

Original scientific paper

UDK: 345.5:314.15(659.2:497.11)

DOI: 10.5937/jrs18-41755

Received: 28 February 2023 / Accepted: 2 September 2023

Images of (In)Security: Visualizing Borders, Migrants and Control in Serbia's News Media

ALEKSANDRA KRSTIĆ*

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science, Serbia

Abstract: Media images of borders and their control have been one of the most dominant frames in reporting on the migrant crisis in European media and the negative coverage of the topic of migrants, presenting them as a threat to security and public health dominates media narratives around the world. This paper examines the way migrants and refugees have been portrayed on the borders of Serbia, a transit country alongside the Western Balkans migration corridor. The mixed method analysis is based on 300 images published in relevant national and regional print media and their online versions from 2015 until 2020. The results show that the visual depiction of walls, wires, control, law and order, modern technological equipment, security providers, and important political authorities have been often intensified with sensational headlines and tabloid coverage and at the same time confronted with images framing migrants as violent and deviant, threatening borders, people, and security.

Keywords: borders, migrants, media, visual framing, Serbia

Introduction

When Serbia's Minister of Interior visited one of the migrant camps on the border with Hungary in July 2022, many national media outlets published the image of him standing alongside policemen and security officers and overlooking dozens of kneeling migrants with arms behind their heads. The image was meant to show political decisiveness and the results of the joint security action aimed at minimizing criminal acts made by illegal migrants in the country. Instead, the image triggered public reaction when many non-governmental organizations, public intellectuals, and migration experts condemned the Minister's treatment of migrants as inhumane. More recently, in the autumn of 2022, national media largely reported about the EU "threatening" Serbia with the introduction of the visa regime because the state has not yet harmonized its legislation with the EU regulations regarding visas for migrants and refugees from third countries.

* *aleksandra.krstic@fpn.bg.ac.rs*; ORCID: 0000-0003-0090-9911.

These are only a few recent examples of how Serbian media negatively construct the topic of migration and target migrants as sources of many problems for the state. However, the negative, sensational, and tabloid coverage of migration, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as deviant actors threatening the security of people and the country's borders has been dominating national print and online media outlets since 2015 (Krstić 2022a). The portrayal of migrants and refugees¹ in Serbian media is not very different from the overall media coverage of migration in other European countries, which has been usually focused on reporting border security, restriction of migrants' movement, or various aspects of migrants' behavior. News coverage of migrants as a threat to the security of borders has been one of the dominating media narratives around the world. This paper examines how the relationship between migration and borders has been visually framed in the media narrative in Serbia, a transit country situated on the Western Balkans migration route. The study² is based on a mixed-method analysis of 300 images published in both national and regional print and online media from the beginning of the migrant crisis in 2015 until the end of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Visual Media Representation of Borders and Migration

National and comparative analysis of press coverage in Europe (Caviedes 2015; Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017; Amores and Blanco-Herrero 2020; Valente et al. 2021) shows that the media representation of migrants has been dominated by the negative coverage focused on border management, security issues and the restriction of migrants' movement. This narrative often depicts migrants as criminals or as a physical threat, while the media frames of hospitality or other aspects of humanization are often missing from the news coverage (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017). Authors who have examined visual representation of migration in European media found that the approach to migration is more positive in Spain, France and Italy, in comparison to Greece where the threat has been identified as the most frequent frame. The emphasized negativity of media coverage in Greece has been often associated with the geographical position of the country, which has been receiving between a large number of migrants and refugees from Turkey and through the Aegean Sea on a daily basis over the years. This has

1 According to the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, "refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection", while international migrants change their country of usual residence "irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more". Since Serbia has been a transit country for both migrants and refugees, two terms will be equally used throughout this article. See: United Nations (n.d.).

2 The study is based on broader research of visual framing of migrants and refugees in Serbian media from 2015 until 2020. The sampled images for this paper have been drawn from a larger sample of 469 photographs since the analysis has been focused on specific visual frames of borders and migration and does not relate to other topics identified in the larger study.

reflected on the overall public opinion towards migration in Greece, which is rather negative (Amores, Arcila-Calderón, and Blanco-Herrero 2020; Valente et al. 2021). In Central and Eastern Europe, the visual media narratives of migration have been focused on the two main themes: migrants as a threat to border security and to the economic standard of people (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Kovář 2019). Similar coverage has been identified in media outside the EU, for example in African (McDonald and Jacobs 2005) and Australian (Eades 2019) outlets, which have been described as drivers of xenophobic and stereotyped images of migration.

The stylistic and semiotic features of visual media coverage analyses show that migrants and refugees tend to appear more in large groups than in individual portraits. Also, photos and videos of their arrival in overcrowded boats and ships (Bleiker et al. 2013; Wilmott 2017) are very frequent and often associated with narratives of flooding, overflowing and invasion. The usual long camera shots, although taken to establish the scenery and highlight the context, have been actually preventing viewers from making a closer visual contact with the migrant group (Krstić 2022a), therefore establishing distance between “us”, the viewers and “them”, the represented migrants and refugees. Occasional close-up camera angles indicating a visual closeness with migrants and refugees have been largely omitted from the media coverage worldwide (Bleiker et al. 2013), indicating that the media lack the “humane perspective” in representing migration. The abstractness of migrants and refugees has been recognized both in individual portrayals and the depiction of masses (Massari 2021) in various narratives of humanitarian visual representation of refugees. Even though authors acknowledge the importance of recent visual shift from showing refugees as unidentifiable groups to individuals with faces, which allows their humanization and connection to the viewers, Massari still finds examples of an individual approach to portraying migration problematic and insufficient as “individualities, names, histories, experiences and feelings of the people portrayed are taken away by the photographic selection of a conceptual structure” (Massari 2021, 126).

In the context of the mediatization of migration, the visual research of borders and migration has increased in the recent years. For example, the concepts of borders and bordering have been examined through traditional and social media content, where photographs, visuals, videos etc. have been identified as an important tool which “play a role in the plurivocal, critical re-reading of borders that border scholars are currently undertaking” (Ball 2014). The theme of the border has become one of the key dimensions in research on the representation of migration in the media. According to Bruno (Bruno 2016, 45–58), there are different types of borders constructed in Italian media, for example the symbolic border, which relates to emotional, religious, cultural and mental conception of “others”, and physical, real space and territory imagined as “ours”, referring to spatial notion of arrivals, boundaries, death and control. In Bruno’s research, the maritime border of the Mediterranean Sea has been represented in the media as uncontrollable and solid at the same time, depending on the angle of who is crossing and controlling it. Moreover, televised coverage of migrants’ arrivals to the Italian coast, together with repetitive representation of

rescuers and police authorities, “exhaust the phenomenon discursively, providing a highly repetitive and recognizable set of images and content” (Bruno 2016, 49).

Other authors identify different media frames in reporting on borders and migration, such as the frame of border management, visible in textual and visual representations of physical obstacles and objects, like barb wires, uniforms, technological equipment, surveillance images, etc. This frame usually connotes the meaning of control, power, safeguarding and defending the border as a physical space from the arrival or invasion of foreigners as “the others.” In their research of visualization of migration in public service media live blogs, Cvetković and Pantić (2018, 12) found that visuals have been often accompanied by verbal metaphors like “the floods of arriving people,” “waves of migrants,” and “huge influx of migrants,” with numerical representation depicting the intensity of migrants’ arrivals: “The borders are constructed as spaces where control and order have to be established and maintained through registering, fingerprinting, controlling, and directing migrants on when and where they are allowed to go and how they should behave.”

Another visual media frame identified in academic studies is the frame of borders “as lived space,” derived from personal stories of migrants and their daily lives and activities along the borderlines, where the border itself represents the shared space between migrants and refugees on one side and border authorities on the other. Also, Cvetković and Pantić identify borders as visual political spaces, derived from media texts showing different activities and photo opportunities for politicians to discuss the issues of migrants’ movement and other issues of border and migration management.

Musarò (2016, 8) argues that the visualization of borders, migration and soldiers involved in a humanitarian rescue builds the linkage between the spectators and soldiers, where spectators have been given the role of possible saviors of the rescued bodies in media images. From the performative dimension of visual analysis, the author problematizes the notion of border control from the aspect of its redefinition “within a moral imagination that puts emphasis on human vulnerability.”

Looking at borders as a contested „shared space” of various actors in the context of migration (Franko 2021, 385), Franko finds that contrasting visual narratives have been dominating its portrayal in media – for example, ships and boats used by Frontex are usually shown as fast technologically better equipped and more powerful, while vessels of other NGOs and organizations have been depicted as less seaworthy. Moreover, Franko argues that, in a visual performative way, “for one actor the sea appears to be a tragic space of humanitarian emergency, for the other it is a space to be controlled and conquered by technology.” In the context of Croatia, for example, recent research (Šarić 2019) on the securitization of migration shows that visual symbols of fences and borders appear in a rather ambivalent way, either as an appeal for a more humanitarian approach or as a support for the politics of exclusion, where even visually invisible refugees connote the meaning of a threat. These and other similar interpretations and representations of migrants as criminals, terrorists and society challenge has been closely linked with the framework of

the securitization of migration and the blooming research of migration as a security topic in the past two decades (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998; Huysmans 2000; Šabić 2017).

In that context, theoretical contributions to studying visual securitization of migration (Andersen and Möller 2013; Andersson 2012; Campbell 2003, 2007; Hansen 2011; Kearns 2017; Massari 2021) reveal that the security discourse is quite empirically open. As Hansen argues, there are various kinds of dangers and defenses, for example political, military, religious, environmental, societal, or economic and the discourse is therefore neatly related to the construction of identities and the interplay between “the Self to be secured and the Other threatening it” (Hansen 2011, 58). Hansen proposed the intertextual framework for the study of the role of images in the security discourse and identified four main strategies of visual migrants’ depictions, arguing that the depictions of the Other as demonic or evil and the Other as insignificant and weak are often interwoven: “a depiction through demonization constitutes a threat to be conquered while a strategy of belittling makes the threat manageable” (Hansen 2011, 60). Other strategies relate to familiarization, where securitization is referred to as divine and sacred or where ordinary people are depicted in private and vulnerable situations, and the strategy of suffering, representing threatened, persecuted and violated people. Studies of visual securitization (Kearns 2017) that applied Hansen’s strategies to examine this topic through gender perspective found out that the central component of strategic depictions of suffering and liberation of Afghan women was burka, functioning as visual shorthand in both representations of women as victims of oppression and subjects liberated from Islamic oppression. Other studies of visual securitization focusing on humanitarian actors and NGOs (Massari 2021) highlight another important aspect in relation to migration, particularly the ambiguity of the humanitarian discourse. Massari criticizes this discourse, promoted by many humanitarian actors and NGOs worldwide in the past few years, as it has tried to draw attention to dimensions of solidarity and humanity, but has simultaneously contributed to its securitization (Massari 2021, 103) through representation of refugees and migrants as masses, threat and risk for humanity. Moreover, Massari argues that frequent dichotomous visual depictions of refugees as threats and objects of threat in the images used by NGOs to represent their massive arrivals in Europe drive the overarching emergency narrative, but at the same time recognizes the visual “abstractness of the refugee masses” (Massari 2021, 126) and the large absence of refugees’ voices and opinions from the NGOs’ visual material.

In the recent years authors have identified the “aesthetic turn” in border studies, particularly with the research of visual representation of borders in photographs, documentary films, videos, as well as maps and other visual objects deployed to visualize the borders (Moze and Spiegel 2022; Kudžmaitė and Pauwels 2020; Boyce 2020; Ellison and Van Isacker 2021). According to Moze and Spiegel, from the perspective of geographical studies, “the aesthetic turn in border studies refers to a variety of empirical, conceptual and methodological interests in prompting attention to how processes of rendering visible/invisible are to be understood” (Moze and Spiegel 2022, 3). Researchers particularly acknowledge the increase of the discussion about the visibility of bordering with the Covid-19 pandemic around the world, and specific issues driven from quarantine measures and estab-

lishment of new bordering regimes and methods of surveillance of people movement (Liu and Bennett 2020; Casaglia 2021).

In the context of Serbia, research of migration and borders has been intensified in the recent years, particularly around the relevant academic discussion about the Western Balkans countries, including Serbia, which were identified as becoming the EU borderscapes with the role “to protect the EU core countries from unwanted migrants” (Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica 2019, 6). As Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica argue, the differences between entrance and exit borders in Serbia have been erased, “since all borders are being crossed in all directions in the attempt to avoid being stuck and to keep alive the hope of reaching final destinations” (Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica 2019, 7). Moreover, the dominant discourses shaped around the countries in the region and Serbia as EU borderscapes have treated bordering and migration rather as “emergency-like phenomenon” than from the perspective of societal integration (Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica 2019, 9). National borders have been particularly important in the context of far-right networks and migration in Europe and in Serbia as a transit country for migrant and refugees. Lažetić argues that “far right actors have been uniting based on their ideology of national rebirth and return to national borders, strengthened by the anti-immigration platform” (Lažetić 2018, 32), which has been intensified since the closure of the Balkan Route in 2016 with a large number of migrants “stuck” inside Serbia. While Lažetić acknowledges that such a situation provided new platforms for strengthening the far right movements and the growing anti-migration sentiment in the country, other studies highlighted worsening trends during the Covid-19 pandemic which fueled fake and manipulative media narratives about migrants and refugees (Milinkov, Janjić, and Jakovljević 2021; Janjić 2020) throughout popular social media platforms, mobilizing far right movements and their supporters to spread hate speech and xenophobic narratives and even call up for physical clash with migrant groups in Belgrade and other cities in the country (Šljukić Bandović 2021). Although more than a million of refugees and migrants have passed through the country since the beginning of the crisis and despite the more positive public opinion about migration in 2015, respective studies confirmed an overall decline in public opinion since 2016 and 2017 (CESID 2019; Beogradski centar za ljudska prava 2021), which has been associated with negative media narratives about migrants and refugees.

A small number of national studies have been focused on media narratives about the migrant crisis (Vuletić and Filipović 2019; Kleut and Drašković 2017; Milinkov, Janjić, and Jakovljević 2021; Milojević and Milić 2023), highlighting the security of borders and inhumane treatment of migrants as one of the key problems found in the media coverage. Previous research (Krstić 2022a; Krstić 2022b) shows that the print and online media in Serbia use very similar and repetitive frames throughout the years to present migrants and refugees as faceless, estranged people either threatening to the security of borders, other people and public health or as victims of war, human trafficking and maltreatment of the host-country. Dominant media topics during the first years after the migrant crisis breakout in 2015 were migrants’ personal experiences, medical issues, the concept of solidarity and institutional help, as well as economic and financial aspects of their life in Serbia

(Stojić Mitrović 2020). During that period, various analyses of national TV programs in Serbia have identified the lack of in-depth and analytical reporting on migrants and refugees (Bajčeta and Milošević 2015). Also, many ethical and professional journalism norms were violated in everyday reporting on this subject, mainly in daily tabloids and national TV stations which have published sensational, unchecked information and disinformation and boosted xenophobic and negative headlines which were not associated with the content of the texts or images (Krstić and Milojević 2015).

Interestingly, national media reports have been identified as biased and positive towards Serbia as a host country, which has often been depicted as a warm and welcoming nation to migrants and refugees (Krstić 2017) in contrast to other countries of the Western Balkan route, particularly the former Yugoslav states. For example, domestic police forces have been reported to treat migrants well and with dignity, whereas Serbian policemen and border authorities have been presented as defenders of migrants who were suffering from the constant clash with Hungarian, Slovenian or Macedonian police forces (Krstić 2017). During the first years after the migrant crisis breakout in 2015, Serbs were presented as “good guys” in national newspapers, as the coverage gave a lot of space to ordinary people who were presented as helping migrants during their journey through Serbia (Krstić 2017). The same analysis shows that this kind of narrative has been often juxtaposed in the national media coverage to, for example, the representation of Turks as “greedy” and selfish, or to the Croatian and Macedonian police as violent or incapable to help migrants. During the first years of migration crisis, media were also emphasizing the power of Serbian political authorities, their institutional responsibility in managing migration and praised their overall politics of inclusion, portraying them as better than anyone else in the region. For example, the Serbian government was portrayed as decisive, fierce, and ready to secure and protect migrants and such depiction was supported with the government officials’ statements who tended to compare Serbia’s decisiveness to other, even more developed, states: “Many developed, rich and powerful countries burn shelters and camps for migrants, abuse them, show hate and intolerance, segregate them on the basis of their religion and skin, while in Serbia there is no such example!”³ At the same time Human Rights Watch reported that migrants in Serbia were not treated well and that they have been abused, especially by the Serbian police forces on the border with Hungary (Human Rights Watch 2015). The report also stated that many migrants testified to have been attacked, insulted, shoved back across the border and denied measures to ensure the protection of unaccompanied children. On the other hand, other relevant reports from that period, such as the one from the Council of Europe, highlighted “a genuinely humanitarian approach” of Serbia (Council of Europe 2017), which was acknowledged to have received thousands of migrants and refugees and provided necessary humanitarian assistance, however urged to find better solutions to ensure migrants’ social and economic rights during their stay in the country.

³ The statement of the Minister for Labor and Social Work, published in March 2016.

Methods

This study is focused on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of 300 images from media articles published every June between 2015 and 2020 in relevant print media in Serbia and their online versions. For a reliable sample search, the public press clipping database available at the web portal of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (KIRS n.d.) has been used. Although the database has an extensive press clipping related to the broadest topic of refugees and migrants, only images within articles published in quality daily newspapers *Politika* and *Danas*, semi-tabloids *Večernje novosti* and *Blic*, tabloids *Alo*, *Blic*, *Kurir*, and *Informer*, and the regional daily *Dnevnik* referring to migration, migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa have been selected for the analysis. The selected media represent the most read print media (IREX 2019), along with their online versions that have been among the most visited internet portals in Serbia for years (Gemius Rating 2022; Media Ownership Monitor Srbija 2019). June was selected as the month for analysis because it has been related to the World Refugee Day and that period has usually more media content related to the main topic published than in other months since 2015, when the first intensive reports about the migrant crisis in Europe were published.⁴

The unit of analysis is a single photo within each media article⁵ published between June 1 to June 30 every year between 2015 and 2020, focusing on the topic of migrants and refugees at or near the borders of Serbia or other countries that have been visually or textually identified as borders as physical spaces. The sample was coded chronologically, by date and year of publication of each image. The methodological approach is based on denotative, style-semiotic and connotative level of visual media framing (Barthes 1977; Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011). At the denotative level, the analysis focused on the main actors in images (migrants and refugees, politicians, police/military staff), textual tools accompanying images such as captions, headlines and sidebars, the size of a migrant group (for example, small/medium-sized groups – up to 20 members, large group – 20 and more members, individuals – portrait of a person, n/a – in images where the group could not be identified). Also, the dominant frame of the visual portrayal of migrants on borders was coded, as well as all characteristics of specific visual sub-frames. The specification of sub-frames within each dominant visual frame has been particularly important for this study, because it takes into account the possible changes of frames and sub-frames over the 6-year timeline. Specification of sub-frames allowed to differentiate between, for example, the threat frame in 2015 and the threat frame in 2018 and to see whether there have been different approaches or depictions of migrants on borders inside one dominant frame.

4 The overall sample in the research comprised of total 469 images published between 2015 and 2020 (see Krstić, 2022a), and from that sample 300 images focusing on more specific issue of borders have been selected for analysis the purpose of this article.

5 Within a number of articles more than one image was published. Each published image presented a new unit of analysis.

This research looked for the following dominant visual frames and sub-frames: 1. the victimization frame – images depicting migrants in various sub-frames, e.g. victims of war, smuggling, crime or transport; 2. the threat frame – nuances in the representation of migrants and refugees as a threat to border security, human security, human health, or migrants as the cause of the threat of another state to national interests of Serbia; 3. the administrative frame with subframes of migration management (related to visual representations of numbers and administrative management on borders), and the subframe of asylum seeking/assistance seeking, like images of people in camps near borders, in need for food, clothing, etc.; 4. the integration frame with sub-frames of integration through education, sport or everyday social activities; 5. the politics frame with the sub-frame of political decision making related to the issue of borders in context of migration and the life and transit of migrants and refugees (e.g. images showing politicians on borders), and the sub-frame of another country's policy depicting how other countries regulate migration. This approach allowed more detailed and systematized insight into the dominant media frames that have determined the media narrative during the observed years.

On a stylistic-semiotic level, the position of the camera used to present migrants and refugees was analyzed. For example, the study looked into the long/medium shot for capturing visual closeness and wide/long frame for capturing visual distance, as well as various activities capturing migrants and refugees (Rose 2013; Greenwood and Thomson 2020), in either passive (waiting, sitting or lying down), active (arriving, going through or leaving), or interactive way (with a group of persons, children, police or other authorities).

On a connotative level, the presence of visual symbols and metaphors related to the concept of borders (Aiello 2006; Krstić, Aiello, and Vladislavljević 2020) in relation to migration was analyzed. For example, images of prison bars, fences, handcuffs and cages which may drive perceptions of migrants and refugees as dangerous and deviant, or images of destruction, barb wires, built walls, covered faces and authorities imposing control, law and order which may refer to the segregation and ghettoization of the migrant group.

Findings and Analysis

The analysis shows that migrants and refugees represent the most prominent actors in 87.3% of sampled images, followed by the police and military personnel (6.3%), highly ranked politicians (4%) and images of physical objects and places such as border crossings or refugee camps (2.3%). Most often, migrants and refugees are represented in medium or small groups, and only occasionally as individuals.

Looking at the topic of borders and migration, which is the main focus of this study, the 2015-2020 period was marked by the three most frequent visual frames – migrants as the threat to the security of borders (32%), migrants as victims (24%) and the administrative frame (24%). The frame of politics (20%) has been less frequently used in the coverage. This implies that the sample has been dominated by the media narrative frequently

framing migrants either as a physical threat to Serbian borders (for example, as violent males trying to break the metal fences securing the borders or in bloody clash with the police) or as a symbolic cause of other states' threat to Serbia. A large number of images accompanied with sensational headlines and image captions depict migrants throughout the analyzed period as a threat to the security of Serbian borders and the whole Balkans region (Figure 1), or as criminals and deviants who behave violently and break rules to get to the EU (Figure 2). Within this frame, migrants have also been depicted as responsible for triggering Serbia's neighboring states, like Hungary, to build walls and fences along the border to defend the EU from illegal trespassing. For example, popular tabloids *Alo*, *Blic* and *Informer* frequently published images of numerous migrants, mostly males, walking along train tracks towards Serbian borders within highly sensational coverage of Hungary's decision to "isolate Serbia" and "make it a concentration camp for migrants" (Figure 3; Figure 8). The images published in June 2015 have even directly addressed Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban in main headlines and published visual content, putting him behind the lock in an illustrative visual metaphor (Figure 3) or addressing the Hungarian people as "crazy, unreasonable, chauvinistic" with barb wire as a decoration to highlight the strength of the message in the main headline (Figure 4). The metaphor of barb wire was used by highly circulated popular tabloids in 2015 not only to negatively portray migrants and refugees as those directly causing the threat to the security of Serbian national borders and indirectly triggering conflicts with other states, but also to frame Hungarian Prime Minister as an "inhumane" politician.

The negative reference to Hungary and its Prime Minister identified in the analyzed coverage during 2015 has been completely different from the most recent media coverage and publicly acknowledged relations between the two countries and their leaders, which have been described as better than ever. Moreover, Serbia has signed an agreement with Hungary and Austria in November 2022 regarding the readmission of migrants which would include sharing expenses and investing "joint efforts to solve the problem of illegal migration" (N1 2022).



Figure 1: Printscreen, *Politika*, 18.6.2018, "The Balkans Under the Threat of New Migrant Crisis"



Figure 2: Printscreen, *Politika*, 30.6.2020, "Migrants Digging Tunnels to Get to the EU"

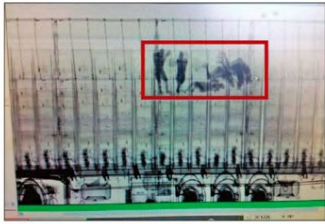


Figure 3: Printscreen, *Blic*, 19.6.2015, "Serbia Is Not a Concentration Camp. Orbán, Get Yourself Together and Give Up"



Figure 4: Printscreen, *Kurir*, 25.5.2015, "They Do Not Give Up: The Craziness of Neighbors on the North Continues. Hungarians Are Urgently Building Up a Wall Towards Serbia. Chauvinistic Plan of Orbán"

Frequent images of border crossings, barb wires, police and military uniforms, maps and graphic visualization of movement of migrants, as well as images of modern equipment for visual control of borders have been used to depict migrants and refugees as being under the control of the border authorities. Newspapers often use images from special cameras used by the police and military to show numerous examples of detected attempts of smuggling migrants in packages of fruit and vegetables. Therefore, within the victimization frame, migrants and refugees appear as victims of smuggling, trafficking, illegal trespassing and maltreatment along the borders, where their actual suffering or personal context of victimization has been left out from the analyzed images (Figure 5). The images usually depict modern technological equipment handled by bordering and custom control, or various border authorities in uniforms and with weapon to highlight the power of the state and the borders under full control (Figure 6). Similarly to the visual politics of military humanitarian operation in the Mediterranean Sea (Musarò 2016), the sampled images show the border enforcement usually from the aspect of surveillance techniques, data and map visualizations to track migrants' movements. However, this aspect of imagery in the Serbian media has not been associated with the notion of rescue on borders, as in Italian media, where military personnel has been frequently shown in actions of assisting the victims of migration, but more on the notion of full control of national police and military enforcement over the borders and consequently the overall successful defense of the state.



Migranti među lubenicama

Figure 5: Printscreen, Danas, 7.6.2017, "Migrants Found in Watermelons"

За једанаест месеци откривена 142 кријумчара

Мигранти ретко иду на Балканско полуострво преко границе Србије са Македонијом и Бугарском. – У тимовима и 54 стране полицијом.

Борачи полицијске агенције српске и македонске полиције су открили 142 кријумчара у последних 11 месеци. Полицијске агенције су у складу са тимовима полицијских агенција из 54 стране полицијом. Полицијске агенције су у складу са тимовима полицијских агенција из 54 стране полицијом.



Припадници војске и полицијске агенције

Figure 6: Printscreen, Politika, 9.6.2017, "142 Smugglers Detected in 11 Months: Migrants now rarely crossing borders with Macedonia and Bulgaria – Teams of 54 foreign police officers working together"

In the administrative frame, visual content has been usually related to statistical data expressed through various graphics, maps, or depicting long queues of people regarding the administration on borders and in camps along the borders (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Printscreen, Blic, 2.6.2016, "Increasing Number of Refugees Every Day on the Horgoš Border"

The results show that migrants and refugees have been usually presented in wide shots (78%) and less in medium/close up shots (22%), which highlights the overall visual approach of analyzed media outlets towards migrants and refugees on borders as distant and estranged group of people. This media approach has been even more evident through the analysis of the most prominent activities migrants and refugees have been visually captured in: they have been presented as passive and waiting for something in 46% of the images, while in 32% of the images they have been shown in transit, for example arriving to the border, going away or passing through the center of the image. They have been captured in action or interaction with other members of their group, with the police or other authorities in only 9% of media coverage. There are also several images depicting migrants' dead bodies near the border crossings, which also refers to their visual presentation as victims of illegal border crossing.

Even when they appear in different types of movement, regardless of whether they are captured in arrival towards the camera objective, going away from the viewer's point of view, or just shown as sitting and waiting, the articles' headlines and image titles have often clashed with the visual content itself. Therefore, the text accompanying the image often connotes negative meaning that the image itself does not have. There are numerous examples in the analyzed coverage, where migrants are captured as still and motionless, exhausted and tortured people, while the image caption refers to their "invasion" on borders (Figure 8). In images of interaction, especially with the police, the camera is almost always placed in a way that viewers get the impression that they are looking from the police's, and not from the migrant group's point of view (Figure 9).



Figure 8: Printscreen, 22.06.2015, *Informer*, Main headline: "Humanitarian Disaster: Invasion of Migrants. More than 10.000 Refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan Has Crossed the Border Between Serbia and Macedonia" Image caption: "Unstoppable: Lines of Rushing Towards Belgrade"



Figure 9: Printscreen, 27.06.2018, *Alo*, "Vienna Fears from New Migrant Wave: Austria is Getting Ready to Close the Borders!"

Conclusion

Visual representation of migrants and borders in Serbian print media and their online versions has been dominated by sensational, tabloid, clickbait headlines and out-of-context image captions related to migration and borders and confusing narratives driven from frequent confrontation of textual and visual content across the studied timeline. This is particularly obvious in images showing migrants' arrival, which are put in such a context to drive fear and reinforce negative and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants and refugees. Similarly to previous research of Italian media reporting on migrants on maritime borders, the arrival at the borders as a physical space has been articulated in the media discourse like a conquest of migrants and invaders of a certain territory, on the one side, and as a constant defense of borders and what is "ours", on the other. Therefore,

the sampled media outlets construct the overall image of migrants' arrivals through verbs such as "filling up," "invading," "endangering," "rushing towards," "threatening" the borders as specific geo-political spaces representing "the door" of Serbia and more broadly, the entrance to the whole Western Balkans region and the EU borderspace. Photos usually point out the police officers and other authorities controlling the migrants arriving, and unlike Cvetković and Pantić's finding of visually outnumbered police officers (Cvetković and Pantić 2018), the analyzed sample depicts border authorities having full control over the migrants across all the years covered by the analysis, sending the message that Serbia has been taking good care of its borders, maintaining law and order at all times, despite the occasional visual changes in media coverage depicting the density of arrivals which are scaled from dozens to hundreds of thousands and often verbally augmented to millions of refugees waiting outside the borders.

In such a media narrative, the concepts of border and migration are not based on images of rescuing, welcoming and helping the people in need, but on images of uniforms, authorities, advanced technologies and objects carrying out the overall control of migrants' movements. Analyzed media outlets obviously foster the narrative of border security in relation to migration, and such a depiction reinforces the issue of border control, safety, law and order exclusively as question of security. In this study, borders have been depicted more as geo-political spaces that always need to be defended for the security of the country's territory and Serbian people from the threat of "the Other", namely from migrants and refugees or from other, neighboring, states. At the same time, borders represent contested political spaces for disputes between governments and highly ranked politicians of two neighboring nations, which has been largely covered by pro-regime tabloids. As the analysis has shown, there is no difference between quality and tabloid print outlets and their online versions in confrontational visualization of the theme of borders and migration – all lack the aspect of human vulnerability and compassion.

References

- Aiello, Giorgia. 2006. "Theoretical advances in critical visual analysis: Perception, ideology, mythologies and social semiotics." *Journal of Visual Literacy* 26 (2): 89–102.
- Amores, J. Javier, Carlos Arcila-Calderón, and David Blanco-Herrero. 2020. "Evolution of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in the main media of Southern Europe." *Profesional de la información* 29 (6): 1–21.
- Andersen, Rune Saugman, and Frank Möller. 2013. "Engaging the limits of visibility: Photography, security and surveillance." *Security Dialogue* 44 (3): 203–221.
- Andersson, Ruben. 2012. "A game of risk: Boat migration and the business of bordering Europe." *Anthropology Today* 28 (6): 7–11.
- Bajčeta, Snežana, and Ivana Milošević. 2015. "Etički i profesionalni aspekti izveštavanja na nacionalnim televizijama." In *Indikatori profesionalnog/ neprofesionalnog ponašanja novinara i medija - mogućnosti za poboljšanje stanja*, edited by Rade Veljanovski, 39–57. Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka Beogradskog univerziteta.
- Ball, Susan. 2014. "On the 'Doing' of Visual Research on Borders and Migration: Collaboration Between Professional Photographers, Social Scientists and Subjects." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 29 (2): 147–164.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. "Rhetoric of the image." In *Image, Music, Text*, edited by Roland Barthes, 32–51. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Beogradski centar za ljudska prava. 2021. *Istraživanje javnog mnjenja o stavovima građana prema izbeglicama*. Accessed October 13, 2023. <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/istrazivanje-javnog-mnjenja-o-stavovima-gradana-prema-izbeglicamamigrantima-u-srbiji-u-2021-godini/>.
- Bleiker, Roland, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison, and Xzarina Nicholson. 2013. "The visual dehumanisation of refugees." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48 (4): 398–416.
- Boyce, Geoffrey A. 2020. "Immigration, policing, and the politics of time." *Geography Compass* 14, e12496.
- Bruno, Marco. 2016. "Media representations of immigrants in Italy: framing real and symbolic borders." *REMHU – Rev. Interdiscip. Mobil. Hum.*, Brasília, 24 (46): 45–58.
- Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Casaglia, Anna. 2021. "Borders and mobility injustice in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 36: 695–703.
- Campbell, David. 2003. "Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: Reflections on the imaging of war." *Review of International Studies* 29 (1): 57–73.
- Campbell, David. 2007. "Geopolitics and visibility: Sighting the Darfur conflict." *Political Geography* 26 (4): 357–382.
- Caviedes, Alexander. 2015. "An emerging 'European' news portrayal of immigration?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (6): 897–917.
- CESID. 2019. *The attitudes of citizens towards the impact of refugee and migration crisis in 19 local municipalities in Serbia*. Beograd: CESID.

- Chouliaraki, Lilie, and Tijana Stolic. 2017. "Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': A visual typology of European news." *Media, Culture & Society* 39 (8): 1162–1177.
- Chouliaraki, Lilie, and Rafal Zaborowski. 2017. "Voice and community in the refugee crisis: A content analysis of news coverage in eight European countries." *International Communication Gazette* 79 (6/7): 613–635.
- Council of Europe. 2017. Report: The situation of migrants and refugees in Serbia and transit zones in Hungary. October 19. Accessed October 12, 2023. https://www.coe.int/en/web/special-representative-secretary-general-migration-refugees/home/-/asset_publisher/VR1PwCH8uptK/content/report-the-situation-of-migrants-and-refugees-in-serbia-and-transit-zones-in-hungary/16695?inheritRedirect=false.
- Cvetković, Ivana, and Mirjana Pantić. 2018. "Multimodal Discursivity: Framing European Union Borders in Live-Blogs." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 42 (4): 318–339.
- Eades, David. 2019. "Stopping the boats' to save lives? Humanitarian concern as a slow moral panic." *Media Practice and Education* 20 (1): 87–106.
- Ellison, James, and Travis Van Isacker. 2021. "Visual methods for militant research: Counter-evidencing and counter-mapping in anti-border movements." *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 13 (1): 349–374.
- Franko, Katja. 2021. "The two-sided spectacle at the border: Frontex, NGOs and the theatres of sovereignty." *Theoretical Criminology* 25 (3): 379–399.
- Gemius Rating. 2022. *Country: Srbija. Gemius Audience, Report Domains*. February 7. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://rating.gemius.com/rs/tree/31>.
- Greenwood, Keith, and TJ. Thomson. 2020. "Framing the migration: A study of news photographs showing people fleeing war and persecution." *International Communication Gazette* 82 (2): 140–163.
- Greussing, Esther, and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. 2017. "Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (11): 1749–1774.
- Hansen, Lene. 2011. "Theorizing the image for Security Studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis." *European Journal of International Relations* 17 (1): 51–74.
- Human Rights Watch. 2015. *Serbia: Police abusing migrants, asylum seekers*. April 15. Accessed November 10, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/15/serbia-police-abusing-migrants-asylum-seekers>.
- Huysmans, Jef. 2000. "The European Union and the securitization of migration." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38 (5): 751–777.
- IREX. 2019. *Media Sustainability Index 2019: Serbia*. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-serbia.pdf>.
- Kearns, Matthew. 2017. "Gender, visibility and violence: visual securitization and the 2001 war in Afghanistan." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9 (4): 491–505.
- KIRS. n.d. *Izvodi iz štampe*. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://kirs.gov.rs/cir/dokumenti-i-publikacije/izvodi-iz-stampe>.

- Kleut, Jelena, and Brankica Drašković. 2017. "Vizuelne reprezentacije izbeglica na 'Balkanskoj ruti' u medijima u Srbiji." *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* 42 (2): 165–182.
- Krstić, Aleksandra. 2022a. "Vizuelno uokvirivanje migranata i izbeglica u medijima u Srbiji od 2015. do 2020. godine." *Sociologija* 64 (1): 70–93.
- Krstić, Aleksandra. 2022b. "Bezlične, otuđene i opasne: vizuelna reprezentacija migrantkinja sa Bliskog istoka i iz Afrike u medijskom prostoru Srbije." *Sociološki pregled* 56 (1): 210–233.
- Krstić, Aleksandra, Giorgia Aiello, and Nebojša Vladisavljević. 2020. "Visual metaphor and authoritarianism in Serbian political cartoons." *Media, War & Conflict* 13 (1): 27–49.
- Krstić, Aleksandra, and Ana Milojević. 2015. "Etički i profesionalni aspekti izveštavanja dnevne štampe u Srbiji." In *Indikatori profesionalnog/neprofesionalnog ponašanja novinara i medija – mogućnosti za poboljšanje stanja*, edited by Rade Veljanovski, 11–37. Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka Beogradskog univerziteta.
- Krstić, Aleksandra. 2017. "'We do it better than you' – media portrayal of Serbia as a host society for migrants in the Western Balkans route." Presentation at the international conference "Rights & Might: Cultural counter-narratives of the migrant and refugee experiences", panel: "Media Portrayals of Refugees and Migrants", University of Westminster, London, June 2017.
- Kovář, Jan. 2019. "A security threat or an economic consequence? An analysis of the news framing of the European Union's refugee crisis." *International communication gazette* 2 (6): 564–587.
- Kudžmaitė, Gintare, and Luc Pauwels. 2020. "Researching visual manifestations of border spaces and experiences: Conceptual and methodological perspectives." *Geopolitics* 27 (1): 1–32.
- Lažetić, Marina. 2018. "'Migration Crisis' and the far right networks in Europe: a case study of Serbia." *Journal of Regional Security* 13 (2): 131–178.
- Liu, Xiaofeng, and Mia Bennett. 2020. "Viral borders: COVID-19's effects on securitization, surveillance, and identity in mainland China and Hong Kong." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 10: 158–163.
- Massari, Alice. 2021. *Visual Securitization – Humanitarian Representations and Migration Governance*. Springer.
- McDonald, David A., and Sean Jacobs. 2005. "(Re)writing xenophobia: Understanding press coverage of cross-border migration in Southern Africa." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23 (3): 295–325.
- Media Ownership Monitor Srbija. 2019. *Tržište štampe*. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://serbia.mom-rsf.org/rs/mediji/print/>.
- Milinkov, Smiljana, Stefan Janjić, and Natalija Jakovljević, eds. 2021. *Izveštavanje o migrantima – Između manipulacije i etike*. Novi Sad: Nezavisno udruženje novinara Vojvodine.
- Milojević, Ana, and Kristina Milić. 2023. "Media Framing of the Refugee Crisis at the Periphery of Europe." *Tripodos* 53: 10–31. <https://doi.org/10.51698/tripodos.2022.53.06>.

- Moze, Francesco, and Samuel J. Spiegel. 2022. "The aesthetic turn in border studies: Visual geographies of power, contestation and subversion." *Geography Compass*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12618>.
- Musarò, Pierluigi. 2016. "Mare Nostrum: the visual politics of a military humanitarian operation in the Mediterranean Sea." *Media, Culture & Society* 39 (1): 11–28.
- N1. 2022. "Serbia, Austria, Hungary reach agreement on readmission." November 16. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/serbia-hungary-austria-reach-agreement-on-readmission/>.
- Rodriguez, Lulu, and Daniela Dimitrova. 2011. "The levels of visual framing." *Journal of Visual Literacy* 30 (1): 48–65.
- Rose, Gilian. 2013. "On the relation between 'visual research methods' and contemporary visual culture." *The Sociological Review* 62: 24–46.
- Stojić Mitrović, Marta, and Ana Vilenica. 2019. "Enforcing and disrupting circular movement in an EU Borderscape: housingscaping in Serbia." *Citizenship Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1634368>.
- Stojić Mitrović, Marta. 2020. "Izbeglice (Refugees), azilanti (Asylum Seekers) and ilegalni migranti (Illegal Migrants) in Administrative and Public Discourse in Serbia: An Overview of Concepts in a Diachronic Perspective." *Narodna umjetnost: hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku* 57 (2): 147–167.
- Šabić, Senada Š. 2017. "The impact of the refugee crisis in the Balkans: a drift towards security." *Journal of Regional Security* 12 (1): 51–74.
- Šarić, Ljiljana. 2019. "Visual Presentation of Refugees During the "Refugee Crisis" of 2015–2016 on the Online Portal of the Croatian Public Broadcaster." *International Journal of Communication* 13: 991–1015.
- Šljukić Bandović, Mihaela. 2021. "'Narodne patrolе' danas jure migrante, a sutra koga će?" *Istinomer*, February 14. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://www.istinomer.rs/analize/narodne-patrole-danas-jure-migrante-a-sutra-koga-ce/>.
- United Nations. n.d. *Refugees and Migrants: Definitions*. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>.
- Valente, Adriana, Valentina Tudisca, Andrea Pelliccia, Loredana Cerbara, and Maria Girolama Caruso. 2021. "Comparing Liberal and Conservative Newspapers: Diverging Narratives in Representing Migrants?" *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1985200>.
- Vuletić, Vladimir, and Božidar Filipović. 2019. "Politički i medijski (od)govori na 'migrantsku krizu' u Srbiji." *Forum za sigurnosne studije* 3 (3): 118–137.
- Wilmott, Annabelle C. 2017. "The Politics of Photography: Visual Depictions of Syrian Refugees in U.K. Online Media." *Visual Communication Quarterly* 24 (2): 67–82.