

## THE 2015 AND 2016 MIGRATION CRISIS IN EUROPE: HOW CROATIAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS REPRESENTED AND PORTRAYED REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** *The aim of this research was to find out how refugees and migrants were narratively constructed and represented in selected Croatian daily newspapers during the migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016. We were interested to determine whether such people were addressed in the articles as “refugees” or “migrants”, whether they were commonly portrayed as victims or as a threat, and if Croatia and the neighbouring countries were represented as a refugee-friendly or refugee-hostile country. We present the results of quantitative content analysis and narrative analysis of articles on refugees and migrants published in three of Croatia’s most read daily newspapers (Jutarnji list, Večernji list and 24 sata) in different periods during the crisis.*

**Keywords:** *Balkan Route, Croatia, refugees, migrants, newspapers, media representation*

### Introduction

Since the end of World War II, Western European countries and especially their larger cities have been target destinations for colonial migrants, refugees, displaced persons and other migrants (Castels and Miller, 1998). Yet, the scale of the flow of people migrating to Europe after World War II was never as massive as in 2015 when over 1.25 million refugees and other migrants made their way from Middle East and North Africa countries to the EU (European Union/ECHO, 2016; Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017). This mass displacement of people is also known as the “European refugee crisis”.

The influx of migrants and refugees into Europe and the EU was already underway with greater intensity following the Arab Spring of 2011, but never with the scale and scope as occurred in 2015 when two routes – the

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Mediterranean and the Western Balkan – were established (Hampshire, 2015: 9). People coming primarily from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, but also other Middle Eastern and African countries, were either escaping war at home or in search of better economic prospects and were traveling across the Mediterranean Sea or overland via Turkey and Greece and Southeast Europe in an attempt to reach their final destinations – Western European or Scandinavian countries. The overriding characteristic of the “European refugee crisis” was the general “climate of uncertainty about its political, economic, and social implications, which left ample room” for the local media to help in “shaping the understanding of who the refugees are and what their arrival means for the respective countries” (Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017: 1749–50).

For many years, the Mediterranean Sea was the busiest entry point for Europe for many thousands of migrants and refugees. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) data, in 2015 there were over 1 million arrivals by the Mediterranean Sea while, unfortunately, since 2014 every year more than 3,000 people are registered as dead or missing (UNHCR, 2018). This phenomenon was described in the media as the “Mediterranean Migration Crisis” (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016; White, 2015). The peak of media attention came in autumn 2015 when the picture of a drowned refugee toddler called Aylan Kurdi was published on the front pages of almost all internationally relevant newspapers like The Guardian, The Independent, Le Monde, El Pais, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and many more. This picture shifted the world’s attention to the escalating crisis and became an instant icon (Mortensen, 2016: 410; Bunyan, 2015).

Not long after, instead of risking travelling across the Mediterranean in autumn and winter, refugees and migrants decided to walk or travel by trains and buses. The overland route was called the Balkan Route because it crossed Greece, Macedonia and Serbia, leading towards Hungary and other EU countries. Following Hungary’s decision on 15 September 2015 to close its border with Serbia and block the passage of refugees and migrants, under the threat of 3 years’ imprisonment for crossing the border illegally (JL: Palokaj, Jakubin, and Korljan, 2015: 6–7), tens of thousands of people were redirected to Croatia and Slovenia towards Austria. Along with Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, Croatia started to make up a section of the so-called Western Balkan Route (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 4). The four countries of the region were serving as mere transit routes as people fleeing war, persecution and poverty traversed them towards Austria, Germany and the Nordic countries (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016).

From 16 September 2015 to 9 March 2016 (the day the route was officially closed after a series of political agreements), a total of 658,068 refugees and migrants crossed Croatia (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 11). The peak of the

crisis was on 17 September when over 11,000 people arrived in Croatia. In that six-month span of the crisis, just 178 intentions to apply for asylum in Croatia were lodged (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 11). Josip Esterajher (2015) presented early estimates on the structure of migrants/refugees in an article on the refugee crisis. He refers to the people as “transmigrants” (migrants in transit) who do not wish to seek asylum. According to initial estimates, the majority were 68% Syrian (and some Afghan) refugees, while the rest were economic migrants from Pakistan, Iraq and other countries. Young, male migrants dominated among the moving masses, with a small share of 20% of women migrating through Croatia (Esterajher, 2015: 21). On 18 November 2016, the Croatian government decided to only let migrants from war-torn Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan pass (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 12). After that decision, the number of arrivals per day plummeted.

The Croatian left-wing government led by Prime Minister Zoran Milanović in 2015 framed the refugee crisis as a humanitarian one, while still underlining the need to protect the country’s security interests (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 13). The government had organised the free transportation of refugees and migrants across Croatia. Food, shelter and medical care were provided, and numerous NGOs as well as regular citizens offered various forms of help to the refugees.

## Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to find out how refugees and migrants were narratively constructed and represented in selected Croatian daily newspapers. More specifically, in the quantitative part of the research we consider five main research questions:

RQ1: Were the people mentioned in the media articles as persons traveling along the Balkan Route referred to as “refugees” or “migrants”?

RQ2: Were the people mentioned in the articles as persons travelling along the Balkan Route often referred to as being victims or as a threat?

RQ3: Were the people seen in visuals (photographs) portrayed as victims or as a threat?

RQ4: Was there any change in referring to such people as “refugees” or “migrants”, and in portraying them as victims or a threat, in the periods before and after the Paris terrorist attacks that occurred on 13 November 2015?

RQ5: Which countries along the Balkan Route were described in Croatian newspapers as refugee-friendly or refugee-unfriendly?

In the qualitative part of the research, we consider:

RQ6: How were the people mentioned in the articles as persons traveling along the Balkan Route portrayed as victims or a threat?

## Theoretical Framework: News Framing and Media Narratives

The media contributes significantly to how we define the world around us. It presents ways to understand the world, while representing politics, development, culture and people. It does so using images, sounds and writing. The media dictates what is important and what is not, what and who is right, and what and who is wrong, what we need and what we do not, what is fun and what is not. Jostein Gripsrud (2002: 5) states the media presents “parts and dimensions of the world that we ourselves have not experienced directly and may never come to experience directly”.

Through the selection, presentation and framing of news, news shapes our identities, attitudes to the community, to social, ethnic, sexual and other minorities, and our general view of the world around us. In everyday life, we are constantly exposed to mediation that involves a constant transformation of meaning. It entails “the movement of meaning from one text to another, from one discourse to another, from one event to another” (Silverstone, 1999: 13).

Journalists “choose images and words that have the power to influence how audiences interpret and evaluate issues and policies” (Tewskbury and Scheufele, 2009: 17). Beside written or audio-visual information, news contains frames as well. Journalists or editors choose these frames, and in doing so can be influenced by media owners, advertisers, political elites, or business elites. News frames suggest how audiences should understand and interpret an issue or event, and how they should react to it (Tewskbury and Scheufele, 2009: 19).

The concept of news framing originates in the early 1970s and refers to an interpretative frame, an angle or perspective from which an event, issue or problem is presented in the news (Kunczik and Zipfel, 1998). By selecting a news frame, the journalist decides to point to a particular ‘reality’ while other angles of that ‘reality’ remain ignored or neglected. For example, if there is a group of refugees and migrants protesting on the street, with some protesting peacefully with banners in their arms, while others are violent and breaking shop windows – a journalist can choose to take a picture of only the peaceful protestors, only the violent protestors, or take a wide picture that captures both protestor groups.

While analysing media texts, media narratives should be included as well as beside frames. Whether information published in media is factual or fictional, it should be assembled to form a narrative (Fulton et al., 2005; Gillespie, 2006; Car, 2011: 33). The importance of narrative arises from the notion that all stories are ultimately framed by the prevailing cultural and political ideologies from which they are told. It is important to understand the context in which journalists construct news stories, and how these

stories relate to the culture of which they are both a reflection and a representation. To understand media narratives, a wide range of story-telling devices, including myths or mythical structures that form an integral part of their construction, must be examined.

In his book *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*, Jack Lule (2001) recognises seven 'master myths' that can be found in news no matter the medium or historical, political or social context. In this article, we consider two of them. The first is the myth of the victim. In journalistic practice, focusing on individuals is used to represent what is happening to other people. Lule (2001: 53) stresses how "one of myth's important social roles is to reconcile people to the seeming randomness of human existence". This 'formula' is often used while telling stories about socially mistreated groups and minorities, as well as refugees and migrants.

Opposite to narratives of victims, in the media representation of refugees and migrants the narrative of a threat is also common, agreeing with Lule's interpretation of the myth of the flood (2001), which concerns an unpleasant, unexpectedly large storm or any other natural disaster. It could also be a disaster that human kind is responsible for, but is described in narratives of 'the wave' – a symbol of an unexpected natural disaster. In such stories, everyone in the devastated place is in the same situation, no one is privileged and usually at least someone survives.

News framing (de Vreese, 2005; Kunczik and Zipfel, 1998) created by the decisions of editors and journalists therefore relies on use of particular language constructions and narrative to present a political, economic, social or any other type of discourse to individuals or groups of people. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 2), media discourse is "part of the process by which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process by which journalists develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse". Media frames, as well as "political and popular narratives can help us learn a great deal about how the responsibility for suffering is shifted; how fears of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference are mobilized; and how boundaries of social categories are made and unmade" (Latour, 2007, cf. Holmes and Castañeda, 2016: 13).

## **Media Representation of Migrants and Refugees**

The mass displacement of people in 2015 was framed in the media as a crisis (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016) and spurred numerous academic analyses of the phenomenon. Media shapes public opinion on this complex political issue by choosing the framing for reporting on the "refugee crisis" or "migrant crisis" (Bird et al., 2011). The mass media has often been described as hampering the social integration of refugees and migrants by

providing negative coverage (Schemer, 2012). The dehumanising patterns of visuals in “refugee crisis” media coverage “reinforce a politics of fear that explains why refugees are publicly framed as people whose plight (...) does not generate a compassionate political response” (Bleiker et al., 2013).

According to Kieran Cooke and Aidan White, in many different countries, from Nepal and Gambia to South Africa, Bulgaria and Turkey, media representations of refugees and migrants are similar: “journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants” (Cooke and White, 2015: 6). The focus of media stories is on numbers and emotions. Christian Schemer (2012) gives a broad overview of previous research on negatively biased public opinion concerning ethnic minorities and immigrants, which is partly influenced by how the media represents and portrays these unprivileged social groups. Refugees and migrants can be represented in the media within three common frames: “as passive victims, as threat to the culture, security and welfare of the host country, or as dehumanised, anonymous (out)-group” (Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017: 1751).

Represented as economic migrants, the displacement of these people from one continent to another is regarded as a security issue and the masses of migrants as a threat to countries’ national security, social structure, their culture and lifestyle, economic security, and are associated with criminal acts (Tatalović and Malnar, 2015: 24). Cooke and White (2015) agree that migrants are usually described as a threat in the media. There is a tendency “to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life” (Cooke and White, 2015: 7).

Words matter, especially in news reporting. It is not the same if journalists use the words “refugees” or “migrants”, “refugee crisis” or “migrant crisis”. These terms can sometimes be distinguished or conflated, particularly in political discourse. While Al Jazeera pointed out how important it was to report on refugees (Kyriakides, 2017), the BBC, The Guardian and The Independent, as well as the Brussels-based Euractiv and EUobserver widely used the term “migrant crisis” (Bunyan, 2015: 12). The terms “migrants”, “refugees” and “asylum-seekers” cannot be used interchangeably since their meanings are distinct. According to Bunyan (2015: 12), refugees are forced to leave their country “because of persecution, or they are displaced by war or a humanitarian disaster or some other external and compelling factors”; asylum seekers are “refugees seeking protection from war or persecution who apply for refugee status under international and national laws”, while migrants move freely, “temporarily or permanently, from one place or country to another”.

How refugees and migrants are framed in media reports reveals much about the anxieties regarding the limited goods and cultural diversity in Europe. "Media reports and political statements project these anxieties onto displaced people by morally delineating the deserving refugee from the undeserving migrant while casting both groups as outsiders threatening the wellbeing of an imagined homogenous Europe" (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016: 13).

In this 'reality constructing' process concerned with refugees and migrants, King and Wood (2001) see the importance of how the host-country media portrays migrants, thereby influencing their reception in the host-country in the sense of either inclusion or exclusion. Exactly media discourses happened to be "immensely influential in constructing migrants as 'others' and often to as 'criminals' or 'undesirables'" (King and Wood, 2001: 2).

Insights into news reports show that early reporting consisted of empathetic responses and that a change in reporting came after the attack in Paris on 13 November, stressing suspicion with regard to refugees (Berry et al., 2015, and Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016; all cf. Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017). For this research, it is important to mention an analysis of the securitisation of migration during the migration crisis in the Slovenian media conducted by Marjan Malešič (2017). Defining securitisation as "a process in which an issue is presented as an existential threat" (Malešič, 2017: 950) and focusing on framing theory in media, which denotes ways of encouraging and favouring certain interpretations (Malešič, 2017: 952), the author ventured to analyse the Slovenian press to determine the extent to which the two chosen Slovenian newspapers contributed to the securitisation of migration through the framing process. In addition to press, the author analysed the governmental and oppositional stances as well as public opinion. Investigating Slovenian newspapers with the highest circulation, Slovenske novice (Slovenian News) and Delo (Labour), Malešič showed that securitisation was not framed by editorial policies nor did the articles researched express any intentional bias. On the contrary, the second-most read newspaper in Slovenia, Delo, and its articles were opposed to the securitisation of migration, attempting a liberal, humanistic approach to reporting (Malešič, 2017: 965).

Investigating news reports on the refugee crisis, Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic (2017) inter alia wanted to find out "which conceptions of refugees" are represented in the images on newspaper front pages (2017: 1163). The authors analysed 51 newspaper front pages from five European countries (Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, UK) "to create a typology of refugee visibilities" (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017: 1163). Based upon previous studies on migration in which the refugee is visually an ambivalent media



figure (either a sufferer or a threat), Chouliaraki and Stolic's conceptually-driven semiotic analysis (2017: 1151, 1173) further developed the victim/threat dichotomy into five categories: visibilities of mere existence (biological presence), empathy (victimhood), threat, hospitality (Western citizens' activism regarding refugees) and self-reflexivity (i.e. celebrities' advocacy for refugees, remediation of social media posts). These "regimes of visibility", as the authors call them, are crucial since they are "key spaces of moralisation that produce and regulate the public dispositions by which we collectively take responsibility for the plight of distant others" (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017: 1172). The authors also claim that each of these visibilities "proposes different forms of civic agency and responsibility towards refugees" (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017: 1163).

Therefore, only adherence to high ethical standards in news reporting on refugees and migrants, including accuracy, independence, impartiality, humanity and accountability, can secure that this vulnerable minority will not "quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security" (Cooke and White, 2015: 8).

## Methods

Having in mind the complex theoretical concept of media narratives (Fulton et al., 2005; Gillespie, 2006) and media framing (de Vreese, 2005; Kunczik and Zipfel, 1998: 103), in this study we decided to use quantitative content analysis (Riffe et al., 2014; Neuendorf, 2002; Holsti, 1969) to answer RQ1 through RQ5, and narrative analysis (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2015; Gillespie, 2006) to analyse RQ6. We focused on articles about the refugee and migrant crisis published in three Croatian daily newspapers with the largest national circulations: *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list* and *24 sata*. *Večernji list* and *24 sata*, both owned by the Austrian Styria, are the choice of more conservative, right-leaning readers (Car and Bukvić, 2014). *24 sata* is a tabloid and has the highest sales in Croatia, while *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list* are semi-tabloids with more short articles than analytical ones, containing many photographs and several opinion editorials (Dragojević et al., 2006: 138). *Jutarnji list* is kept by the Croatian-owned company Hanza media and supports liberal socio-political and economic values (Car and Bukvić, 2014). It is important to note these differences in ownership and editorial policy while considering the construction of the narratives journalists and editors use when portraying refugees and migrants.

The unit of analysis is a complete newspaper article, including photographs and images, as well as titles and text in frames. The article can be short news, a report, an interview, or any kind of a larger analytical article,



or an editorial. Only articles covering the topic of refugees and migrants were selected.

The period of the 'refugee crisis' in Croatia started on 15 September 2015 after Hungary closed its border with Serbia, and when the first refugees consequently arrived in Croatia. It ended on 9 March 2016, when the Balkan Route was officially closed. In this six-month span of daily reporting, for the analysis of Croatian daily newspapers concerning the refugee crisis we selected three 2-week research periods. The sample was determined around four important events, as identified by Senada Šelo Šabić and Sonja Borić (2016) in their detailed timeline of events that began with the route shifting through Croatia: Hungary's decision to seal off the border with Croatia for migrants and the crisis' escalation (15 September 2015 onwards), the Croatian general election for Parliament (8 November 2015) and the Paris terror attacks (13 November 2015) and, finally, the official decision to close the Balkan Route (8 March 2016). Around each event, a 14-day timeframe was determined to investigate reporting on the refugee and migrant crisis: 15–28 September 2015; 8–21 November 2015, and 1–14 March 2016.

A total of 335 articles reporting on refugees and migrants in print editions of the *Jutarnji list* (N1=85), *Večernji list* (N2=168) and *24 sata* (N3=82) newspapers was analysed. The analysis was conducted by two human coders, with the inter-coder reliability percent agreement being .96. Nine variables were coded: article technical description; associated photographs; associated visuals (e.g. infographics, maps or illustrations); presence of the term "refugee/s" or "migrant/s"; text narrative elements of a victim or of a threat; visual narrative elements of a victim or of a threat; description of person/s in the photograph's foreground; countries mentioned in a friendly context towards refugees and migrants; countries mentioned in an unfriendly context towards refugees and migrants.

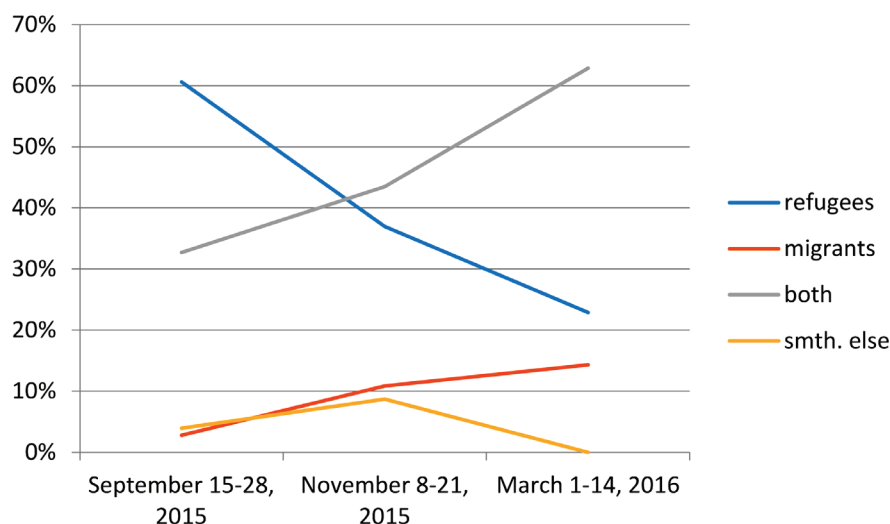
## Results of quantitative content analysis

In this research, we separately analysed article text and the accompanying visuals (photographs). The large majority of articles had visuals – photographs were much more common (89.55%) than graphics like infographics, maps, illustrations etc. (43.58%). Most common were articles with just one photograph (44.78%), followed by a set of articles that had four or more photographs (25.37%), as opposed to articles illustrated using two or three photographs. Compared to *Večernji list* and *24 sata*, *Jutarnji list* had the largest amount of usually 2-page report articles with four or more photographs.

Regarding RQ1, the articles in all three newspapers referred to the people in question as "refugees" in 53.43% of cases; they were identified as "refugees" and as well as "migrants" in 37.31% of the articles, while exclusively

referred to as “migrants” in only 5.07% of the remaining articles. Regarding RQ4, we identified a statistically significant relationship between the way the labels “refugees” and “migrants” were used and the time period under study ( $\chi^2 = 34.306$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Specifically, the label “refugee” was used significantly more than expected in the first period (September 2015 2-week period) and less in the remaining two periods (November 2015 and March 2016 2-week period) after the Paris attacks; the opposite results were found for the label “migrant”. It is also important to note that use of the two labels within the same article occurred less than expected in the two later periods (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: ADDRESSING OF THE PEOPLE IN ARTICLES IN DIFFERENT TIME PERIODS: REFUGEES OR MIGRANTS?



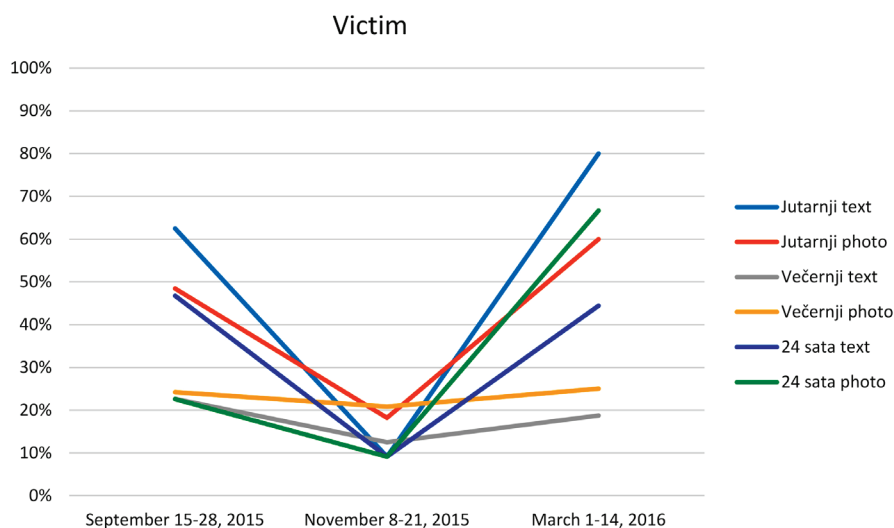
Source: Car, Čančar and Bovan (2016).

Considering RQ2, the text of all the articles in the sample portrayed 35.22% of their protagonists as victims, 10.75% as a threat; 40.6% of the text linked the protagonists to neither classification, while 7.76% of the text linked them to both labels. The portrayal of refugees and migrants through the prism of threat increased in the November timeframe (32.61%), while the figures were 7.48% in the September timeframe and 5.71% in the March timeframe (RQ4). This increase corresponds with the Paris attacks and a shift in narrative that then focused more on the security aspect of the refugee crisis. Here, we found a similar statistically significant relationship as above ( $\chi^2 = 36.235$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) – the label “victim” in the text was used

more than expected in September 2015, and less so in November and March. The threat frame was used more than expected only during the time of the Paris attack, while it was used less in the September and March periods (see Figures 2 and 3 for data given by newspaper).

Regarding RQ3, the visual portrayal of refugees in Croatian daily newspapers had 29% of the people depicted represented as victims, only 3.28% as a threat, 2.39% as both victims and a threat, and 28.96% of portrayals fell into neither category. It must be mentioned that 30.75% of the photographs analysed did not depict refugees or migrants at all in the articles they were otherwise meant to illustrate. We found no statistically significant relationship between the way people were visually portrayed and the period we analysed ( $\chi^2 = 14.412$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p = 0.07$ ) (RQ4).

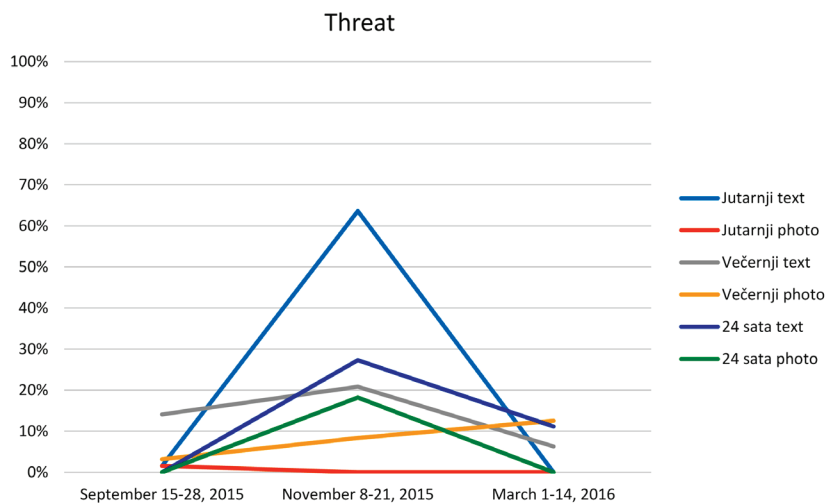
*Figure 2: REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AS VICTIMS BASED ON DIFFERENT NEWSPAPERS*



Source: Car, Čančar and Bovan (2016).

While examining the geopolitical context for migrants and refugees, over 66% of Croatia's neighbouring countries were not mentioned at all regarding their relationship to refugees, whether friendly or hostile. Regarding RQ5, Croatia was found to be a predominantly friendly environment (if such a stance was articulated in the text or Croatia was explicitly mentioned) in 30.75% of the analysed articles, while 2.29% found Croatia to be a hostile environment for refugees and migrants, whether through op-ed pieces, political statements, or policy measures. The country portrayed as the most hostile towards refugees was Hungary, in 13.43% of all analysed articles.

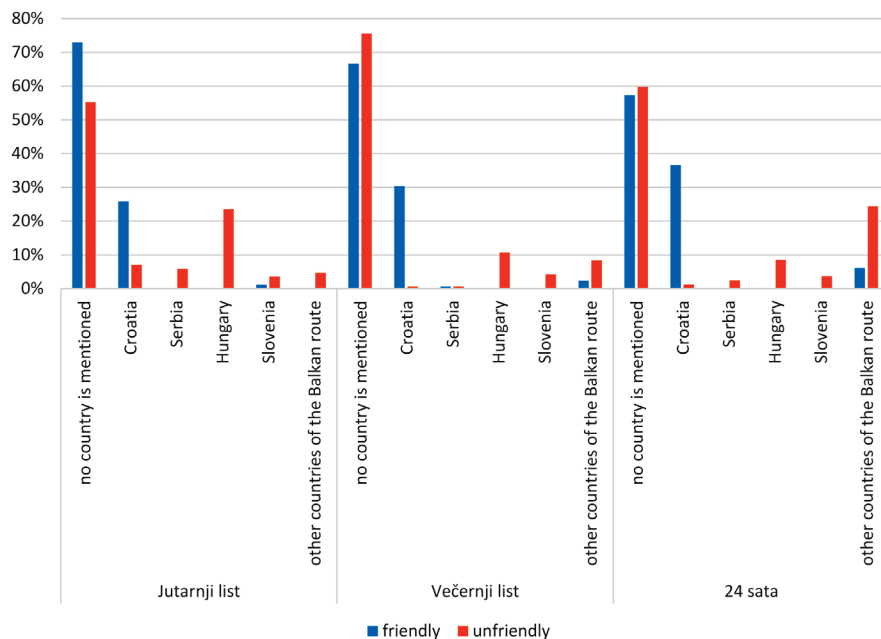
Figure 3: REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS AS A THREAT  
BASED ON DIFFERENT NEWSPAPERS



Source: Car, Čančar and Bovan (2016).

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Figure 4: CROATIA AND THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AS REFUGEE-FRIENDLY AND REFUGEE-UNFRIENDLY COUNTRIES



Source: Car, Čančar and Bovan (2016).

## Results of narrative analysis

In order to answer RQ6 (How were the people mentioned in the articles as persons travelling along the Balkan Route portrayed as victims or a threat?), we conducted a narrative analysis of the articles' text and visuals. The two newspapers, *Večernji list* and *24 sata*, both owned by the same Austrian publisher, *Styria Media Group*, as well as *Jutarnji list* owned by the Croatian company Hanza Media, recounted personal stories and experiences of refugees, praised Croatian citizens as being good Samaritans, and pointed out the generally warm reception given to refugees and migrants, as Šelo Šabić and Borić (2016) also identified in their report on the Western Balkan Route. Besides factual reporting on the ongoing crisis, government and EU policy on the crisis and the foreign policy context that triggered the crisis, numerous articles recounted refugees expressing gratitude for their treatment in Croatia as well as Croatian citizens flocking to volunteer, donate clothes and other supplies. Often cited were areas located close to the border where refugees had entered Croatian territory and the local inhabitants had offered various refreshments to people in transit, citing their own persecution in the war in Croatia 25 years before. The editorial introduction of *Večernji list* on 17 September 2015 was headed "Refugees, we in Croatia know what you feel like", and also relied on a quote from a Croatian onlooker of the refugee influx, who stated, "We were also refugees, let the poor people live" (VL, Klarić, 2015: 2). The text was also featured in Arabic scripture. There are many similar examples from *Jutarnji list*, like "Humanity in Ježevo: A student brought them water and pears from his garden", or "Ilača: Citizens get organised, they are saving people from thirst" (JL: Korljan, 2015a: 7; JL: D.K., 2015: 7), or "Humanity: Professor Petrović lived for 7 days with refugees – I invited people from Syria with a pregnant woman into my home" (JL: Korljan, 2015b: 4).

The refugees themselves were often portrayed (whether in text or visually) as being vulnerable, exhausted, victimised and scared. Individual stories of women who had lost their children while registering upon entering the country, young men who fled the draft in Syria, or disabled persons and the physical and mental consequences of long journeys on people's lives were frequent. A vivid example is a *Večernji list* story about a young Syrian named Ahmed who is claimed to have walked for weeks from Damascus, till the point his shoes were destroyed. He had no money to buy a new pair after being robbed by bandits along the road. He is portrayed as a martyr both visually and in the text because the photograph shows him sitting on the ground with his feet covered in sores. Ahmed is quoted as being a polyglot who wishes to earn his degree in architecture in Europe now that his studies have been interrupted in Syria (VL: Diab, 2015: 5). In reporting on the

refugee crisis, along with the labels “refugees” and “migrants”, in an attempt to humanise reporting journalists often referred to them as “people”.

Yet what was noticeable was the discrepancy in discourses of high-ranking Croatian elected officials, as highlighted by journalistic reporting (24 sata: MAB, 2015: 7, and elsewhere): the right-wing president insisted the people entering Croatia be referred to exclusively as “migrants” and that the focus be given over to security issues of mass movements of peoples, whereas the left-wing prime minister insisted on use of the label “refugees”, calling the situation a humanitarian crisis. As a newspaper of liberal political discourse, *Jutarnji list* generally promoted positive attitudes towards refugees, but highlighted the Catholic Church in Croatia was against having refugees in Croatia: “Church: Glas Koncila in contradiction with the Pope’s policy on the refugee crisis ‘Migrants are a danger to Europe, to destruction of the family and to Christianity’” (JL: Bajruši, 2015: 3).

*Večernji list* and *24 sata* published an identical feature entitled “Everything about refugees without fear and prejudice. 50 questions and answers” (VL: Krmpotić, 2015; 24 sata: Krmpotić and Rašeta, 2015) on 20 September 2015, 5 days into the growing crisis. In both newspapers, the feature introduction was illustrated using photographs of children in black and white, as were the cover photos for that day. The feature offered information on the difference between refugees and economic migrants, asylum-seekers, terrorist threats, and the background to the crisis.

Even though newspaper articles took a generally warm and positive stance on refugees and migrants, the op-ed pieces in editions of *Večernji list* had a more negative connotation. Unlike *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list* is a newspaper for conservative political discourse. The commentary found called for greater caution in dealing with the migrants, criticising the governmental lack of thorough security policies regarding foreigners, the illegal border crossings by refugees and migrants, and the numerous entries by physically fit male immigrants into the country. The open-door policy was criticised and the closing off of borders as started by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was glorified, with one commentator praising him for “understanding the fears of Europeans” (VL: Ćurić, 2015: 31). Another one stated that the media is constructing a much-distorted image of the refugee population with “pictures of children as a means of emotional pornography for manipulating the public” (VL: Raspudić, 2015: 36). The chief criticism was levelled against images of Croatian police officers and journalists fraternising with refugee children since these images were frequently perpetuated in the media, as opposed to images of violent clashes between migrants and police in other countries prior to opening of the Croatian route. It was claimed in the commentary that the photographs were at odds with the apparent demographics; i.e. that mostly young and physically fit males were

seen among the immigrants on their way towards the West, not helpless children.

## Conclusion

This research endeavour sought to investigate how three Croatian daily newspapers with the largest national circulations reported on the 2015–2016 refugee crisis in the Croatian setting. In the first part of our study, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the articles' texts and visuals. Our results show that, in both forms, people were dominantly addressed as refugees while the most common representation was that of a victim; only 3.28% of visuals and 10.75% of texts portrayed these people as a threat. Further, Croatia was mostly depicted as a friendly environment, while Hungary was portrayed as being the most hostile to refugees (in 13.43% of all articles). These results were corroborated with more in-depth narrative analysis and are in line with previous studies (e.g. Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016). However, the terrorist attacks in Paris brought with them a change in reporting since after the Paris attacks the language and visuals in the selected articles were prone to portraying refugees and migrants more as a threat and less as a victim.

When we keep in mind the newspapers' earlier mentioned ideological orientation, we would expect the liberal newspaper *Jutarnji list* to promote the victim narrative and portray these people as refugees, whereas the more conservative newspapers *Večernji list* and *24 sata* would label them as migrants and, in that connection, a possible threat. The narrative analysis, especially of the op-ed pieces, confirmed just that (also see Figures 2 and 3). Similarly, after the terrorist attacks in Paris some media outlets began to amplify the security concerns that had been voiced formally and single-handedly by Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović since the very start of the crisis (Šelo Šabić and Borić, 2016: 13). Whereas the articles in all of the newspapers, especially in the liberal, left-leaning *Jutarnji list*, often quoted the refugees' plight and referred to the Croatian people and institutions as being welcoming and friendly towards them, the op-ed pieces in the conservative, right-leaning *Večernji list* took a different approach – they questioned the refugees' 'true' motivation for leaving their home countries, also commenting on their attractive and youth-like physical appearance, and presenting them as a threat to the European, Western way of life.

Since the gender of the people passing through Croatia was an important aspect of several articles, especially the op-ed pieces, we performed an additional analysis and discovered that the majority (40.6%) of those shown in the photos were of mixed age and gender (men, women and children or large groups of people), 15.22% of photographs depicted just men,



followed by 8.06% showing children, and 5.07% showing women and children in the foreground of the shot. Contrary to some statements made in conservative op-ed pieces (VL: Raspudić, 2015: 36), a woman with a child or women alone were portrayed in a negligible share of a mere 0.6% of all the photographs analysed. However, here we also found an impact of the terrorist attacks in Paris ( $\chi^2 = 26.585$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Men were depicted less than expected in the September 2015 period, and more so in the following two periods. Children were depicted less than expected in the period of the Paris attacks, while more in September and March. Mixed and/or large groups were depicted more than expected in the first period, and less in the second two periods.

This study has several limitations. First, we focused only on three daily newspapers and disregarded other newspapers, as well as other forms of old and new media. Second, we chose three 2-week timeframes and disregarded the time between them. Third, we looked only at the way people along the Balkan Route were portrayed in the media, and we cannot be sure which representation was most accepted by Croatian citizens. Still, these limits are a result of conscious decisions. First of all, in order to inform themselves of political and social events Croatian citizens still read print issues of daily newspapers and in our analysis we chose the three best read daily newspapers<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, by choosing those newspapers we were able to check for differences in the portrayals of refugees and migrants based on the newspapers' ideological backgrounds. Second, choosing three distinct periods of analysis allowed us to check the impact of several important events on the way the people travelling along the Balkan Route were represented. Since there are no 'normal' or 'regular' periods in an event such as the European migrant crisis, we deliberately focused on the most salient events. In this way, we captured periods with the most intense media coverage which provided us with sufficient data. Unfortunately, the impact of the media coverage on Croatian citizens lies beyond the scope of the current study.

Thus, despite these limitations, we feel important insights have emerged regarding the topic of the representation and portrayal of refugees and migrants in Croatia. We hope to inspire further research on how refugees and migrants are framed. Future studies could focus on assessing other media types, such as television or Internet news sites, or examining the impact of media portrayals of migrants on citizens' attitudes.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2017 AIR (Average Issue Readership) was 11.1 for 24 sata, 5.2 for Jutarnji list, and 4.5 for Večernji list. Source: Ipsos-MEDIAPuls, 1.1.-31.12.2017.

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