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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Executive summary

Contextual Analysis – Serbia

The migration landscape of the Republic of Serbia is characterized by net-emigration and by transit. Located on the so-called Western Balkan Route for migrants aiming to reach the European Union (EU), the country is experiencing a recent increase in migrants crossing the country, as well as seeking asylum. Before 2015, migrants were discussed in individual cases, and the topic was not considered socially relevant. However, from 2015 onwards this changed and migrants did become a major issue of public debate. At the beginning of the so-called “migration crisis”, the narratives surrounding migrants in Serbia were initially driven by positive humanitarian concerns. Later, these narratives altered to include more negative securitarian and identitarian, as well as economic and demographic elements. The closure of the Balkan route in 2016 led to a shift from a “welcoming-through” scenario to encounters with stranded migrants, raising concerns about security, identity, and integration. However, the policy narrative almost exclusively framed Serbia as just a transit country. In this context, the issue of migration is naturally treated as a matter of temporary concern. Only occasionally is migration considered in a more permanent frame, e.g. as part of a solution to economic (“brain drain”) and demographic (aging population) challenges. However, the real polarization in the debate is between humanitarian and securitarian narratives. In this light, this report links the narrative composition with a broader contextual framework, in order to identify the “movable middle”.

Between 2015 and 2021, based on the analyzes of newspaper articles, polarization in media narratives is evident. Over the years, a gradual rise in negative sentiments is reported, contrasting against neutral or positive reporting. Negative sentiments have been mostly fueled by securitarian narratives, while positive reporting has been primarily driven by humanitarian narratives. Public opinion polls and surveys reveal a complex picture, with a significant degree of ambiguity and ambivalence. While a majority supports a humanitarian approach, concerns about cultural differences and potential economic and political risks contribute to an ambivalent stance. Despite a slight deterioration in attitudes towards migrants, coupled with negative reporting in the media, the “movable middle” in public opinion remains resilient, oscillating between humanitarianism and concerns about perceived risks associated with migrants. Questions concerning identity are only occasionally present in media narratives, and are generally related to security issues. Securitarian and humanitarian narratives dominate, while economic and demographic aspects play a lesser role.

The portrayal of migrants, broadly spoken, is either that of victimized individuals in “transit” or as subjects of risk assessment and integration profiling. This narrative complexity is deeply embedded in broader societal discourses on justice, geopolitics, economy, and culture, contributing to the constant redefinition of “us” and “them”. After the closure of the Balkan Route, the image of the migrant-as-a-

predator (“them”) emerged in the Serbian public. This shift towards securitization narratives was accompanied by stricter policies and criticism of the EU’s inability to face the “crisis”. It also fueled xenophobic sentiments and hate speech on social media. The portrayal of migrants as potential terrorists, health risks (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic), and demographic threats further intensified negative perceptions. In the broader context, the predator-image functioned as a story of a self-victimizing position of Serbia in the broader geopolitical context. Its emotionally fueled stronghold intends to develop into rationalized and justified actions to be taken against the potential collapse of the security regime and international prestige of Serbia. Interestingly, humanitarian narratives served a similar purpose. The victimized migrant has been closely linked with geopolitical insurgencies and served as a backbone for a narrative that distinguished Serbia and its migration crisis management as enviable in comparison to other countries. Again, the migrants are seen as an instrument in geopolitical affairs, but now in order to enforce the narrative on “us” against the inhumane “them”. The media’s coverage in 2015 focused intensively on migrants, gradually shaping a humanitarian narrative around Serbia’s dedication to European values, while upholding the image of Serbia as a transit-country. In this light, the migrant-as-a-hero archetype, which is often linked to stories of successful integration (an irrelevant topic if migrants are only in transit), is mostly absent.

The visual representation of migrants often emphasizes themes of movement, drama, receiving help, and, to a lesser extent, play and hygiene. These narratives evolved over time, influenced by political events such as the 2017 presidential elections. Artistic engagements, including theater shows and exhibitions, have come closest to depicting migrants as victims, highlighting the trauma, stress, and uncertainty they face. However, the victim imagery in these artistic expressions surrounding migrants also sometimes involves a self-critical perspective. These present some of the rare occasions where the actions of the host population are scrutinized.

The dissemination of the major narratives has been predominantly one-sided through traditional media platforms. As a result, broader political discussion remained mostly absent. In the traditional media landscape, over the years, a shift has taken place with an increase in overall negative sentiments. Directly linked to this is the previously discussed trend of a deteriorating public opinion, underlining the susceptibility of the Serbian public to the narratives disseminated by the traditional media. Social media, while more ambiguous in its impact, is identified as a space where securitarian concerns and conspiracy-leaning thinking thrives. Here, extreme cases of anti-immigrant politics on right-wing propaganda-populist portals and Facebook groups are found. Fake news, misinformation, and disinformation flourishes here, manipulating public perception and reinforcing negative stereotypes about migrants. Much like in the broader public, these online narratives rarely met any opposition or serious discussion. The only platform where engagement and discussion regularly took place was in the artistic field of exhibitions and plays, reaching only a narrow audience.

These insights emphasize the need for a vigilant communication strategy, acknowledging the reserved nature of conventional platforms for certain segments of the audience. Therefore, the campaign should be sensitive, well-designed, and open to various interpretations to resonate with the “movable middle” and challenge stereotypical media representations. The potential of social platforms is undeniable but requires careful consideration to avoid provoking negative sentiments and to foster a more nuanced public discourse on migrant-related topics.

Based on all of the above, the Serbian National Migrant Communication Group (NMCG) proposes three prototypes for multimedia campaigns that aim to engage the “movable middle”, endorse humanitarianism, foster encounters with newcomers and stimulate wider debates on migration.

1. Erasing Borders:

- *Concept:* A campaign featuring a traveling caravan moving across Serbia, encouraging a participatory challenge between migrants and locals. Participants sing a song in their mother language, reciprocated by others.
- *Strengths:* Participative approach, cultural exchange, and potential for a broader debate. Emphasis on shareable, meme-like video content.
- *Weaknesses:* Concerns about spreadability, reach, and potential derailment on social media.

2. Mirror:

- *Concept:* A video campaign targeting reflective moments of cultural encounters, challenging local worldviews. It aims to address and scrutinize common stereotypes through a man reflecting in a mirror and encountering biased self-perceptions.
- *Strengths:* Participative approach, cultural reflection, and potential for a broader debate.
- *Weaknesses:* Challenges in spreadability, organizing performances, and achieving adequate reach on social media.

3. Dice:

- *Concept:* Utilizing the motif of manipulation, this campaign involves throwing a dice in six sequences, each unfolding into unique video content representing stereotypes. The message conveys that stereotypes may be manipulations by unknown forces.
- *Strengths:* The interactive and playful nature of the dice. Potential to spread widely and reach a broader audience without favoring dominant narratives.
- *Weaknesses:* Challenges in determining exact archetypes and refining dissemination on social media.

Introduction

Serbia, located on the Western Balkan area of Southeastern Europe, has evolved into a major transit and an origin country for migration in recent years. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, Serbia succeeded into the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 2001, committing to international responsibilities concerning the rights and obligations of refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Serbia is also party to the 1954 and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (ibid.). On a national level, the entry, stay and departure of foreigners in Serbia is regulated by the Law on Foreigners of the Republic of Serbia, last amended in August 2023, and more changes applicable as of February 2024 are planned (Law on Foreigners, 2018). This law sets out visa requirements and regulates residence permits. Another important law is the Law on Employment of Foreigners, updated simultaneously with the Law on Foreigners. This law regulates the conditions and procedures for employers and foreign workers to obtain work permits and visas (Law on Employment of Foreigners, 2014). The most important law that regulates international protection in Serbia is the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, enacted in 2007, outlining the procedures for applying for asylum, the rights of asylum seekers, and the criteria for refugee status determination, along with provision for Temporary Protection in certain circumstances (Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, 2018).

According to national statistics, in 2020, approximately 11,000 people immigrated to the country, with China as the main origin country (32.8%), followed by Turkey (18.6%), Russia (11.4%), and neighboring North Macedonia (2.5%) and Croatia (2.4%) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). In the same year, almost 27,000 people emigrated to mostly European Union (EU) and neighboring former Yugoslav states (ibid.). This makes Serbia a net-emigration country. Besides being mostly an origin country, Serbia is also a transit country for migrants trying to reach the EU. Although transit migration was particularly evident in 2015, the numbers of migrants using Serbia to reach the EU is growing again. For 2022, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) registered a 59.5 percent increase (from 120,531 to 192,266) in arrivals in the Western Balkans compared to 2021, with the IOM noting that almost two-thirds of all migrants transiting through the Western Balkans moves through Serbia (IOM, 2023). A similar upwards trend is identified in a report by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), which registered an 81 percent increase (from 2,306 to 4,181) in the total number of people that expressed their intention to seek asylum in Serbia compared to 2021 (BCHR, 2023). The discrepancy between the number of people transiting through Serbia, and the number of people expressing the intention to seek asylum in Serbia, illustrates the transitional nature of the migration landscape. Even more so when looking at the actual number of applications. In 2020, out of a total of 2,813 expressed intentions for asylum, only 5.2% (145 persons) indeed applied for asylum (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). Notably, between 2008 and 2022, Serbia granted international protection to a total of 244 asylum seekers (BCHR, 2023). Across the Western

Balkans, the IOM observes that migrants are spending less and less days in each country, attempting to cross ever so swiftly into the European Union (IOM, 2023).

The five main countries of origin of people expressing the intention to seek asylum in Serbia in 2022 were Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Cuba (BCHR, 2023). In the same year, a significant increase of Syrians transiting through Serbia were registered, compared to 2021. The same goes for Moroccans, with Serbia registering a 487 percent increase compared to 2021 (IOM, 2023).

/Chapter One

General overview

Over the past several years, the horizon of narratives towards migrants in Serbia has profoundly altered its shape. Whereas the initial reactions of the public to the high influx of migrants in 2015, when the so-called 'Balkan route' was established, were primarily driven by a humanitarian cause, a gradual ramification of narratives in coming years has been marked with a broader inception of securitarian and identitarian, and, to a lesser extent, economic and demographic aspects. Since the Balkan route was officially closed in March 2016, this proliferation of diverse narratives on migrants, principally corresponded to a prolonged presence of migrants in the neighborhoods, schools and public spaces. From being a "transit country" showcasing enviable humanitarian support (Petrović & Pešić, 2017), the Serbian public has gradually started to incline towards more negative sentiments. While the humanitarian narrative has certainly kept a large share, in the meanwhile, the negative feelings towards migrants from the Middle East and Africa have risen. This tendency has, however, been dictated by the complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics, a broader inception of migrant-related topics in an increasingly rich and information-dense landscape, but also, various scientific and policy attempts to describe the pacing migrant movements.

The situation was certainly different in 2008 when the Asylum Law was implemented. To a large extent, the arrival of migrants in Serbia was discussed as individual, isolated cases and migration was not perceived as a socially relevant topic. Dealing with migration was only one of the means to achieve visa liberalization with EU countries (Stojić Mitrović, 2018). In 2015, it became a topic, but from the very beginning, the inconsistency of the terminology used to refer to the arrival of migrants in Serbia was noticed in the media and in political discourse. Regardless of the fact that the largest number of people came from war-torn countries, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia (UNHCR, 2016), which according to international law should be called refugees, this term was used only on specific occasions. One could even often

read the term “azilanti” – a pejorative name for asylum seekers. On the other hand, representatives of the non- governmental sector mostly use the term “refugees” (Bobić & Šantić, 2019). Seemingly minuscule, this semiotic difference has profoundly resonated among the citizens of Serbia in the years to come, for whom residents of Syria were perceived as “real refugees”, while Afghans were seen as “uncivilized migrants prone to violent behavior” (UNDP, 2017).

Intense reporting that accompanied a greater influx of migrants from 2015, however, sparked a series of often contradictory messages. A broader reception of migrant-related topics in Serbian public discourse initially was positive. However, once the conflict on the borders intensified and the images of migrants being pushed back, and often molested, provoked mostly cathartic sentiments. In following months, this humanitarian narrative crystallized and numerous actions to build adequate infrastructural support for the reception were undertaken. In spite of having consistency, with a relatively “soft” attitude in the public regarding the newcomers, manifesting in numerous acts of help and relative openness towards the migrant experience, the humanitarian narrative was constantly counterposed to generally suspicious attitudes that were justified primarily in securitarian terms, and to a lesser extent, identitarian, demographic and economic ones. A sensationalist and xenophobic narrative based on fear of newcomers has been evolving ever since the “neutralizing” effects brought with a general conception of a “transit country” started to collapse (Jevtović & Bajić, 2016). In other words, once the “welcoming-through” scenario ended, an encounter with a dozen of stuck migrants headed to Western Europe, opened delicate questions regarding security, identity and integration (Bez nec, Kurnik, 2020). Parallel to that, an administrative visa framework appeared, where migrants presented themselves in situations of seeking help and asylum, as well as in the form of numbers and statistics, which put the focus on how much of a burden they may be for the state (Krstić, 2022).

Simultaneously, the policy towards migration has been communicated to the public in a rather narrow format, where Serbia is presented as exclusively a transit country, through which migrants only pass on their way to the countries of Western Europe (Bjekić et al. 2020). While Serbia has traditionally been an emigration country, a steady-paced growth and the influx of migrants from conflict zones has also started drawing the attention of the wider public. Although it has been noted that institutional mechanisms for the integration of migrants have proven to be obsolete (Antonijević, Krstić, Banić-Grubišić, 2013; IOM, 2012), external labor migration, net migration losses and the overall aging of the population have, only occasionally, posed the question whether the immigration gains could compensate for these demographic issues, while also providing indirect economic and social benefits. Because the demographic processes affect the labor force supply, which can be particularly damaging due to the so-called “brain-drain” phenomenon, epitomized in emigration of highly educated population, the existing capacities of the social, economic and educational system should also account for productivity and the innovativeness brought to the economy of the country by developing inclusive strategies for incorporating migrants into the labor market, rather than presenting only a transit country (Marjanović, 2015).

Exactly the state of being derived from the conception of a **“transit country” resonated profoundly in dominant narratives**. As we will see in following pages, the recurring moment in these, often polarized, but also, overlapping narratives situates the migrant-related topics as a concern of temporary treatment – whether in form of aid or in form of seclusion. Albeit the migrant-related topics to a certain extent were addressed in a more permanent manner, related to demographics or economy, the principal line of polarization revolves in counterposing the “hermeneutic” aspects of the humanitarian approach, with general securitizing tactics, which intends to impose clear identitarian and political borders on migrants. Demographic or economic issues are only occasionally revived. However, one might find clearly the messages and worldviews that either see the migrants as a necessary reservoir for an aging country or as an orchestrated attempt of forced settlement, these narratives mostly function as the receptive stance of humanitarianism or following the exclusivist, securitarian agenda. Yet, many of these narratives overlap due to changing dynamics of migratory movements, international affairs and other factors.

Our desk analysis thus attempts to discern these dynamics and identify the “movable middle” exactly by linking the narrative composition with a broader contextual framework. In this sense, analysis has been covering several types of data sources. First, analysis covered the press clipping, i.e. the narratives in dominant daily newspapers regarding the migrants from 2015 to 2022 (see below). Secondly, scientific works in Serbian and English published in the period 2015– 2022 which contained the word “migrant”, “refugee” or “migration” in the text, and dealt with these topics in the context of Serbia and/or the Balkans were also reviewed.¹ The reports of influential national non-governmental organizations that intensively dealt with migrant issues and surveys of citizens’ attitudes (Group 484, PIN, Vlade Divac Foundation, Belgrade Center for Human Rights) were also reviewed, as well as international organizations and public opinion polling agencies (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, UNDP, CeSID), published in the period 2015–2022. Lastly, the artistic engagements, embodied in theater plays and exhibitions dealing with migrants, also were the subjects of analysis.

Polarization of dominant narratives

The initial confusion first sparked with the opening and then by the closure of the Balkan route. which undoubtedly led to a conspicuous polarization of narratives among the general population, but also, to a proliferation of opposing discourses in other spheres of social life. Media narratives well epitomize this polarization, as they have both channeled many prejudices and stereotypical representations of migrants, and kept a largely

¹ The collection of material went in several directions: 1) analysis of scientific articles from the database of journals published in Serbia from Scinex, 2) analysis of thematic collections of papers and announcements from conferences by searching through Google and Kobson, 3) analysis of scientific articles published in prestigious international journals by reviewing key publishing houses (SAGE, Wiley online library, SpringerLink, Scimedirect) through Kobson. Qualitative content analysis was applied, with the fact that in the case of overview and theoretical papers, the dominant narrative was analyzed, i.e. the way the authors of the papers talk about migrants, while in the case of empirical papers, a meta-analysis of the results and conclusions was carried out, namely those related to the presentation of migrants in the media and on the attitudes of Serbian citizens towards migrants.

ambiguous and nonetheless neutral stance towards the migrants. Some researchers (Jevtović & Bajić, 2018) have particularly noted that there is an apparent dichotomy in media narratives in Serbia regarding migrants. On the one hand, the media reports were either neutral, encompassing everyday politics and dynamics of migratory movements, or positive to a certain degree – either by praising Serbia’s handling of the “crisis” or by attempting to raise the issues of integration. On the other hand, negative sentiments also played a huge part in the media landscape. Sensationalist reporting has provided a fertile ground for negative sentiments, with the share of xenophobic discourse building on fear of newcomers and putting forward either the assumed harms migrants might leave on identity, or exposing the anticipated demographic transformation as a political or economic risk. Such perceptions were supported by sensational news about migrants in the media and securitarian narratives in social media that expounded the economic harms that might be imposed by these newcomers who are “stealing” jobs from the domicile population, or, in the most radical forms, equated migrants with terrorists.

Favoring these kinds of narratives, where the fears of inner security hazards, brought about by the brawls and altercations of “trapped” migrants, or by overstretched reception infrastructures, has particularly been enforced through time in major Serbian media. As our in-depth press clipping analysis of three dominant daily newspapers in Serbia – Danas, Politika and Informer – shows, ever since 2015 there has been a gradual rise of negative sentiment, especially due to a broader adoption of the securitarian narrative against the humanitarian one. Certainly, the three printed daily newspapers cover different target groups and have different editorial policies/narratives. The daily newspaper “Danas” was selected as a representative of the democratic, opposition-oriented print media, the daily newspaper “Politika” as a representative of a neutral editorial policy and the daily newspaper “Informer” as a representative of the media whose editorial policy and announcements mostly hold a negative emotional charge, often with a violent undertone. The frequency of the word “migrant” has been used as a principal criterion for the selection of material in the period between 2015 and 2022. By using Google Trends as a tool, it has been revealed that the interest in searches for the keyword “migrants” in Serbia was concentrated in several time peaks, the key ones being August, September, October 2015, then February, March 2016 and March 2020. The identified peaks of GoogleTrends coincided with the shock waves of the influx of migrants to Serbia (during 2015 and 2016), as well as the beginning of the covid-19 virus pandemic (March 2020). However, in order to have a comprehensive overview of media coverage of migrants, the press clippings cover 17 months from 2015 to 2021: 2015: August, September, October, 2016: February, March, 2019: November, December, 2020: February, March, April, May, June, October, November, December, 2021: January, February (Figure 1).

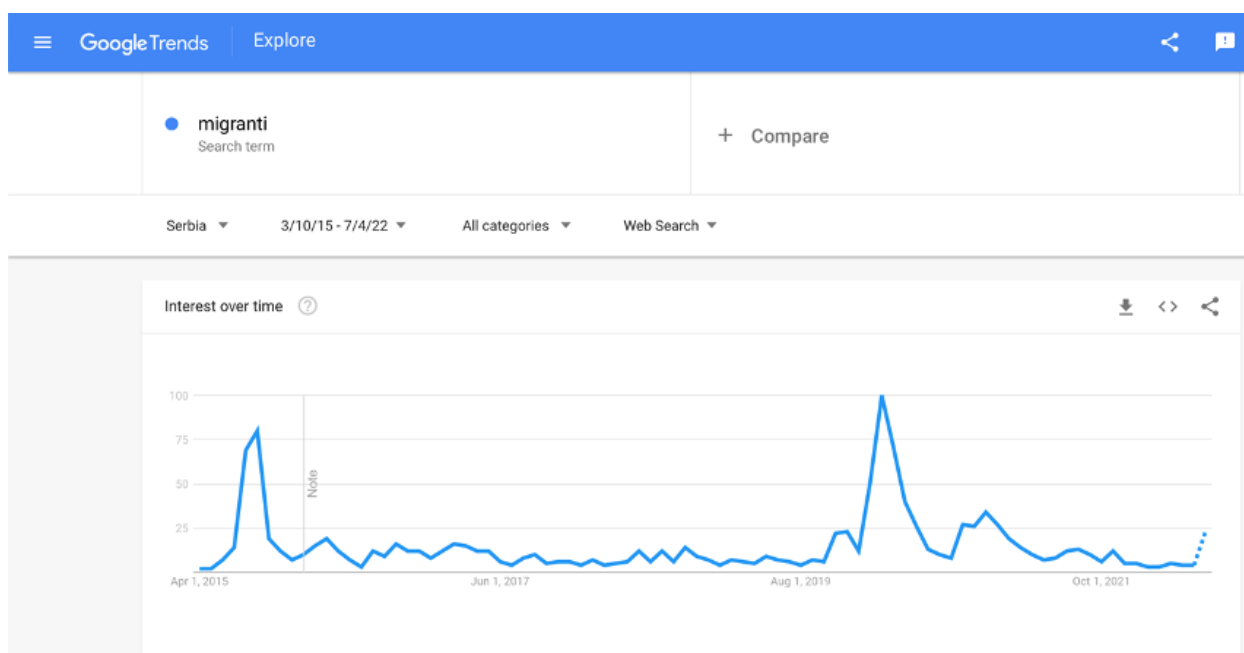


Figure 1 - GoogleTrends analytics for the keyword “migranti” from March 2015 to April 2022.

Among a total of 1,847 newspaper articles in all three printed newspapers published in the abovementioned period, it has been noted that 51% of posts contain a neutral sentiment (936 articles) - those principally reporting on migrant-related topics. However, with a share of 34% (625 articles), the **negative sentiment** is particularly interesting. Mostly, **it encapsulates prolonged securitarian fears**, but also, it exposes political conflicts and registers the supposed harms which migrants are creating for receiving infrastructures, local communities or even broader, the nation in economic and demographic sense. With only 15%, the positive sentiment (286 articles) mostly encompasses **reports on cultural acts which tended to secure better integration and understanding for migrants**. Also, a positive sentiment runs along a broadly taken humanitarian narrative, which favors aid, but also largely praises the efforts of the host population. However, in order to gain deeper insights into the sentiments of newspaper announcements, movements and changes over time of overall positive, neutral and negative sentiment were analyzed separately (see Figure 2). Newspaper announcements were distributed by year in absolute values as follows:

- **2015** (August, September and October) published a total of 813 articles: 364 neutral, 177 positive and 272 negative sentiments. **Positive sentiment mainly occurs when humanitarian, infrastructural, demographic, social and cultural narratives are used, and negative sentiments when using political, economic and security narratives.**

- **2016** (February, March) published a total of 393 articles, of which 228 with neutral sentiment, 55 with positive and 110 with negative. **Positive sentiment appears when using the humanitarian and cultural narrative, while negative sentiment is most pronounced when using the security narrative.** The political narrative became

more positive thanks to articles praising the state's successes in dealing with the migrant crisis.

- **2019** (November, December) published a total of 123 articles: 75 neutral, 10 positive and 38 negative sentiments. **Positive sentiment appears in the cultural narrative, while negative sentiment is most pronounced in the security, political, humanitarian and infrastructural narrative.**

- **2020** (February, March, April, May, June, October, November, December) published a total of 582 articles: 312 neutral, 49 positive and 221 negative sentiments. **Positive sentiment appears in the cultural narrative, while negative sentiment is most pronounced in the security, political, humanitarian and infrastructural narrative.** In 2020, a specific health narrative directly related to the COVID-19 epidemic is emerging.

- **2021** (January, February) a total of 59 articles: 35 neutral, 4 positive and 20 negative sentiments. **Positive sentiment mostly occurs when cultural and informational narratives are used, while negative sentiment is most pronounced with the security narrative.**

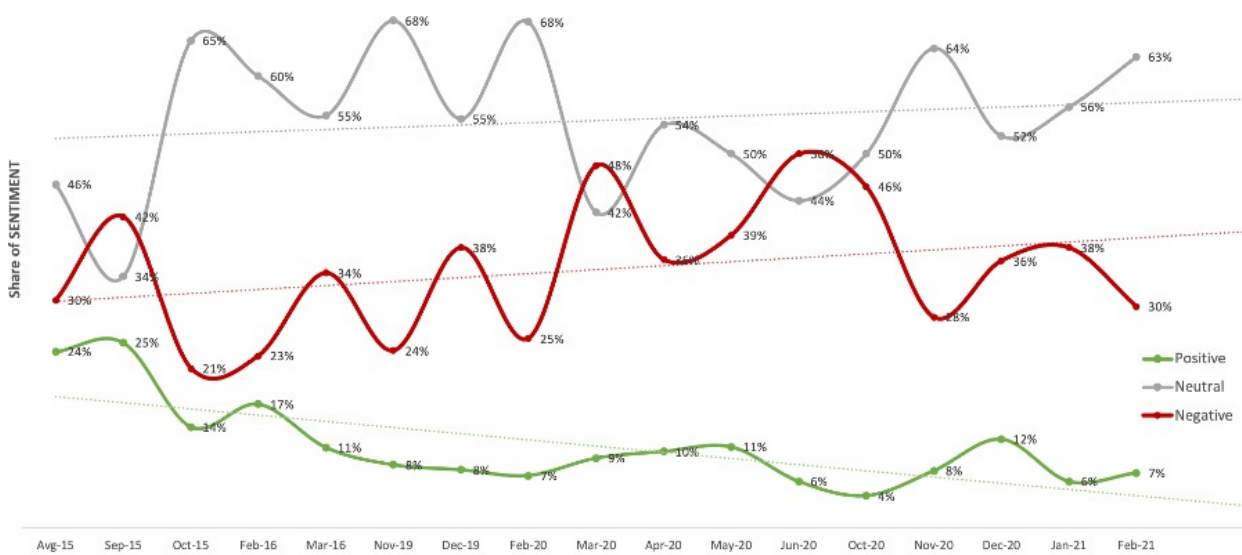


Figure 2 – Total share of sentiments over time.

Alongside these polarizing narratives, where humanitarian ones are contrasted with those which enable demographic and economic narratives with potential benefits and gains, various polls conducted by NGOs and public opinion polling agencies have once again confirmed a large degree of ambiguity and delicate interpretations that neither could be ascribed to a positive or a negative sentiment (cf. CeSID, 2019; Fondacija Ana i Vlade Divac, 2017; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016; PIN, 2020; UNDP, 2017). Research conducted by a group of sociologists supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in 2016 showed that the majority of the population of Serbia advocates a humanitarian approach to migrants (75% have a strong or very strong humanitarian attitude), especially those who live in smaller towns, who are over 50 years old, and who have the lowest or highest level of education. Only a smaller number of respondents have opted for securitarian approach. However,

almost a third of the population shows an ambivalent attitude. When asked about the movements of migrants, almost 10% of residents say they would ban migrants from passing, while almost a quarter would support their permanent settlement in Serbia (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016).

The research conducted by the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation on a representative sample at three points in time (May-June 2016, December 2016, and May-June 2017), found that the attitudes of citizens changed slightly, so the percentage of those with positive attitudes decreased over time. After longer contact with refugees, people who did not develop a negative attitude to a greater extent, primarily due to the news that reached them during 2016, started being more precautionary and reserved towards refugees. Regardless of the fact that about 33% of citizens have a negative attitude, it is very important to note that about 44% of citizens have a positive attitude. The general societal attitude therefore is that refugees should be helped, as the people in trouble, and that we should not be afraid of possible acts of terrorism or crime. In general, there is also a desire to know more about them, that 4/5 of the population sympathizes with the problems that refugees go through and supports them, i.e. insists on the state helping them (Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, 2017).

Whereas later findings indicate a generally favorable stance towards humanitarianism, some other research displays numerous hardships which increase the distance between the host population and newcomers. In a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study from 2017, in which the researchers dealt in depth with the issues of distance and integration, it was found that the distance is most often justified by cultural differences that, sooner or later, would lead to intractable problems (UNDP, 2017). A Centre for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) survey from 2019 also noted that the unfavorable economic and political situation in the country accompanied the cultural differences as factors that make integration difficult (CeSID, 2019). From a UNDP survey it also became evident that respondents expressed a desire to know more about the cultural origins of refugees and the circumstances that brought them to Serbia. This desire stemmed from the impression that they did not have enough verified information about refugees, and even suggested creating a campaign that would “attack” our natural inclination for generalizations, by pointing out that, as with other nations, there are good and bad people among migrants, and by presenting as many examples as possible that illustrate the lives of migrants (UNDP, 2017).

The public opinion survey from June 2019 shows that attitudes towards migrants remained similar to those of 2017 (CeSID, 2019). Thus, around 40% of citizens had a negative opinion, 47% are neutral, and 11% are positive. In local self-government units that are more affected by the economic crisis, the negative attitudes are more prevalent than in those that are more developed. Traditionally, the most positive attitudes are visible in Tutin and Sjenica – towns with a large proportion of Muslim inhabitants. Also, more positive attitudes are usually registered among those who are better informed (CeSID, 2019). Compared to the beginning of the “migrant crisis”,

equating the migrants from the Middle East and Africa with those from the 1990s has significantly dropped. In other words, this turn has largely been driven with marking the current migrants predominantly as economic migrants, rather than those forced to leave their homelands due to war and conflicts. This why also the 4% of respondents expressed their concerns that the terrorists might be among the newcomers (CeSID, 2019). Similar to previous years, most of the respondents expressed concerns regarding the public safety and personal safety. However, in comparison to previous years, the concern for hygiene has increased significantly. If we focus on the positive effects of the migrant crisis, the most common answers were the improvement of retail sales and the relationship with other religions. The largest number of citizens (64%) stated that the presence of migrants had no impact on their life or that of their family (CeSID, 2019).

Despite the fact that the number of people coming to Serbia in search of international protection decreased in 2020, the topic of migration has become more prevalent in the public since the beginning of the state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in the spread of negative and/or incorrect information regarding the migrant and refugee population in Serbia. This trend was especially noticeable during the political campaigns for the 2020 parliamentary elections. Research from June 2020 (PIN, 2020) on a representative sample showed that around 40% of Serbian citizens have negative feelings towards migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa, while around 17% have positive feelings, which indicates a similar situation to 2017 and 2019 (PIN, 2020).

The results of the same survey show that 18% of citizens believe that Serbia should adopt a policy of “closed borders”, that is, to secure the borders so that migrants cannot enter, which is a less favorable picture than in previous years. However, slightly more than half of the citizens believe that the policy of open borders should be continued, but the detention of migrants should be limited to only a few days or weeks. This position corresponds to the way in which the migration policy has been communicated to the public: Serbia is most often presented as exclusively a transit country through which migrants only pass on their way to the countries of Western Europe. On that line, but with a slightly more liberal attitude, 19% of citizens believe that permanent residence in Serbia should be allowed for a limited number of people, but without encouraging or providing support for the decision. This attitude corresponds to the greatest extent to objective indicators - in the past few years, between 3,000 and 15,000 migrants and refugees resided in Serbia at any given time, but the number of those who received the right to reside permanently in Serbia is barely a few dozen. Finally, 12% of Serbian citizens believe that the country should be open to migration, and that it should allow everyone who wants to come and get all the rights that Serbian citizens have (PIN, 2020). It is interesting that the attitudes towards the migration policy are in no way related to the respondents' characteristics such as socioeconomic status, age, level of education or place of residence (whether there is a migrant camp nearby or not). The only difference that consistently emerges is that women tend to take somewhat more liberal views than men (PIN, 2020). In another study, it was shown that cynical and manipulative

people have more negative attitudes towards migrants, but that in situations of threat, the negative attitude especially escalates, accompanied by a desire to take action against migrants, among people who are also inclined to hurting others. On the other hand, pro-social attitudes are based on compassion for the poor, but if a threat framework is imposed from the outside, then pro-social attitudes are linked to a sense of equal rights for all people (Petrović, 2019).

Movable middle – key points

Identity: largely absent; appears in media occasionally and is related to security issues

Security: recurring narrative in media and parts of academic discourse; related to various risks the migrants bring

Demography: not prevalent; related to security issues

Economy: not prevalent; related rarely to positive sentiments on potential benefits, but more often to infrastructural pressures the migrants bring

Humanitarianism: recurring narrative in parts of media landscape, academic and NGO discourse; generally positive and inclusive attitude

Despite the slight deterioration of attitudes towards migrants among the general population, and at the same time unfavorable reporting in the media, Serbian public largely remains “in-between” the polarities. While the humanitarian motives comprise a huge share of general attitudes, their strength weakens when various “risks” associated with a figure of “foreigner” come to the fore. On the other hand, a strong presence of securitarian narratives was largely dictated with broader geopolitical controversies (see below) and with perceived dangers, mostly in local communities. A movable middle in this regard oscillates between the generalized moral sense of helping others is contrasted with an echo of an exotic, and thus, dangerous other. In that sense, a movable middle appears as relatively resilient and prone to both fast-paced media spectacularism and acceptance of otherness as a moral obligation. Some valuable participatory experiments, especially from the cultural sphere (see below), might be the possible backbone for the campaign, since they emphasize the grievances of displaced persons, their stories and experiences of suffering.

/Chapter Two

A varying figure of a 'migrant' or a 'refugee' that has been framed within a complex ensemble of fast-paced media reports (including fake news), social networks, cultural sphere and various scientific assessments nonetheless is determined with these changing dynamics of migratory movements and general political conditions in Serbia, but also beyond. As emphasized earlier, the principal lines of polarization went along marking migrants either in terms of victimized people in "transit", or in more subtle forms, where "profiling" of migrants encompasses both the risk assessment and the various other aspects of integration. In that sense, these narratives are often accompanied with indeed delicate representations of migrants. The latter essentially involve distinct means of storytelling that resonate among different audiences. These narratives are also profusely situated within broader societal discourses on justice, geopolitics, economy and culture, thus mirroring complex discourse structures where different relationalities separating "us" and "them" are (re)defined. What might be inferred from a desk analysis is that different characterizations of migrants are not only portraying the newcomers. Storytelling behind these characters nonetheless reflects mostly the emotional appeal in which the main axis of symbolic divisions, but also, the trajectories that these narratives acquire, is organized around us-them dynamics in which the varying figure of the migrant mediates.

A figure of the **migrant as a predator** thus seemed to be consistently reappearing in the Serbian public, by portraying the alleged risks and dangers for the host population. As was noted previously, a figure of a predator was marked not as a temporary narrative frame, but as essential "enforcement" of negative sentiments which embodied broader processes of rebordering and accompanying securitization. Especially since 2016, after the official closure of the Balkan route, the securitization approach started to strengthen (Jakešić, 2016). In July 2016, Serbia officially confirmed that its migration policy is turning towards the preservation of borders (Stojić Mitrović, 2018). It also begins to write critically about Europe's inability to face the "crisis" (Jevtović & Bajić, 2022). A tendency of authors from the military and security field to label migrants as a threat to the security of Serbia, and to use less scientific and more political language, without sufficient reliance on references, as much as on their own judgment, has particularly fueled this image of migrants as predators. The turn to the security narrative again opened the door for a xenophobic narrative, even for open hate speech on social media, in which people called for physical attacks on migrants and for signing a petition to remove the camps, especially in Šid near the border with Croatia, and Subotica near the border with Hungary respectively (Stojić Mitrović, 2018).

Speaking more broadly, the image of predators has essentially been derived from the narratives which have linked the influx of migrants with the potential infiltration of terrorists. Eventually, this caused fear and anxiety among the numerous media-

consumers, which were particularly transmitted and disseminated through the social networks and comments on the news portals, nonetheless in the form of moral panic and certainly, emotional appeals which are deposited on assumed dangers. One of the common tropes was that the migrants will “rape Serbian women” (Ilić, 2018). Additionally, an analysis of photographs in the media showing migrant women shows that they are mostly presented as a threat to health (Krstić, 2022). After the pandemic started, a securitization of the health system once again came to the fore. Albeit the (qualified) migrants were also seen as those who can help or are invited to help in the “fight against the virus”, the common conspiracy was that the migrants are intentionally spreading the virus. Moreover, a specific danger to the country itself concerning female migrants focused on the high birth rate that threatens to “overwhelm” Serbia with a Muslim population, i.e. conquering Serbian territory (Perović, 2016). All of this started appearing more frequently in public spaces, including graffiti spreading negative messages (Perović, 2016).

There are, however, several important nuances to observe, regarding the figure of a predator. As it was generated in the public sphere, a predator-image functioned as a story of a self-victimizing position of Serbia in the broader geopolitical context. Its emotionally fueled stronghold intends to develop into rationalized and justified actions to be taken against the potential collapse of the security regime and international prestige of Serbia. This particularly aligns with the doubts on whether and how Serbia can build adequate reception capacities for the migrants that have accelerated since the security situation started worsening after a number of EU countries closed their borders. The principal effect of these actions was the closure of the “Balkan route” and the increase in the number of migrants. Insurgencies created in such a way, prolonged both a bordering anxiety, with an omnipresent narrative in tabloid media who reported, for example, on “thousands of migrants will try to enter Serbia via Bulgaria” (Informer, 2016), as well as the potential harms the “dangerous” migrants might do on security architecture of entire Europe. Thus, an increasing number of articles report on migrants committing criminal acts and terrorist attacks in Europe. Additionally, storytelling behind the figure of a migrant-predator has to a certain extent functioned as a tool for geopolitical conflict. Namely, it was often stressed that the “migrant question” is artificially imposed on Serbia, who is being pushed into conflicts with its neighbors.

But, the migrant-predator image is multifaceted and, quite unlikely, it relates to the image of a **migrant as a victim**. For the same reasons listed above, the victimized migrant has been closely linked with geopolitical insurgencies and served as a backbone for a narrative that distinguished Serbia and its migration crisis management as nonetheless enviable in comparison to other countries. Again, the migrants are seen as an instrument in geopolitical affairs, but now in order to enforce the narrative on “us” against the inhumane “them”. Hence, the humanitarian, geopolitical and security aspects overlap, with praises to Serbia’s extraordinary efforts to host, help and treat the vulnerable migrants (Figure 3.). As expected, the

analysis of the media shows that in 2015 the most intense reporting was on migrants (migrants were the subject of more than 15% of the covers of leading serious and tabloid newspapers), especially in August and September when there was a greater influx of migrants from Greece and North Macedonia and the conflict intensified on the borders of Serbia - raising the fence by Hungary and closing the crossing by Croatia. It took several months to crystallize the humanitarian narrative, i.e. the narrative about Serbia as a country that helps migrants, unlike other countries whose moves are often condemned (Jevtović & Bajić, 2022; Stojić Mitrović, 2018). It was supported by the fact that since August 2015, politicians began to visit parks where migrants were staying, that toilets were installed and garbage was collected, and that "we were refugees too" could be heard in the media. As some authors noted, by initially adopting a humanitarian approach, Serbia tried to present itself as a country dedicated to European values (Bobić & Šantić, 2019).



Najnovije **Vesti** Ukrajina Biznis Sport Eurobasket



Svet Kultura Jetset

Naslovna / Vesti / Srbija

16/02/18 | 16:11

Na hiljade migranata je u Srbiji, ostaju duže nego ikad: Hrvati ih pretuku i ponize, oduzimaju im mobilne telefone i obuću!

Poslednji slučaj jes proterivanje sa Hrvatske granice osmočlane izbegličke porodice sa šestoro dece



9 1 <

Figure 3. A headline from the Serbian tabloid Telegraf, from February 18, 2018: Thousands of migrants are in Serbia, staying longer than ever: Croats beat and humiliate them, take away their mobile phones and shoes!

A strong presence of humanitarian narrative and suchlike inclinations has made a migrant- as-a-victim a recurring character in the Serbian public. However, the narrative of the migrant- victim therefore does not necessarily correspond with or involves a humanitarian treatment; nonetheless, it relates to whom and how the image is transmitted and for which purposes it was created. Analysis of television images and newspaper photos from March 2016 (Kleut & Drašković, 2017) shows that the most common narrative patterns are those that present movement and drama, then receiving help and, to a lesser extent, play and hygiene. Such representations can be seen as counterparts to the already identified topic of numbers in textual strategies. Children, family, loneliness, wire and symbolic otherness are themes in

which refugees are statically represented. Taken as a whole, they send contradictory visual messages. On the one hand, photographs and attachments represent direct or indirect appeals for sympathy, in which images of children play the most significant role. The themes of family, receiving aid and loneliness also describe refugees in the context of a humanitarian crisis that requires a humane response. However, by appealing to compassion, visual messages maintain a distance between the represented subjects and interacting subjects (photojournalists, videographers and viewers)(Kleut & Drašković, 2017).

After the international media started reporting on migrants living at -20 degrees C° in Belgrade parks in early 2017, the xenophobic outbursts that dominated in 2016 changed and the imagery of the victim got particularly revived and subjugated to local political circumstance. An important event in 2017 was the presidential elections (March 2), when politicians, especially Aleksandar Vučić, "softened" their views on migrants, especially when meeting with international officials, saying that "regardless of the fact that Serbia is not a member of the European Union, it shows solidarity and humanity and supports Germany's policy on migrants" and sending the message that it will not erect fences such as, for example, Hungary did it (Belgrade Center for Human Rights, 2017). In that period, one could also hear a narrative about how important it is to be "good people", although once this "goodness" was equated with "naivety", i.e. "weakness" (UNDP, 2017). School year 2017/18, migrant children were officially included in formal education in Serbia for the first time. The visual framework of integration appeared in several daily newspapers in the beginning of 2018, when the education of migrant children was mainly discussed. However, even when cases of school attendance were shown in 2018, the images remained at a safe visual distance and failed to convey a positive message (Krstić, 2022).

Artistic engagements and acts possibly have come closest to depicting migrants as victims, by emphasizing the trauma, stress and uncertainty accompanying the encounter with different cultures and reception in transit and receiving countries. For example, some theater shows, such as the "Port of dreamers" or "Under the same roof" which premiered in 2021 in Novi Sad National Theatre are designed to exhibit and emulate the hardships of integration and intercultural understanding, particularly emphasizing the experiences of forced migration. Among the most interesting performances is the play "Boy with a Suitcase" based on the play by Mike Kenny, a famous English writer for children, which premiered in October 2020 at the "Duško Radović" Little Theater in Belgrade. "The Boy with the Suitcase" is a story told from the perspective of a twelve-year-old boy who leaves his home in order to reach the "promised city" (London) where his brother is. Although the focus of the play is on stories as an intangible cultural heritage, which become a means of survival and integration, the topic of forced migration of children is nevertheless approached with seriousness, and problems of exploitation and abuse are pointed out. This is not often the case in theater considering the age to whom the play is intended. In addition, the stage language is extremely developed. In a simple scenography and with the help of basic means of expression, the scenes are transformed from the open sea to a factory, then to the promised city, and so forth . And, as in the case of the play "Under the same roof", what is immediately

noticeable is the representation of the perspective of others, which should lead to the development of empathy towards displaced persons, regardless of whether it is an adult or a young audience. For example, Amir, a refugee student from Syria, after looking back on the experience of leaving home and family and traveling to Germany by himself, will say from the stage: "Why does anyone think I would do this for 400 euros?"

Exhibitions held from 2015 in Serbia, in a similar fashion, deploy the humanitarian narrative and display the immediate migrant experiences. Nonetheless, these exhibitions often were participatory in character. For example, during the public meeting of members of the Zoukak theater company from Lebanon with the Belgrade audience at the Center for Cultural Decontamination (2016), the theater troupe shared the stories of the population and refugees passing through, after a series of meetings and interventions at workshops in different refugee centers and collection centers in Belgrade. The inspiration for the name of the project lies in the actuality and applicability of general places from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the current migrant situation: the search for an immortal life, the search for a life worth living. The result of photography and video workshops with migrants, this time in Subotica, Belgrade and Vienna, is the exhibition "Vienna/Serbia RAW - Our new neighbors". Part of the same project is the exhibition "Step by Step" (2015), which communicates with the audience through maps, which are part of the research work at the aforementioned workshops. The maps contain useful instructions in Arabic for the route from Greece to Hungary. The exhibition also indicates that migrants have a lack of information, and this is not only the result of language barriers, but also the inertia of institutions.

Exhibitions are often realized through cooperation with activist initiatives and the civil sector. This kind of narrative illuminates the social, cultural, political and legal problems of migration processes. One such exhibition is the "90s Migration Dictionary" exhibition at the Museum on May 25 (2019/2020). The dominant vocabulary structure of the exhibition, through which visitors move as if through a labyrinth, sheds light on the concepts that artists and activist collectives associate with the process of migration: "safe country", "law", "house or home", "suitcase", "hands", "address", "sorrows", "cleaning", "others", "Yugoslavism", "courage and cowardice", "friends", "inventory", "one-way ticket", and so on. This exhibition, according to the curators, Ana Panić and Simona Ognjanović, shows how the migration dictionary offers "a tool for reshaping general places that dictate both thinking and action, thus opening up the question of the role of art, activism, civil society and public institutions in the reconstruction of the past." The aforementioned discourse is also present on exhibitions MIG 21 (2017), Unheard stories (2017), Staying here with you - moving (2019).

Unlike marking the migrants as victims instrumentalized in geopolitical conflicts where the counterpoising of "our" humanitarianism against "their" troublesome migration management presents the key thread in storytelling, artistic expressions embody a general criticism towards both the "inner" reception of the migrants

along with the reassessment of broader political circumstances. An announcement for the exhibition “Cold wall” (2016) depicts well the critical stance taken towards international affairs (Figure 4). “Migrants fleeing war, persecution and poverty have now become the object of political trade between the actors of the new European order, which relies on alliances with repressive regimes and phantom states, as well as with Turkey and Germany, as the strongest actors in that constellation”. Similarly, the announcement for a multimedia performance “Little Bird” by Spanish artists, performed at 2019 Belgrade Festival of Play, addressed the indifference of the local population and a lack of reactions regarding migrants. According to an artist, José Palazon, the intention was to metaphorically enrich the otherwise neglected aspects of migrant movements and the traumas they face. “At first we thought it was the photo-assembly. In contact with the author, we found out that it is a real picture and from there we started to build a story about the painful topic of refugees. The idea of unstoppable movement, human and animal migrations, and birds as a symbol of free movement was followed. There were associations with Hitchcock’s film ‘Birds’, with fear, as well as other metaphors. This multimedia performance uses 3000 miniature toy animals, models, then people who move them and an image of it on the screen”.



Figure 4. Cold wall (Source: Izvor:<http://www.seecult.org/vest/hladni-zid>)

Overall, the victim imagery seems to involve delicate nuances. On the one hand, it's a humanitarian and mostly emotional appeal, particularly present in the media and political discourse, along with broader securitarian issues, and serving as an iconography for reclaiming the moral exceptionality of the host population against the alleged brutality others perform in the political space. It is thus emotionally appealing and principally addresses the massive audiences of dominant media. On the other hand, victimization of migrants nonetheless encompasses a self-critical imagery, where the host population and its actions are also put under scrutiny. Various artistic engagements, performances and plays, albeit addressing much narrower audiences, present a key cultural locus for such critical assessment.

Yet, whereas the figures of predators and victims comprise the common tropes in Serbian public discourse, a figure of a migrant as a hero is conspicuously missing. Albeit that the artistic engagements have, to a certain extent, depicted bravery along with misery, it seems that only the host population was bequeathed with fortitude. But this gap in storytelling nonetheless largely fits into existing narrative structures in the Serbian public. Since it was predominantly shaped with concerns on how to

achieve the security, political stability, infrastructural support to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, only conditionally considering the long-term integrative aspects, a landscape of public opinion in Serbia has been principally attuned to the idea of a “transit-country”. A desk analysis of both media reporting and the public opinion polls largely confirms that, since the influx of migrants has reduced, the very topic of migrants - either seen as predators or as victims, has drastically reduced. One, potentially beneficial effect is that the initial anxiety, uncertainty and discomfort subsided. However, the shifting of the narrative seems to be stuck: the openness to reporting on new topics, such as labor migration and the inclusion of migrants in Serbian society is apparently lacking. Attempts to revive the topics of integration and broader cultural communication are quite narrow and do not reach the broader public.

Main characters in storytelling – key points

Main characters regarding the storytelling on migrants in Serbia revolve around the figures of a predator and a victim. Different storytelling appeals to different audiences, but it also conveys a complex dynamic related to the channels of communication. A predator is thus mostly seen as an intruder. This character is derived from broad securitarian narratives and tells the story of “us” as a host population which is exposed to “external” harms and other potential risks, mostly seen as artificial in origin. To a lesser extent, the predator is aligned with an immediate experience of an encounter with a “foreigner”. In general, the predator-image tells the story about the abstract other.

A victim-image is contradictory. On the one hand, it aligns with the predator-story with geopolitical concerns. The victims also emerge as an abstract other, but as one who is harmed, even manipulated, and for whom the host population imposes as the protector. Certainly, the victim-image addresses the domestic audience and portrays the dangerous “outside”. On the other hand, the victim is also harmed because of the lack of local support, treatment and integration.

/Chapter Three

Keeping in mind that the public reception of migrant-related issues in previous years in Serbia has been narrowly attuned to a rather flexible political portrayal of migrants, the very course of disseminating the major narratives was profoundly reflected in popular understanding. However, as the principal media platforms through which these narratives were disseminated were predominantly one-sided, thus not allowing broader political discussion, the major narratives on migration in Serbia were not scrutinized, challenged or even refuted. Above-noted increase in overall negative sentiment at the expense of positive sentiment might be particularly observed as an epitome of a broader political turn in the reception of migrant-related issues in the public. Ever since the dangers and the risks became omnipresent, any broader discussion on the migration and the reception of the newcomers has lacked. A gap created in such way has not been compensated with quite susceptible and thought-provoking experiments from the cultural sphere. Largely, these were addressing only narrower audiences, not expanding further in public space. Nonetheless, scientific assessments and civil sector efforts have not reached broader audiences. In that sense, communicating the migrant-related topics in the Serbian public sphere has almost exclusively been kept in major media, only provisionally reaching broader social platforms which have served mostly for radical, anti-migrant groups.

The links between the principal communication strategies in the media and the broader public illustrates this well. The media analysis directly indicates that a neutral sentiment in the overall reporting on migrants prevails and grows over time, with peaks in 2015, 2019 and 2020, thus pointing out that principal communication strategies have nonetheless turned the political debates towards more repudiating attitudes. The peaks of negative sentiment were in September 2015, March 2020 and June 2020, which coincided with migrant waves and the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic. Also, the most positive was written about the subject of migrants at the beginning of the migrant crisis in 2015. Since then, positive sentiment has recorded a linear decline and is less and less present in all newspapers included in the analysis. As far as individual newspapers are concerned, the prevailing sentiment in the newspaper articles published in Politika and Danas is neutral. In these daily newspapers, one might find the traces of critical reassessments and sparking of broader debates regarding the migrants. However, Informer uses language with more emotional charge and more often negative. In that sense, it might be inferred that the changes in overall sentiments come under influence of the editorial policies. This particularly goes for the observed newspapers, when the positive and negative sentiments are analyzed individually in relation to all three newspapers.

A detailed analysis of the movement of positive sentiment over time in relation to each media showed that there was a drop in positive sentiment among all media,

especially the Politika newspaper. From the beginning, Politika, the most dominant media with the largest number of publications, reported neutrally to positively about migrants. Over time, the newspaper's editorial policy changed towards a neutral-negative one, which was directly reflected in the decline of the overall positive sentiment about migrants. Although the newspaper Danas initially had a positive-neutral approach to migrants, over time it moved towards more negative reporting. The Informer newspaper also recorded a decline in positive sentiment on the topic of migrants, but since they wrote positively about migrants in a small number of articles from the beginning, the aforementioned finding did not have a significant impact on the overall decline in positive sentiment.

When it comes to the share of negative sentiment for each of the media, the obtained findings indicated that the Informer newspaper continuously reports the most negatively on the topic of migrants. Informer has seen a linear growth of negative sentiment in reporting, so at the end of 2020, 80% of their articles were with negative sentiment. The linear growth of negative sentiment was also determined in the coverage of the newspaper Danas, which, during the first months of the covid-19 pandemic, reported extremely negatively about the migrants. Although there is a slight decrease in negative reporting on migrants in the newspaper Politika, as well as in Danas and Politika, there was a peak in publications with negative sentiment during the first months of the global pandemic.

Apparently, the abovementioned results of the three analyzes that we have performed, has largely indicated at the susceptibility of Serbian public to follow the major media reporting and the sentiments transmitted in such manner. The role of social platforms in this regard seems more ambiguous. A large share of negative reporting on migrants has certainly been located in the digital space, where particularly the securitarian concerns, empowered the various conspiracy-leaning thinking. As one study has remarkably shown, a wave of negative comments that accompanied the news on migrants were only rising and have become a common trope on platforms offering basic communication. This study has found that three quarters of comments left by readers had a negative tone towards migrants and their social inclusion. Each of the negative comments has many times more positive reactions than negative ones (Ivanović & Čudan, 2019). Also, the UNDP study showed that the effects of positive news about humanitarian actions and joint activities of migrants and local residents are far less than the effects of negative news (UNDP, 2017).

The most extreme cases are fake-news media outlets and Facebook groups with strong anti-immigrant sentiments. Anti-migrant politics is being conducted more and more vigorously on right-wing propaganda-populist portals, which a large number of citizens perceive as informative, but also on social networks. The Facebook group "Stop the settlement of migrants" in just a few months gathered more people than, for example, the city of Novi Sad has inhabitants - as many as 330,000. In this and similar groups, members share fake news, half-information and disinformation, as well as "stale" photos and video content from different parts

of the world, which allegedly show refugees and migrants terrorizing locals and vandalizing villages and cities. The intention of the authors of such posts is certainly to manipulate and mislead the general public by claiming that incidents and crimes that are flatly attributed to members of the refugee and migrant population are happening in Serbia and that they are happening in the present time, with the warning that with the settlement of migrants comes the Islamization of Serbia, terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, as well as the extermination of Serbian culture and identity (Jakovljević, 2021; Kosović, 2020; Vlaškalin, 2020).

Another research has thoroughly examined an ascending deployment of social media by the extreme-right (Petrović, Ignjatović, 2022). By following the announcements of the "People's Patrol" (Narodna patrola), "Leviathan" (Levijatan) and "The Šid Youth" (Omladina Šida) on their accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in 2021, the researchers noted that anti-immigrant narratives succeed more and more in mobilizing audiences exactly through social platforms. Mostly, these announcements are based on fake reports. They are placing unusual, strange and incredible information on migrants, which causes anger, despair or fear in the audience. Nonetheless, these groups regularly record their actions and share them on social networks, which contributes to creating the effect of authenticity and convincing the audience of the credibility of their actions. The recordings usually only contain an epilogue, i.e. they show how out of context the members deal with some migrant whom they label as a criminal acts, while waiting for the police patrol. Regardless, recordings of specific actions that promoted as "preventing an attack" or "solving a case" cause a lot of positives reaction of citizens, who praise them in the comments. Albeit these tendencies do not necessarily depict a broader public mood, but might be reserved for already politically-radicalized groups, on the other hand, there have not been many discussions – not even confrontations situated on social platforms. As emphasized earlier, the communication which would lead towards more engaged encounters with the personal experiences of migrants was occurring only occasionally and have been conveyed through artistic acts. This specifically applies to exhibitions hosting documentary photography. There are several enviable examples. Among them are the exhibition of the Spanish photographer, Marcos Moreno, at the Cervantes Institute, "Exit in case of danger" (2017), whose lens recorded the tragedy of immigrants in the Strait of Gibraltar, the exhibition "On the Road" by Marko Drobnjaković (2015) (Figure 5). Who photographed refugees from the Middle East to Europe and the exhibition of the Kamarades photo collective, "On the Paths of the Nameless" (2017). In the Cultural Center of Serbia, personal confessions of refugees could be heard, for 48 hours without interruption, in the performance "48 Hours of Vigilance in Paris". This shows not only the high degree of participation of the migrants, but also of the audience, who could read the confessions. The aim of the exhibition is to achieve solidarity, humanity and vigilance. Exhibitions that deal with the personal experiences of migrants in different ways are: "Unheard Stories" (2017), Lecture on Migration and Space by artist Marko Lulić (2016), Mladen Bundal's exhibition "Moving Chronotopes", "Emigration Postcards" (2017).



Figure 5. On the road. Marko Drobnjaković (Sources: <http://seecult.org/vest/na-izbeglickom-putu>; <http://seecult.org/vest/na-izbeglickom-putu>)

In that sense, setting an adequate communication strategy in such fragile environment necessitates quite a vigilant approach. Since the conventional platforms are “reserved” for those who are either distrustful of official media, perceive risks towards the newcomers and are generally more susceptible towards risk-inclining narratives, potential communication strategies have to be particularly sensitive and well-designed in order not to provoke a series of negative sentiments and prolong a quite fragile inception of migrant-related topics in the Serbian public. The chances of using the social platforms, however, should not be downplayed, but offer a broad spectrum of representations. Thus, in order to resonate among those who are the movable middle, the campaign should be equally ambiguous, open to various interpretations, spark an interest not only in fortitudes the migrants are facing, but also, reassess the common and often, quite stereotypical media representations which uncritically favor the mere humanitarian aspect. Later seems of an utmost importance, since there is an urge to manipulate with and control the common sentiments and analogies in Serbian public, which see the work of international organizations and NGOs as unfavorable for domestic affairs. Thus, the principal shape of the campaign should particularly be more receptive for opening the debate among various stakeholders and allow the assessment of their previous engagements.

/Chapter Four

Having in mind the potential communicative obstacles, as well as the profoundly resilient character of the public, the Serbian NMCG has thus far devised three potential prototypes for the campaign. Each of the prototypes listed below intends to convey the key messages in a manner which would fit the most for the abovementioned characteristics of the movable middle: its general propensity to endorse a morally acceptable humanitarianism, but also, to enhance the encounter with the newcomers and to propel a wider debate on migration in Serbian society. Nonetheless, each of the proposed prototypes – albeit not being fully developed at the moment, seeks to unfold a multimedia campaign. Even so, the suggested prototypes differ in terms of messages, approach, involvement of the wider public and the very content.

First prototype goes under the title ERASING BORDERS. Designed as a campaign, Erasing borders develops around a travelling caravan going around Serbia. A caravan itself endorses a simple, participatory form of challenge which is reciprocal. The idea is to visit the places where the migrants are usually located and to ask both them and the locals to sing one song in their mother language. A challenge comprises of singing a song from a motherland which supposed to be repeated by someone else. For example, a migrant sings a song in Urdu and then a local should reproduce it and vice versa. Erasing borders tends to be spreadable and focuses primarily on creating sharable, meme-like video materials. Other aspects of the campaign would involve further presentment of each culture, thus sparking wider dialogue. This prototype appeals primarily to the humanitarian narrative, by intending to involve a more engaged, participatory form of cultural encounter in an entertaining and competitive manner. It is deposited upon in actu, a situated approach with an uncertain storytelling which in effect targets the rather movable attitudes of the audience.

Key strengths of this prototype comprise the participative approach, reviving the cultural contact and enabling the unfolding of a broader debate. However, key weaknesses are the question of how the campaign would be spreadable and whether it might provide a bigger reach. Also, there is a risk of derailing this campaign on social media.

Second suggested prototype goes under the title MIRROR. It is also a video campaign targeting a reflexive moment of cultural encounter. However, the storytelling in this case inverses and aims to address and scrutinize the local worldview. The campaign questions common stereotypes on migrants, with a man reflecting in a mirror and seeing both prejudiced self, but also other forms of talks on migrants as manipulative. The campaign plot thus revolves around reflecting different, but typical everyday situations, through which the viewer encounters with typical representations of migrants and their treatment. Another aspect of the campaign

involves performativity. This kind of a campaign also might be replicable and involve performances on various locations.

Key strengths of this prototype therefore comprise of a participative approach, reviving the cultural contact and enabling the unfolding of a broader debate on our stereotypical representations of migrants. However, key weaknesses of the campaign are spreadability, organizing performances and achieving adequate reach on social media.

Lastly, the third suggested campaign goes under title DICE. Dice uses the motif of manipulation that exists in both of polarities. The manipulative act, which tends to reflect both the negative and the positive sentiments on migrants, revolves around throwing the dice in overall six sequences. After throwing the dice, each side unfolds as a unique video content which represents one of the stereotypes found in common narratives: a child as a victim, a predator who does pickpocketing, a successful doctor of migrant origin, a migrant who is dirty, a woman who culturally shocks others by wearing the hijab and an unsettling migrant with a huge family. Act of throwing the dice sends a message that each stereotype might be a manipulation performed by unknown forces or people. But, the dice itself also allows the campaign to be interactive, playful and applicable in multiple contexts.

Key strengths of this prototype are a potential to spread and reach into broader public, without inclining towards any of dominant narratives. The dice itself is playable element and might be transformed into different context. Key weaknesses of the campaign are how to determine exact archetypes and how to further develop dissemination on social media.

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