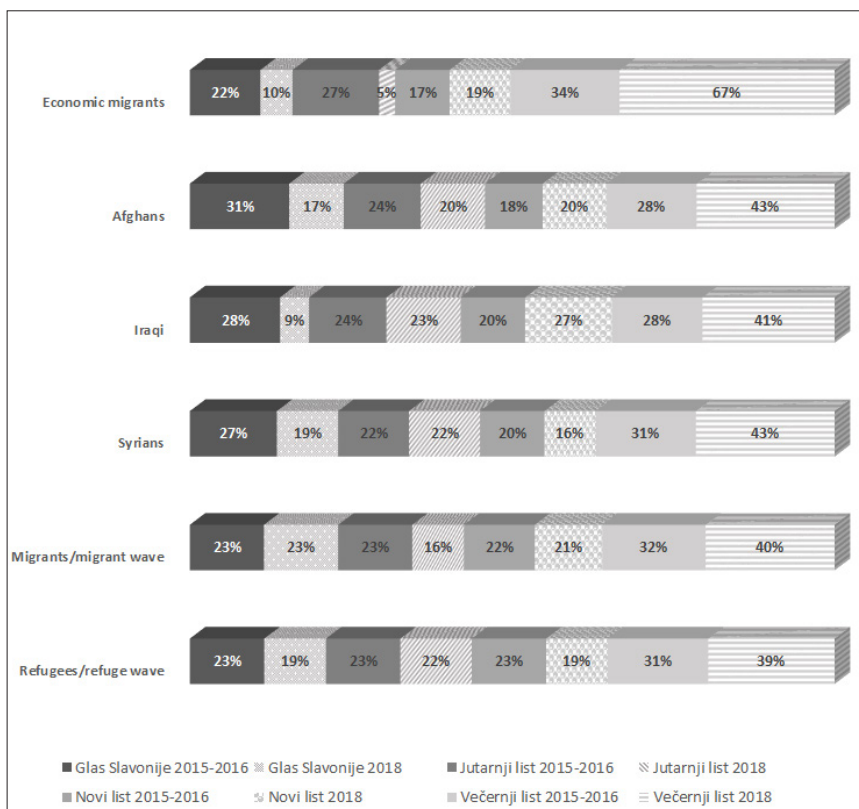
Note: In one article more than one keyword was identified.

Source: Authors.

Similar to the analysis of articles published in the first period (September 2015 to September 2016), the higher number of articles published in the

Večernji list generated a marginally larger share in the observation of the specific term. Thus, in the second part of analysis, articles published in the Večernji referred to “refugees” and “refugee waves”, “migrants” and “migrant waves” as well as to “Syrians”, “Afghans”, and “Iraqis” to a greater extent (more than 40%) than those published in other analysed daily newspapers, (see Figure 2). A significant difference with regard to mentioning economic migrants was noted. In articles published from July to November 2018, reference to economic migrants varied from 5% in the Novi list up to 67% in the Večernji list (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Share of key words detected in newspapers in 2015-2016 and 2018



Source: Authors.

The content analysis also included a (subjective) evaluation of articles' main attitude towards migrants/refugees, which was the basis for categorising them as 'positive', 'neutral' or 'negative'.

From the point of view of the author's main attitude (see Figure 3), the majority of articles were classified as neutral (75%), a significant number as positive (17%), while a minority were negative (8%). The prevalence of neutral articles indicated the dominance of articles with basic information about refugees passing through Croatia and the help offered to them. Thus, these articles were informing about the number of refugees, their conditions (hunger, lack of adequate clothes, medical needs), and the organizations helping them. The following titles are illustrative: "Hungary is building a large transit camp for 10,000 refugees at the border" (Mađarska uz granicu gradi veliki tranzitni logor za 10 000 izbjeglica);⁶ "Only six refugees have applied for an asylum so far" (Azil dosad zatražilo tek šestoro izbjeglica).⁷

Positive articles were those taking the standpoint of humanitarianism. They referred to humanitarian aid and empathy towards refugees, issuing messages of tolerance and promoting values of multiculturalism, especially those associated with Pope's words and actions (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018). The positive examples include: "We have proven ourselves in action by helping refugees" (U pomaganju izbjeglicama dokazali smo se na djelu);⁸ "Croatia will support the new EU plan of acceptance 160,000 refugees" (Hrvatska će podržati novi plan EU za prihvat 160.000 izbjeglica).⁹

Negative articles were those framing the refugees as security, cultural, and economic threat, with following examples: "Migrants could become the biggest security threat since World War II" (Migranti bi mogli postati najveća sigurnosna prijetnja od II. svjetskog rata);¹⁰ "Tighter acceptance rules: Croatia decided to close the border to economic migrants" (Pooštreni prihvat i Hrvatska odlučila zatvoriti granice za ekonomske migrante).¹¹

⁶ Krasnec, T. (2015). Mađarska uz granicu gradi veliki tranzitni logor za 10.000 izbjeglica. *Večernji list*, 12. 9. 2015.

⁷ Frlan Gašparović, I. (2015). Azil dosad zatražilo tek šestoro izbjeglica. *Novi list*, 1. 10. 2015.

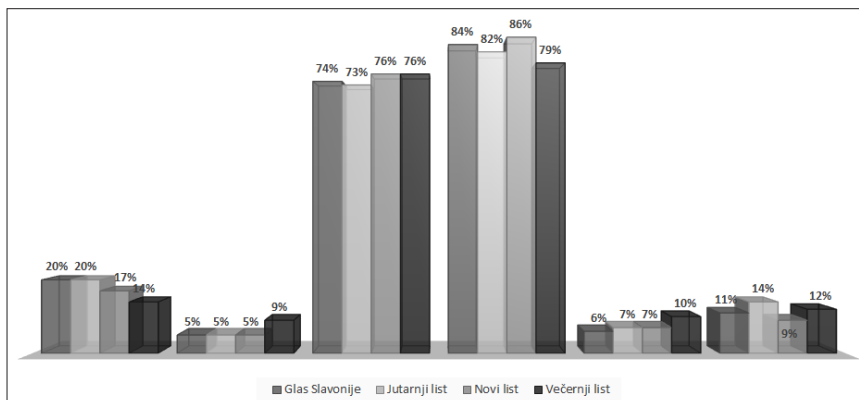
⁸ NN (2015). U pomaganju izbjeglicama dokazali smo se na djelu. *Večernji list*, 6. 11. 2015.

⁹ Palokaj, A. (2015). Hrvatska će podržati novi plan EU za prihvat 160.000 izbjeglica. *Jutarnji list*, 5. 9. 2015.

¹⁰ Havel, B. (2015). Migranti bi mogli postati najveća sigurnosna prijetnja od II. svjetskog rata. *Večernji list*, 17. 10. 2015.

¹¹ Frlan Gašparović, I. (2015). Pooštreni prihvat i Hrvatska odlučila zatvoriti granice za ekonomske migrante". *Novi list*, 20. 11. 2015.

Figure 3. Assessment of articles' main attitude towards migrants/refugees in 2015-2016 and 2018



Source: Authors.

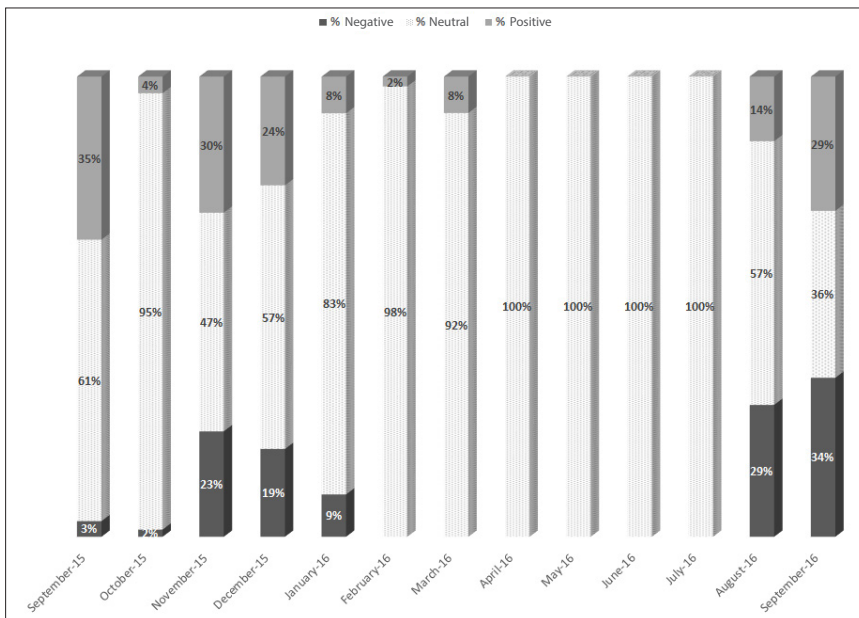
There was no significant difference among daily newspapers concerning the number of articles with a specific tone (positive, neutral, or negative) (see Figure 3). However, as shown in Figure 1, there was a noticeable difference in the share of positive, negative, and neutral perceptions of refugees and migrants by month. In all months, the neutral position on refugees/migrants was dominant, reaching even 100% of all news in the period from April to July 2016. There was also a noticeable oscillation in positive perception. For example, at the beginning of 2016, there was a noticeable decline from the initial 35% of articles with positive perception of refugees and migrants recorded in September 2015. This was linked to exogenous events that had nothing to do with the situation in Croatia. The first reason for the decline in positive perception could be the Paris terror attack at the end of 2015, when a terrorist was falsely linked to the Balkan route. The protracted media interest in the story was based on the information, which later proved to be false, that documents found on the site of terror attack contained data showing that a terrorist passed through Croatia as a part of the refugee wave.¹² The second reason for the decline could be linked to series of articles coming from the foreign media (which Croatian media reported on) on sexual assaults, including

¹² <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/jedan-od-napadaca-prosao-i-kroz-hrvat-sku-20151113>

rapes, of women in the German city of Cologne, during New Year's Eve celebrations, which were blamed on the refugees.

The positive perception of refugees and migrants appeared again in articles published in August (14%) and September 2016 (29%). However, in these months the share of negative perception increased as well (29% in August and 34% in September 2016), and in higher percentage than positive perception. This rise is predominantly linked to the overall increase of stories about refugees/migrants focused on the first anniversary of the initial refugee wave coming to Croatia in 2015, as well as to the analyses of news coming from Germany on the political consequences of opening borders for A. Merkel's CDU and of Bavarian CSU's strong anti-immigrant policies that came to fore after mainstream parties lost to anti-immigrant forces in local elections in some German regions.

Figure 4. Assessment of articles' main attitude towards migrants/refugees by months (first period of analysis 2015-2016)



Source: Authors.

Almost two years later, there is a visible change of perception. The distribution of articles with positive, negative, and neutral perception of refugees/migrants among four newspapers was similar to the first analysis

period. However, there was a clear difference in the proportion of positively and negatively oriented articles. While in the first research period 17% of articles communicated a positive perception of refugees/migrants and refugee wave/migrant wave, in the second research period there was a decline, i.e. only 6% of articles presented this topic in a positive context. Furthermore, negative perception in articles included in the second period increased to 12% compared to 8% in the first period. At the same time, the proportion of articles with neutral orientation increased – from 75% in the first to 82% in the second period of analysis (see Figure 5).

The negative perception of migrants and refugees in the articles of the second research period (from July to November 2018) was based on stories of injured refugees/migrants, migrant smuggling reports, illegal migration, and threats to the European Union and the member states created by the migrant issue. Some of the titles depicting negative orientation were: “The police officers beat 700 migrants who illegally entered the Republic of Croatia” (Policajci su pretukli 700 migranata koji su ilegalno ušli u RH);¹³ “Smuggler with a van full of migrants ran away from the police” (Krijumčar s punim kombijem migranata bježao od policajaca);¹⁴ “Migrations endanger the European Union itself” (Migracije ugrožavaju i samu Europsku uniju).¹⁵

Articles of neutral orientation from this period were focused on news about migrants at borders, migrant clashes, and ways and solutions of migrant issues at the national and international levels. Some of the titles that reflect this are: “The Marrakech Declaration is not legally binding, individual countries decide on the acceptance of migrants” (Marakeška deklaracija nije pravno obvezujuća, a države odlučuju o prihvatu migranata);¹⁶ “Some migrants were returned from the border and situated in Bihać” (Dio migranata vraćen s granice i smješten u Bihaću).¹⁷ The smallest share of articles on migrants and refugees convey a positive perception. They

¹³ Žabec, K. (2018). Policajci su pretukli 700 migranata koji su ilegalno ušli u RH. *Jutarnji list*, 5. 9. 2018.

¹⁴ Karakaš Jakubin, H. (2018). Krijumčar s punim kombijem migranata bježao od policajaca. *Jutarnji list*, 17. 8. 2018.

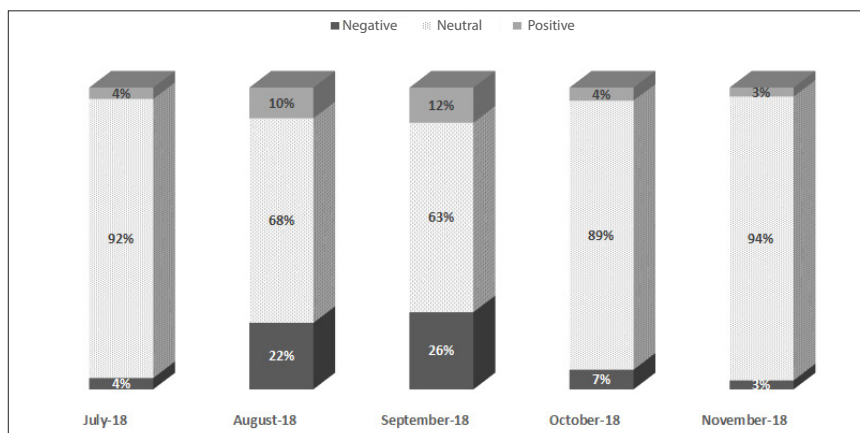
¹⁵ Crnčec, Z. (2018). Migracije ugrožavaju i samu Europsku uniju. *Novi list*, 15. 8. 2018.

¹⁶ Puljić-Šego, I. (2018). Marakeška deklaracija nije pravno obvezujuća, a države odlučuju o prihvatu migranata. *Večernji list*, 17. 11. 2018.

¹⁷ Borovac, M. i Bičak, S. (2018). Dio migranata vraćen s granice i smješten u Bihaću. *Večernji list*, 27. 10. 2018.

include topics such as the integration of migrants/refugees into labour and educational environments, investments in sheltering and helping refugees/migrants, and the welfare they bring to society. These are some of the headlines: “This year, seven refugee families were brought together” (Ove godine spojeno sedam izbjegličkih obitelji);¹⁸ “306,574 refugees employed” (Zaposlili 306.574 izbjeglice);¹⁹ “Children refugees who have not gone to school for six years are coming to Croatia” (Stižu nam djeca izbjeglice koje šest godina nisu išla u školu).²⁰

Figure 5. Assessment of articles' main attitude towards migrants/refugees by month (second period of analysis)



Source: Authors.

The distribution of articles' main attitude towards refugees/migrants, i.e. perceptions expressed in articles published in four daily newspapers from July to November 2018 is presented in Figure 5. The most common were neutrally oriented articles, which varied from the lowest 63% in September 2018 to the highest 94% in November 2018. Positive perception in articles ranged from 3-4% in July, October, and November 2018 to 10% in August and 12% in September 2018. Negative perception in articles of

¹⁸ Matijević, B. (2018). Ove godine spojeno je sedam izbjegličkih obitelji. Večernji list, 15. 9. 2019.

¹⁹ Brumec, D. (2018). Zaposlili 306.574 izbjeglice. Večernji list, 22. 8. 2018.

²⁰ Matijević, B. (2018). Stižu nam djeca izbjeglice koja šest godina nisu išla u školu. Večernji list, 4. 9. 2018.

the second analysis period oscillated more strongly – from a relatively high 26% in September 2018 to a low 3% in November 2018. Interestingly, September 2018 had both the highest share of positive (12%) and highest share of negative (26%) perceptions of refugees and migrants. Negative framing was linked to unconfirmed sightings of migrants in Croatian cities, statements by foreign politicians about the migrant crisis, opinions on negative trends in emigrating countries in Europe, and Croatian politicians' remarks about problems illegal migrations pose to the country. Hence, there was no uniting thread as in previous periods, which can be explained by the strengthened media's interest in the topic due to an increase in illegal border-crossings and the third anniversary of the Balkan route migration.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the media framing theory, this paper has analysed how the media portrayed the situation with refugees and migrants in Croatia. With their unique social position, the media are powerful social actors in describing and presenting realities. The uniqueness is stressed by the fact that Croatia experienced such a huge surge of refugees and migrants, initially only in transition to other countries, but later, when structural support to refugees and migrants on the Balkan route failed, in attempts to cross the Croatian border illegally and obtain the asylum-seeker status. Along with complete novelty of such a situation and the need to put it in a wider European and international context, Croatian policy respond is of a particular interest due to two issues. The first is the recent history of numerous displaced persons in Croatia and refugees who came from Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the war in the early 1990s (for attitudes of the Croatian public towards refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina see more in Bulat, 1995). The question is whether such a recent experience influences on the perception of refugees coming from other countries. The second is the fact that, so far, Croatia has been a homogenous country in terms of religious and ethnic belonging, which is also reflected in high social distance from Others, as explained earlier in the paper.

The analysis has revealed that the majority of articles portrayed refugees and migrants in neutral terms, informing about a range of details of their coming and passing through Croatia. This was the case in both analysed periods. Thus, our analysis confirms the conclusions of Peran and Raguž (2019), who independently researched a similar issue and concluded that

during 2015–2017 the newspapers avoided sensationalising the narrative around refugees/migrants and refrained from using a predominantly negative framing, as was expected. Our research also shows that positive framing outnumbered negative in the first period observed.

However, this focus on the transit aspect of the crisis in Croatia – the idea that refugees are going to remain in Croatia temporarily, before leaving for their *actual* destination somewhere in Western Europe or Scandinavia – is also part of framing that proved to be successful. Croatian authorities at the time built the narrative, which turned into a kind of collective identity, of Croatia as a transit country and of refugees who in general were not interested in staying longer than necessary (Bužinkić, 2017). This certainly helped to tone down the worst negative impulses among the population at large and allowed humanitarian approach to outweigh the securitizing one.

The situation changed during the second period. The share of articles with positive and negative attitudes inverted. Positively framed articles diminished from 17% in the first period to only 6% in the second one, while articles with negative framing increased from 8% to 12%. The difference is not large, but it is indicative because, to certain extent, it reflects the described change of situation between these two periods. It is likely that the rise of negative articles has continued since, simultaneously with a growing number of refugees and migrants trying to cross the Croatian border and the activities of Croatian authorities to safeguard the EU borders. The new government, nominally centre-right but with a strong nationalist bent, focused on the securitization narrative, buttressed by Croatia's EU obligation as a border country to safeguard the Schengen area. It has viewed migrants as a threat and acted accordingly.

The media have followed this logic. Despite sporadic investigative reports or interviews with the critics of government's policy referring to illegal and inhumane actions of the security apparatus, the focus has been on depicting the recent cases of migrant arrivals in Croatia in more dangerous tones. The stories of migrants breaking in into people's summer houses, second homes or mountain lodges, of rumours spreading around small peripheral towns and villages of migrant sightings, of random regular citizens alerting the authorities on "strange people" walking around (who proved to be migrants with working permits whose only crime was to look too different from the local population), were followed by *vox populi* reportages on how the public were frightened and had no idea what was going on. Although there were stories of migrants drowning or freezing to death when trying to cross the border over rivers or mountains, where

they were depicted as victims, the stories of migrants as dangerous Others were more prevalent in the second period we analysed. The political climate, at both national (new right wing government) and supranational levels (EU actors more focused on safeguarding the “Fortress Europe” policies than on humanitarian migration policy), legitimized such a turn in media framing to some extent.

The use of ethnic terms (Syrians, Iraqi, Afghans) was not prevalent in either periods, but it did diminish in the second period of analysis. This is consistent with our expectation that greater focus on specific ethnic/national names was linked to distinguishing between refugees and migrants and to deciding whether they are deserving of the help Croatia was to provide. The almost complete disappearance of specific ethnic names from media reports in the second period can be explained in two ways. For one thing, during the second period, the government was less forthcoming about information on migrants crossing the border, unlike the previous government which treated this issue as transparently as possible. Furthermore, in the first period the narrative obviously focused on depicting two groups, the “deserving refugee” and the (economic) migrant, while the second period homogenized the narrative around the dangerous, “unknown migrant”. It was possible because of widespread framing of the refugee crisis as solved due to the EU-Turkey agreement on not allowing Syrian refugees to leave Turkish territory. Although this did not prevent refugees from leaving Turkey, it allowed the public to “forget” about the deserving refugee story and helped the authorities to securitize the refugee/migrant policy by depicting the most recent examples of migrant arrivals as threatening to both the EU and Croatia.

This explanation is further supported by the difference in labels used by the media in stories about people arriving in Croatia during these two periods. The label “refugees/refugee wave” was much more frequently used in the first period, while the term “migrants/migrant wave” prevailed in the second period. Although we have found out that both terms are used as synonyms, more often than not was the term “migrants/migrant wave” connected with the narrative of closing and closed borders throughout Europe. This helped change the rhetoric of both the authorities and the public from “welcome refugees” to “stop migrants”. We were not able to conclude whether the articles with negative attitudes were exclusively or predominantly those using terms “migrants” or “economic migrants”, and this should be checked in future research.

To conclude, there are visible differences in media portrayal of refugees/migrants in the two periods we observed. The difference is reflected in

both the labels used to describe people arriving in Croatia and the use of humanitarian versus securitizing explanatory context. This could be linked to external and internal reasons. Internal reasons can be related to the change of government from social democratic-liberal in the first period to conservative-nationalist in the second. However, we cannot draw definite conclusions from this research. The issue requires further research efforts. External reasons are linked to rising hostility of the European Union towards migrants and refugees and the return to the “Fortress Europe” narrative focused on preserving and safeguarding “the European way of life”. In all this, the needs and agency of refugees and migrants have largely been ignored, as the media, the political actors, and the public focused on how the domestic population is affected by migrant patterns and what the consequences of migrant flows on maintaining societal and cultural *status quo* are. Hence, further research should tackle the agency of refugees/migrants and their impact on a society such as Croatian, which struggles with strong outward migratory flows of its own population. Further, the framing of economic migrants as threats, opportunities, competition, or a lifeline in an aging and emigrating community should be analysed additionally.

This research is important as it adds to extant knowledge on the influence of media narratives on the portrayal of different societal groups. It is especially important in transitional countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where research of this kind is rare and not focused on the perception of migrants, compared to “internal” marginalized Others (e.g. Roma, LGBTIQ+ citizens, national or religious minorities, etc.). This will become ever more important as those societies transform from predominantly emigrating societies to immigrant ones, as is already the case in some of them.

The limitations of this research are linked to temporal and financial reasons, which limited the ambition and the scope of the study. The use of methods and the theoretical assumptions might also limit the overall conclusions, with alternative approach potentially garnering novel evidence and ideas. However, that is for future researchers to do. Another question that should have been covered but was not, is the whether the change of government and the change in policy (from humanitarianism to securitization) affected the media attitudes. Although we have shown that there is a link, more research needs to be done in order to infer causality between the two.

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WHAT A DIFFERENCE DOES TIME MAKE? FRAMING MEDIA DISCOURSE ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN CROATIA IN TWO PERIODS

Summary

There is plenty of research on media framing of marginalized and “othered” groups, including refugees and migrants. A lot has been said about the 2015–2016 refugee crisis, but much less scholarly interest has been put on the 2018–2019 re-emergence of refugees and migrants on outer borders of the EU and the ways member states have responded to the problem. This paper is focused on analysing similarities and differences in framing of refugees and migrants in the Croatian media in two distinct time periods: 2015–2016 and 2018. The paper is based on applying content analysis and descriptive statistics to articles from four daily newspapers in order to find out how the people coming to Croatia were presented in the media; what they were called, in which sense (positive, neutral, negative) they were presented to the public, and how the media presentation changed over time. The analysis has shown a certain degree of specific political, economic, and societal contexts mediated to, and in turn mediated by, the media’s framing of refugees/migrants. While the predominant frame remained neutral, as per norms of journalistic profession, the change in ideological stance of the government - from social democrats, who put humanitarian elements first, to conservatives, whose focus was security-based - coincided with the relative rise in the number of articles with a negative portrayal of the migrant issue.

Keywords: refugees, migrants, Croatia, media framing, the Balkans route, securitization

UOKVIRIVANJE MEDIJSKOG DISKURSA O IZBJEGLICAMA I MIGRANTIMA U HRVATSKOJ U DVA RAZDOBLJA

Sažetak

Postoji mnoštvo istraživanja o medijskom uokvirivanju kako marginaliziranih grupa, tako i onih koje društvo označava "drugima", uključujući izbjeglice i migrante. Mnogo toga je već rečeno o izbjegličkoj krizi 2015.-2016., no manje se analiza bavilo ponovnim dolaskom izbjeglica i migranata na vanjske granice Europske unije 2018.-2019. godine, kao i o odgovorima europskih država na taj događaj. Ovaj se rad fokusira na analiziranje sličnosti i razlika u uokvirivanju (framing) problematike izbjeglica i migranata u hrvatskim tiskanim medijima u dvama razdobljima: 2015-2016. i 2018. Rad koristi metode analize sadržaja i deskriptivne statistike te novinske članke iz četiriju dnevnih novina, kao jedinice analize. Cilj je bio saznati na koji način mediji predstavljaju osobe koje kao izbjeglice i migranti stižu u Hrvatsku, kojim ih se pojmovima nazivalo, na koji način (pozitivan, neutralan, negativan) je javnost mogla protumačiti narav teksta, te kako se to medijsko predstavljanje mijenjalo kroz vrijeme. Analiza je pokazala da su, do određene mjere, specifični politički, ekonomski i društveni konteksti utjecali na (i bili pod utjecajem) medijsko uokvirivanje pitanja izbjeglica/migranata. Dok je dominantan okvir u oba razdoblja bio neutralan, održavajući profesionalne norme novinarske profesije, promjena ideološkog temelja vlade – pobjedom konzervativaca koji su na migrantsko pitanje gledali kroz sigurnosnu prizmu nad socijaldemokratima, kojima je ključan fokus bio humanitarni – koincidirala je s relativnim porastom broja novinskih članaka koji su pitanju izbjeglica i migranata pristupali iz negativne perspektive.

Ključne riječi: izbjeglice, migranti, Hrvatska, medijsko uokvirivanje, Balkanska ruta, sekuritizacija