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Research Article

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'We Were Refugees Ourselves!' Discursive Framing of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Croatia and Collective Memories of the 1990s War

Tamara Banjeglav*

This paper focuses on the discursive framing of the 'refugee crisis' in Croatian online media in order to examine the extent to which discourses about refugees crossing borders in 2015/2016 were informed by Croatia's recent history and collective memory of the 1990s war. The paper is particularly interested in the local population's perception of and reactions to the arrival of refugees. The analysis shows that the so-called refugee crisis, which dominated the European and world media in 2015/2016, triggered memories and narratives of the Croatian population's own experience of displacement and forced migration, due to its own – not so distant – experiences of war. These local discourses defy the usual pro- and anti-refugee discourses that were present in other societies in Europe where refugees were arriving, due to a different historical memory and experience.

Keywords: refugee crisis, Croatia, Homeland War, collective memory, cultural trauma

Introduction

The so-called refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016 has often been characterised as "unprecedented" in the media, academic and political discourses. There are, however, comparable moments in history which are usually simply neglected in these discourses. As Katrina Horsti argues, "Europe's own histories of emigration, refugee production and reception, and colonialism are selectively remembered in relation to present-day forced migration."[1] Before the ongoing global 'refugee crisis', the 1990s used to be seen as the symbolic decade of serious refugee migrations in Europe. This was primarily due to the 'refugee crisis' accompanying the breakup of Yugoslavia.

In the summer of 2015, the topic of refugee migrations once again gained great interest in the public and the media in former Yugoslavia, following the

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[1] Horsti, Katrina. 2019. *Introduction: Border Memories*, in *The Politics of Public Memories of Forced Migration and Bordering in Europe*, edited by Horsti, Katrina. Cham: Palgrave, 3.

beginning of the 'refugee crisis' on the so-called Balkan route.[2] After Hungary decided to build a wire fence on its border with Croatia and Serbia in mid-2015, and after it closed its border, debates about the legitimacy of building walls in an attempt to cope with the 'refugee crisis' circulated in the Croatian media and in public debates. This paper examines these debates in order to analyse how discourses about borders related to the 'refugee crisis' intersect with collective memories about Croatia's 1991-1995 war and the local population's experience of being refugees themselves. Specifically, the paper examines how the self-perception of a receiving community, including its own memories of migratory events, influences the way in which the community responds to people crossing borders.

Research conducted so far[3] has mostly focused on the change in media discourses about the topic of refugees and migrants in Croatia, which ranged from initial reporting on the solidarity, empathy and mobilisation of Croatian citizens in providing humanitarian aid to people on the move, to prevailing negative attitudes towards them. There is, however, a gap in the research on the mediatisation of the 'refugee crisis' paying particular attention to the extent to which debates about refugees crossing borders were informed by Croatia's recent history and collective memory of the 1990s war. In order to fill this gap, this paper examines the discursive framing of the 'refugee crisis' in an attempt to answer the following research questions: what were the dominant frames in debates about the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis' in Croatia? Did new narratives emerge that established continuities between the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis' in Europe and certain past events, specifically the 1990s war? In what way were experiences and memories of the 1990s war in Croatia mobilised by different actors?

In this paper, the term 'refugee crisis' refers to the period between the beginning of a larger influx of refugees into Croatia in August 2015 and the closing of the borders in March 2016. I use this term since it was frequently used in the Croatian public and the media, while being aware of its stigmatising connotations and its political functions. The use of the 'crisis' discourse has produced representations of people's mobility as exceptional and has ignored the political and historical reasons that led to their displacement in the first place. The terms 'refugee' and 'migrant crisis' also imply that there is a 'crisis' embodied in human beings, due to their illegalised mobility. Nicolas de Genova *et al.* argue that "what is commonly called 'the migrant crisis' or 'the refugee crisis' actually reflects the frantic attempt by the EU and European nation-states to control,

[2] 'Balkan route' refers to an informal and illegal pathway through which migrants and refugees have attempted to cross European borders over the past years, often with the assistance of human traffickers. 'Balkan corridor', on the other hand, denotes a pathway that was *de facto* formalised and made semi-legal from October 2015 to March 2016 in order to allow migrants and refugees to travel from Turkey and Greece over the Balkans into the EU.

[3] Bilić, Paško / Furman, Ivo and Savaş Yildirim. 2018. The Refugee Crisis in the Croatian Digital News: Towards a Computational Political Economy of Communication. *The Political Economy of Communication* 6(1), 59–82; Car, Viktorija / Čančar, Emil and Kosta Bovan. 2019. The 2015 and 2016 migration crisis in Europe: How Croatian daily newspapers represented and portrayed refugees and migrants. *Teorija in praksa* 56(2), 681-99; Čepo, Dario / Čehulić, Mateja and Siniša Zrinščak. 2020. What a Difference Does Time Make? Framing Media Discourse on Refugees and Migrants in Croatia in Two Periods. *Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava: časopis za teoriju i praksu javne uprave* 20(3), 469-96.

contain, and govern people's ("unauthorised") transnational and inter-continental movements."[4] In fact, it is a 'crisis' of state power and control over the human mobility of those whose movements are usually regarded as 'illegal',[5] but also a crisis of humanity.

The aim of the paper is not to theoretically analyse the terms *migrant* and *refugee*. This would call for a wider discussion on the use of these terms and the capacity of the existing categories to capture complex and messy social realities. Drawing on the already existing research about 'categorical fetishism',[6] I argue that these two categories cannot address the complex relationship between political, social and economic drivers of migration. As migration scholars have already remarked, "the distinction between 'refugees' on the one hand, and 'migrants' on the other, does not reflect the way migratory processes work in the 'real world'" – they argue that "they fail to take account of the fact that people with different motivations travel together and that individuals may change status or simultaneously fit in two (sometimes more) pre-existing categories."[7] However, since the paper analyses discourses related to recent and more distant war experiences, for this research, it is important to include people fleeing their homes due to war events and coming from war zones in the analysis. For this reason, I mostly refer to them as 'refugees'. I, however, do not use the term 'refugee' as an analytical or explanatory category. Rather, as Lisa Malkki argued, it is a "a historically specific discursive figure whose social uses have been many since the end of the Second World War."[8]

The research is based on an analysis of media reporting about discourses produced by the local population in refugee-receiving area, as well as those produced by political elites. I, therefore, differentiate between 'local discourse' and 'political discourse', which I distinguish according to their actors. By 'local discourse' I understand discourse that is produced by the local population in places where refugees were arriving and where they were settled. My understanding of 'political discourse' is in line with Teun van Dijk's definition as a discourse which is identified by its actors – politicians – as a form of political action undertaken in order to accomplish specific political aims and goals.[9]

Although I am aware that people arriving in Croatia during the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis' also travelled through other parts of Croatia, I focus mostly on the area of Eastern and Western Slavonia for two reasons. First, this is the area where the greatest number of refugees arrived when coming from neighbouring Serbia, and where they settled in transit camps. As a result, a lot of media

[4] De Genova, Nicholas / Fontanari, Elena / Picozza, Fiorenza / Soto Bermant, Laia / Spathopoulou, Aila / Stierl, Maurice / Suffee, Zakeera / Tazzioli, Martina / van Baar, Huub and Yildiz, Can. 2016. *"Migrant Crisis"/"Refugee Crisis"*, in *Europe/Crisis. New keywords of 'the Crisis' in and of 'Europe'*, edited by De Genova, Nicholas and Martina Tazzioli.
[5] De Genova et al., *"Migrant Crisis"/"Refugee Crisis"*, 21.
[6] Crawley, Heaven and Dimitris Skleparis. 2018. Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(1), 48-64.
[7] Crawley and Skleparis. *Refugees, migrants, neither, both,* 50.
[8] Malkki, Liisa H. 2002. News from nowhere: Mass displacement and globalized 'problems of organization'. *Ethnography* 3(3), 351-60, 357.
[9] van Dijk, Teun A. 1997. What is Political Discourse Analysis? *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11(1), 11-52.

attention focused on this area. Another reason why this part of Croatia is interesting for this research is the fact that the area was severely affected by Croatia's 1990s war, also known as the Homeland War. For this reason, much of the local population there have their own experiences and memories of fleeing their homes and becoming refugees.[10]

The paper is organized as follows. The first section outlines background information on the period of the 'refugee crisis'. The second section discusses the theoretical framework and methodology driving the research. The third section focuses on the four most dominant frames in debates about the 'refugee crisis' in Croatia and analyses the discourses of the local populations and politicians that these frames rely on. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the main findings.

Mapping the debate[11]

The period of the 'refugee crisis' in Croatia started on 15 September 2015 after Hungary closed its border with Serbia. Following Hungary's decision to close the border and block the passage of refugees and migrants, people were redirected to Croatia and Slovenia towards Austria. Several thousand people a day began to cross the border between Serbia and Croatia. Between 16 September 2015 and 5 March 2016, a total of 658,068 migrants entered the territory of Croatia.[12] The crisis peaked on 17 September, when over 11,000 people arrived in Croatia.[13] On October 16, Hungary erected a fence along its border with Croatia. After that, refugees were directed to Slovenia. In November, a Winter Reception and Transit Centre was built in Slavonski Brod, and an agreement was reached between Serbia and Croatia to transport refugees directly from Šid (Serbia) to Slavonski Brod (Croatia) by train. The influx of refugees to Croatia slowed down on 9 March 2016, when the 'Balkan Route' was officially closed, following the EU-Turkey deal.

The period of analysis (late summer 2015 to spring 2016) can be divided into different phases. The first phase corresponds to the summer of 2015, when Croatia was still not involved in the migration crisis, as the refugees attempted to enter the Schengen Zone by travelling to Hungary. The second phase corresponds to mid-September 2015, after Hungary closed its border with Serbia and the first refugees started to arrive in Croatia, where they were accommodated in the reception centre, that is, the transit camp in Opatovac. The

[10] According to the government of the Republic of Croatia, almost 700,000 people in Croatia had to flee their homes in 1991. The majority of them settled in other parts of Croatia and were registered as internally displaced persons (some 550,000), while 148,000 people took refuge in third countries: Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, etc. See: Izvješće Vlade Republike Hrvatske o dosadašnjem tijeku povratka i zbrinjavanju prognanika, izbjeglica i raseljenih osoba. 1998. *Narodne novine*, 92/1998 (accessed 12 October 2021).

[11] Contextualisation and a discussion on the emergence of the 'refugee crisis' and the Balkan route fall outside the scope of this paper. For a broader discussion, see: Šelo Šabić, Senada and Sonja Borić. 2016. *At the Gate of Europe. A Report on Refugees on the Western Balkan Route*. Working Paper. Zagreb: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. See also: Santer, Kiri and Vera Wriedt. 2017. (De-)Constructing Borders. Contestations in and around the Balkan Corridor in 2015/16. *movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 3(1), 141-50.

[12] Šelo Šabić and Borić, *At the Gate of Europe*, 11.

[13] Car / Čančar and Bovan, *The 2015 and 2016 migration crisis,* 683.

third phase corresponds to the beginning of November 2015, when the Winter Reception and Transit Centre in Slavonski Brod opened. This new transit centre took over the function of the temporary centre in Opatovac and was open until mid-April 2016.

Methodology and theoretical framework

Discourses surrounding the events of refugee arrivals in Croatia are examined by following their coverage in the local, national and regional online press. As the first step, I mapped the media coverage of the topic of refugees passing through Croatia by searching for results online on the Google search engine using the relevant search parameters in the Croatian language. As the second step, I searched through the online archives of selected online media – local outlets *Glas Slavonije*, *Brodportal* and *Vukovarske novine*. *Glas Slavonije* and *Vukovarske novine* are published in Osijek and Vukovar respectively and mostly cover the area of Eastern Slavonia, while *Brodportal* is a news portal from Slavonski Brod covering mostly the area of Western Slavonia. I deliberately chose these media outlets as they mostly cover the area of Slavonia and were interesting because they often reported on the local population's perception of and reactions to refugees. My analysis of the local discourses is based on these reports. Other online sources included: the dailies *Jutarnji list, Večernji list* and *24 sata*, the weekly magazine *Novosti*, the news portals *Index, Telegram*, and *Dnevno.hr*, as well as regional coverage of *Deutsche Welle*. *Večernji list* and *Jutarnji list* are widely read semi-tabloids, representing mainstream conservative and liberal views respectively; *24 sata* is the tabloid with the highest sales in the country, and it is the choice of more conservative readers. *Novosti* was founded by the Serb National Council and focuses mainly on issues relating to the Serb minority in Croatia. News portal *Index* is a widely read tabloid; *Telegram* is regarded as left-wing and independent, while *Dnevno* is an extreme right-wing outlet. *Deutsche Welle* is an international broadcaster often reporting on regional events. These newspapers and internet sources were selected because they represent different cultural-political leanings, but also because they offer a wide perspective on the subject by providing statements from different actors. I have also consulted all other written materials, reports and academic research conducted on the topic and I rely on their findings. The aim of the research, however, is not to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the local populations' memories and experiences of the 1990s war in the context of the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis', as this would call for an ethnographic approach, but rather to offer some insights into and an understanding of the discourses in circulation in which the trope of the 1990s war emerged and the reasons behind their occurrence.

In the first stage of research, I conducted a thematic analysis to determine which topics were most common and occurred most frequently. I ended up with a corpus of 63 relevant articles in total. In the next stage, empirical analysis revealed the dominant discursive frames used by the media. Frames are defined as "conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret, and evaluate information."[14] The analysis of the material was informed by the

[14] Neuman, W. Russell / Just, Marion R. and Ann N. Crigler. 1992. *Common Knowledge. News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 60.

method of frame analysis. Frame analysis is a discourse analysis method that analyses how an issue is defined and problematised. Erving Goffman coined the term to describe the process of deconstructing the individual's "organisation of experience."[15] Frames are used to study a process of constructing meaning. They are basic cognitive structures that guide the perception and representation of reality, while framing is a process as part of which aspects of reality are either highlighted or hidden (forgotten). Frames are therefore like an unfolding narrative about an issue.

The paper is theoretically grounded in cultural trauma theory. According to Roy Eyerman, "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion."[16] Cultural trauma means that a breakdown in a group's meaning-system has happened and can therefore be said to threaten collective identity. However, as Eyerman emphasises, the experience does not produce the traumatic effect, but rather our remembrance of it.[17] Cultural trauma can thus become a key component of a group's collective memory. Eyerman also emphasises that the process of cultural trauma includes an attempt to 'work through' what has happened, to make sense of a traumatic past event. For this to happen, carrier groups need to tell a story of what happened in such a way that seemingly disparate meanings become part of a larger narrative, which can have deep historical roots. Moreover, in Eyerman's view, cultural traumas are also shaped by existing societal cleavages.[18] This paper attempts to show how the 'refugee crisis' in Croatia triggered cultural trauma among the local population relating to their own refugee and war experiences. It argues that cultural trauma set in motion a discursive process to understand what was happening today, but also what had been happening in the past.

Frame analysis and interpretation

This section focuses on the four most dominant frames in debates about the 'refugee crisis' in Croatia and analyses their use. The four frames include: the frame of collective memory, the frame of othering, the frame of borders, and the frame of the economy.

The frame of collective memory: We were refugees ourselves!

In the first phase of the 'refugee crisis', the refugees had not yet started to arrive in Croatia. I call this phase the pre-problem phase, in which the issue was presented as a rather distant problem. At this time, the media reported that Croatia was "ready for the refugees who are not here", while the local population claimed they would not even have known there was a 'refugee crisis' going on had it not been for the media.[19] The main discourse could be summarised as 'we

[15] Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 11.
[16] Eyerman. Ron. 2003. *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the formation of African American identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2.
[17] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 3.
[18] Eyerman, Ron. 2019. *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 9.
[19] Tešija, Vuk. 2015. Hrvatska je spremna za izbjeglice kojih nema. *Deutsche Welle*, 15 September 2015 (accessed 16 July 2021).

know what it is like, we were refugees ourselves'. The media reported that the local population generally believed that refugees should be helped as much as possible, since they shared similar experience because they were once refugees themselves. For example, the editorial introduction of daily *Večernji list* on 17 September 2015 was titled "Refugees, we in Croatia know what you feel like."[20]

The parallelism between the local population and today's refugees was even stronger since the passage of refugees took place largely in the Vukovar and Srijem (Syrmia) region, which had been severely affected by the war of the 1990s. The welcoming of the refugees was mainly expressed through discourses grounded in the memory of the war. For example, the media reported that Bapska (a village at the border with Serbia) suffered heavily during the Homeland War, when the entire population became refugees, so that it was not a surprise that the village now warmly welcomed refugees.[21] In her interviews with the local population, Chiara Milan also noticed that "the local population identified with the migrants transiting across their territories owing to the experience of displacement they had personally lived through in the past."[22] The main arguments on which discourses were based in this first phase were those related to the domain of ethical values, such as humanity, solidarity, compassion, and tolerance. It was argued that the destiny of these people evoked memories among the local population of the episodes from their own lives when they themselves were uprooted from their homes and became refugees. As one person said:

> *"we […] have not forgotten how we felt when we were forced to leave everything we had and will never forget how we were dressed, fed and hugged everywhere we arrived. […] When I look at all these wonderful, but sad, people today, I see in them all of us…And the least we can do for them is to do the same. Because they are us."*[23]

The collective 'we' that was created around the shared experience of being refugees was present in the Croatian media in the discourse on how 'we' were also fleeing the war in the 1990s and how 'we' had not forgotten this.[24] Thus, for example, a newspaper article reported a bus driver driving Syrian refugees from the border to Tovarnik saying that images from the bloody 1990s in our country and neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina appeared before his eyes, when he was also driving refugees. He added that "everything is the same as in the 1990s, there is no difference."[25] Another media outlet reported that the local population from Slavonia and Baranja, the eastern part of Croatia near the border with Serbia, knew "what it was like to sleep on someone else's pillow, since their

[20] Klarić, Dražen. 2015. Izbjeglice, mi u Hrvatskoj znamo kako vam je. *Večernji list*, 17 September 2015 (accessed 23 June 2021).
[21] Metroportal. 2015. Nepregledne kolone izbjeglica ulaze u Bapsku. *Metro-portal.hr*, 22 September 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[22]Milan, Chiara. 2018. *Refugees Like Us: Solidarity in Transition along the Western Balkan Route*, in *Us vs. Them in Central and Eastern Europe. Populism, the Refugee Other and the Re-Consideration of National Identity*, edited by Szalai, Andras. Budapest: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 22-29, 27.
[23] Tešija, Vuk. 2015. Slavonija i Baranja ispratile prvi val. *Deutsche Welle*, 19 September 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[24] Rebac, Iva and Franjo Repan. 2015. 'Sjećam se kada su Mađari bili izbjeglice i kako smo ih primili'. *24 sata*, 25 September 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[25] Lepan Štefančić, Suzana. 2015. 'Takav napaćeni izraz lica imale su i izbjeglice iz Davora 1990-ih'. *Večernji list*, 18 September 2015 (accessed on 12 June 2021).

refugee days were still very alive in their memory. Solidarity was based on the shared experience of lived fear."[26] Chiara Milan also notices the emergence of a public discourse that framed the "collective we" as uniting both refugees and their supporters.[27]

However, the narratives about the current 'refugee crisis' among the local population were also narratives of their own victimhood and trauma, as well as their resilience. As one person told the media, "we are not afraid. I was also in a camp and have lived through a lot, I even lost my house, and I am still alive."[28] The 2015/2016 'refugee crisis' provided the local population with an opportunity to publicly speak of (and come to terms with) their own refugee experience. These local discourses arguably reveal a deeper trauma caused by a lack of voice about their own experiences and injustice done to them in the past. Refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s were portrayed in the media in the same manner as refugees in the current 'refugee crisis', which is discussed in the next section. Sociologist Milan Mesić noticed that, in media representation, Croatian and Bosnian refugees and displaced persons were reduced to "a grey mass of impoverished people",[29] who depended on someone else's help. He further argued that "all essential distinctions, both in their pre-refugee experiences (i.e. in the reasons why they had to take refuge), as well as in the way that they personally felt the refugee situation, are most often lost from view."[30] Thus, the current 'refugee crisis' created an opportunity for the local population to speak about their own past experiences and share memories of personal traumas. Another possible reason why the 'refugee crisis' triggered a feeling of injustice and trauma among a part of Croatia's former refugee population was the very use of the term 'refugees' and categorisation of people fleeing their homes.[31] In Croatia, at the beginning of the war, the term 'refugees' was used for all Croatian citizens who had to leave their homes due to the fear of persecution or war, regardless of whether they went abroad or fled to other parts of Croatia which were not affected by the war. However, since international agencies for refugees, based on international law, granted recognition of refugee status only to those people who fled their homelands, the term 'displaced persons' (*prognanici*) started to be used in public and political discourses for all 'internal refugees'. Thus, some might have felt that such categorisation somehow diminished their suffering, due to the fact that they had left their homes, but not their homelands. However, as Mesić notices, all possible reasons why people involuntarily left their homes also apply to displaced persons, "who often find themselves in even more difficult living conditions than those that secure refugee status in another country."[32]

Roy Eyerman points out that, as opposed to collective identities, which are grounded in an imagined glorious past and can thus have a positive effect,

[26] Tešija, *Hrvatska je spremna za izbjeglice.*
[27] Milan, *Refugees Like Us*, 28.
[28] Butigan, Sanja. 2015. Mještani Tovarnika: I mi smo bili izbjeglice, tim ljudima treba pomoći koliko se može. *Glas Slavonije*, 25 August 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[29] Mesić, Milan. 1995. Types of Refugees - Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Experiences. *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja* 4(4-5), 657-75, 658.
[30] Mesić, *Types of Refugees,* 658.
[31] For a wider discussion see Mesić, Milan. 1992. Pokušaj tipologizacije izbjeglištva i prognaništva. *Migracijske teme* 8(2), 105-25.
[32] Mesić, *Types of Refugees,* 659.

collective memory of cultural trauma is loaded with negative emotions and these emotions need to be 'worked through' and put into a broader context.[33] However, even though cultural trauma is usually associated with negative emotions, it can also unify a group through time. In this regard, cultural trauma has the potential to be a source of solidarity. Thus, negative emotions, such as war experiences, can create collective solidarity, which in turn strengthens the collective identity around the past war experience. Eyerman argues that even the experience of fear and anxiety can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity.[34] The discourse on unity around the shared experiences and memories of the Homeland War was, however, lacking in the discourses of the Croatian political elites. The unity discourse is largely present in the official memory politics of Croatia's Homeland War. A discursive construction of the unity of the Croatian national collective and framing the Croatian nation as unified around collective memory of the war and past suffering is part of Croatia's official memory politics, as unity has proved to be a strong emotional category.[35] But as an emotional category which creates empathy and solidarity, such unity around the shared war experience was not desirable in the case of the 'refugee crisis', as it could have raised the issue of welcoming refugees and integrating them into society. This, I argue, was not the goal of Croatian political elites, as their efforts were only to allow refugees to pass through Croatia, but not welcome them to stay. As Prime Minister Zoran Milanović said, "we will give refugees food and drink and let them move on."[36] A lack of solidarity with refuges was thus promoted top-down. Croatia was conceptualised only as a transit country, but not as the final destination for refugees. As Milan argues, "these discursive practices reinforced the perception of the inflow of people as a temporary phenomenon, fostering the idea that migrants did not constitute a severe threat to a local population already affected by a dire economic situation and high unemployment rates."[37] The Croatian political elites insisted that Croatia was only a transit state to persuade the local population that they did not have to fear refugees, as they would not permanently settle in their local areas. The experiences of being refugees shared between the local population in Croatia and refugees arriving in Croatia could have been instrumental in articulating an ethical relation to the other. Alison Landsberg emphasises that "learning to engage intellectually and emotionally with another who is radically different from oneself is crucial to the development of empathy, which in turn enables the larger political project of advancing egalitarian social goals through a more radical form of democracy".[38] But, developing an empathy with refugees, which could have been done through the mobilisation of the framework of their own refugee experience during the Homeland War, was not desirable or necessary, as the government did not attempt to integrate refugees in the society and refugees were not seen as potential asylum seekers. Political leaders kept insisting that Croatia was only a transit country and that refugees were thus not a threat to the local population.

[33] Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*, 93.
[34] Eyerman, Ron. 2005. *How social movements move: Emotions and social movements*, in *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Flam, Helena and Debra King. London: Routledge, 43.
[35] For a discussion see: Banjeglav, Tamara. 2018. Political rhetoric and discursive framing of national identity in Croatia's commemorative culture. *Journal of Language and Politics* 17(6), 858-81.
[36] Gregorović, Damir. 2015. Kapitaliziranje izbjegličke krize: SDP i HDZ bez političkog takta i operativne mudrosti. *Glas Slavonije*, 26 September 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[37] Milan, *Refugees Like Us*, 27-28.
[38] Landsberg, Alison. 2009. Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22(2), 221–29, 222.

The frame of othering: Refugees like you and me?

Discourses on threat and fear started to appear more often during the second phase, in mid-September 2015. The local municipality of Lovas, a neighbouring municipality to Tovarnik, where refugees were being admitted to the transit camp Opatovac, published a text on its web page about how fear and insecurity had crept among the local population due to the large number of refugees arriving in their neighbourhood.[39] Although the local population empathised with the refugees due to their shared experience of fleeing the war and leaving one's home, the discourses of fear were used to separate 'us' and 'our' refugees from 'them' as 'other' refugees. These discourses established the relationship between 'us' and 'them' and showed that refugees were not really like 'us', but radically different.[40] As other authors have also argued, the discourses on humanitarianism and securitisation are not so different, because they both approach refugees as radical Others.[41] Moreover, they both prescribe what is human, who the victims are, and how they are to behave or be treated.[42]

In this case, refugees are presented as helpless Others in need of our help, since 'we' are no longer 'them'. Azra Hromadžić argued, with the example of the town of Bihać, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that this sentiment showed in instances in which ordinary people dressed and fed migrants, saving their 'bare lives', while not necessarily wanting to get to know them as individuals with their own stories and struggles.[43] Lisa Malkki writes that refugees became a "'problematic' social category in the national order of things, an exception made familiar through the media and through humanitarian appeals on behalf of their 'bare humanity.'"[44] They thus stop being individuals and become non-individualised masses. Their voices are largely ignored, and we never actually hear their stories or learn their names. They become a depoliticised "mass of otherness".[45] As discussed earlier in the text, this is exactly the way in which the media reported on the Croatian refugees in the 1990s.

In Croatia, the local population stressed that they understood the refugee predicament. However, although understanding and helpful, they were also aware of the 'otherness' of their new neighbours, and were thus alarmed by their presence. These alarmist discourses, as Hromadžić also notices,[46] were multidimensional, often combining empathy and xenophobia. For example, local

[39] Cirba, Tanja. 2015. Hvala ljudima velikog srca. *lovas.hr*, 19 September 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).

[40] Grubiša, Iva. 2018. *Us and Them? Cultural Anthropological Rethinking of the Fieldwork Experience in Slavonia*, in *Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor: Camps, Routes and Borders in Croatian Context*, edited by Bužinkić, Emina and Marijana Hameršak. Zagreb and München: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Centre for Peace Studies, Faculty of Political Science University of Zagreb – Centre for Ethnicity, Citizenship and Migration, bordermonitoring.eu e.V, 63-86, 84.

[41] Grubiša, *Us and Them?*, 79.

[42] Stojić Mitrović, Marta. 2019. The Reception of Migrants in Serbia: Policies, Practices, and Concepts. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 4(1), 17-27, 24.

[43] Hromadžić, Azra. 2020. Notes from the field. »Migrant Crisis« in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina. *movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 5(1), 163-80, 167-68.

[44] Malkki, *News from nowhere,* 356.

[45] Grubiša, *Us and Them?*, 76.

[46] Hromadžić, *Notes from the field,* 170.

residents from the town of Ilok explained they were worried that there were terrorists and fanatics of the Islamic State among the refugees, but otherwise they understood the horror refugees were going through, because their memories of the 1990s were still relatively fresh.[47] Jasna Čapo argued that local residents in Opatovac did not show xenophobia, but that this did not mean they did not feel uncomfortable, "because you never know what can happen, whether they would enter the village and overflow us."[48] The findings of a research report on attitudes towards refugees and migrants in Croatia, conducted in 2018, similarly showed that the Croatian citizens are "on the border between xenophobic and supportive attitudes towards immigration of foreigners to Croatia: roughly equal numbers express xenophobic and friendly attitudes towards foreign immigrants".[49]

The alarmist discourse about the threat that refugees were posing to the local people was present both in the right-wing media and in the discourses of some of the highest-ranking political actors. The weekly portal *Dnevno.hr*, known for spreading ultra-nationalist ideology, for example, emphasised a clear difference between 'our' refugees in the 1990s and refugees in 2015/2016. The portal argued that there was a clear difference in the age structure of refugees, since in the 1990s, refugees were mostly elderly people, women and children, while able-bodied men were fighting at the frontline. According to the portal, refugees in 2015/2016, coming from the Middle East and elsewhere, were mostly younger and liable for military service, while older people, women and children were missing. The portal, thus, argued that 'our' men stayed to defend their country, while 'their' men fled, leaving women and children behind.[50] Another argument for othering refugees was that 'our' refugees clearly wished for the war to end and to return to their homes, while 'their' refugees showed no wishes to go back, thus creating a fear that refugees were not just passing through Croatia, but were here to stay.

Since 2015 was the year of parliamentary elections in Croatia, the pre-election campaign influenced the ways in which the political discourse towards the movement of the people was shaped. When visiting the Opatovac transit centre, President Grabar-Kitarović inquired about the demographic structure of refugees, asking why "their families were not accompanying them."[51] She argued that only one family she had talked to was from Syria.[52] On another occasion, she also insisted that 80 percent of the people she had been talking to in the camp were economic migrants, and that only a minority of them came from Syria or Iraq.[53] Drago Župarić Iljić and Marko Valenta argue that this was the start of

[47] Gruhonjić, Dinko. 2015. "Neće valjda preko Hrvatske?". *Deutsche Welle*, 27 August 2015 (accessed 12 June 2021).
[48] Čapo, Jasna. 2015. Dva svijeta: Od Opatovca do Strasbourga: razna lica izbjegličke "krize". *Zbornik Trećeg programa Hrvatskog radija* 87, 5-17, 15.
[49] Jurlina, Petra and Tea Vidović. 2018. *The Wages of Fear: Attitudes Towards Refugees and Migrants in Croatia.* Warsaw: Foundation Institute of Public Affairs/Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 7.
[50] Horvatić, Petar. 2016. Razlike i sličnosti: Ratne izbjeglice 1991. i migranti 2016. *Narod.hr*, 21 October 2016 (accessed 14 June 2021).
[51] Bradarić, Branimir. 2015. Predsjednica Grabar-Kitarović posjetila Opatovac: Da sam bilo koji ministar, ne bih kritizirala predsjednicu. *Večernji list*, 11 October 2015 (accessed 14 June 2021).
[52] Bradarić, *Predsjednica Grabar-Kitarović posjetila Opatovac.*
[53] Hina. 2015. Kolinda za CNBC: Ne isključujem postavljanje ograde na granice, migranti loše utječu na turizam. *Index.hr*, 19 October 2015 (accessed 14 June 2021).

"a more serious securitisation practice of ethnic profiling of 'genuine refugees' (Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani nationals) as opposed to 'other' migrant nationalities being contained at borders."[54] Thus, President Grabar-Kitarović insisted on the difference between refugees and migrants and argued that most of the people arriving to Croatia were actually economic migrants.[55] Similarly, the President's Commissioner for Migrants, Andrija Hebrang, told the media that "we don't know who they are."[56] He observed that many migrants had money for taxis, buses and for shopping in the supermarkets, but that real refugees, after a weeks-long journey, would have spent their money long ago.[57] To quote Yugoslawomen+ Collective, "as if […] this demand for people (on the move) to prove their humanity does not primarily speak about the humanity of those demanding it."[58]

Furthermore, President Grabar-Kitarović argued that Croatia could not offer the migrants to stay, due to the high unemployment rate of "our own young people", who also had a right to a better life.[59] These kind of discourses of othering refugees and migrants, as Caress Schank argues, is typical for populist discourses for the purpose of electoral gain, when the focus shifts to "the *role* of migrants as infiltrators rather than a sense that migrants have any common identity."[60] Due to the pre-election campaign in the country at that time, the issue of the 'refugee crisis' was thus also mobilised by populists to highlight the failures of the political establishment.

The frame of borders: Have they ever been refugees themselves?

The war of the 1990s is, however, not the only historical event that the local population remembered during the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis', as this region's history contains several layers of transborder mobilities, migration, and flight. Older residents of border areas also evoked memories of 1956 and Soviet tanks entering Hungary, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of Hungarians fleeing the country. In a village in Baranja, the part of Croatia bordering with Hungary, one resident remembered when they were refugees:

> *"At that time, there were four rows of barbed wire at the border… people were killed by their own border guards. They were fleeing across mine fields. Large groups of people fled, which were welcomed and fed by our own people, although there was not much to eat, those were the years of hunger."*[61]

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[54] Župarić-Iljić, Drago and Marko Valenta. 2019. *"Refugee Crisis" in the Southeastern European Countries: The Rise and Fall of the Balkan Corridor*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises*, edited by Menjívar, Cecilia / Ruiz, Marie and Immanuel Ness. New York: Oxford University Press, 373.

[55] Jutarnji list. 2015. Predsjednica Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović za Jutarnji: 'Prozivaju me oni koji su osporavali moju pobjedu na izborima'. *Jutarnji list*, 14 October 2015 (accessed on 14 June 2021).

[56] Hina. 2015. Hebrang se pita ima li među migrantima ljudi na tajnom političkom zadatku. *Jutarnji list*, 19 September 2015 (accessed on 14 June 2021).

[57] Hina, *Hebrang se pita ima li među migrantima.*

[58] Karabegović, Dženeta / Lazić, Slađana / Musliu, Vjosa / Sardelić, Julija / Stavrevska, Elena B. and Jelena Obradović Wochnik. 2020. The tale of 'good' migrants and 'dangerous' refugees. *The Disorder Of Things,* 19 July 2020 (accessed: 15 July 2021).

[59] Jutarnji list, *Predsjednica Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović za Jutarnji.*

[60] Schenk, Caress. 2021. The Migrant Other: Exclusion without Nationalism? *Nationalities Papers* 49(3), 397-408, 398.

[61] Rebac and Repan, *'Sjećam se kada su Mađari bili izbjeglice'.*

As the scholarship on the intersection of memory and border studies has argued, memories of population replacements play an important part in evaluating the present in the context of border change.[62] "From the perspective of memory, past events and developments are relevant not as objective historical occurrences but as reconstructed accounts of the past that act in and on the present and serve to legitimise, shape or undermine borders."[63] Memory can also be used to legitimise the construction of borders, as well as to question and undermine them.

A discourse on walls and wires on the borders thus also emerged in connection to the local population's memories of their own refugee experiences. This discourse questioned the legitimacy of fences on the borders and can be summarised as "when we were fleeing the war, there were no wires". An illustration of this argument can be found in a statement of a local man from a village in Baranja, at the border with Hungary:

> *"This fence that Hungarians are building is deeply disturbing, this is, for me, the wire of shame. […] This wire that they are putting up can hardly be crossed. People were crossing this border in mass numbers once before, at the beginning of the 1990s. Our people were fleeing to Hungary. It was the border of salvation, but there was no wire then."*[64]

Another local resident rejected the wire on the border saying "some of our politicians ask for the army and wire on the border. Have they ever been refugees themselves? Has someone close to them ever had to run to save their life?"[65]

Political discourses about the protection of the border, however, differed, and there was no political agreement on the issue. On one hand, President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović continually called for the use of the army to protect the country's borders. She also supported the construction of a fence at the border, but rejected comparisons with the 1990s war or the Second World War. As she said, "in the future, some kind of fence or physical obstacle will be needed. But don't call it wire. Don't compare it to Srebrenica or to concentration camps."[66] Prime Minister Zoran Milanović, on the other hand, repeatedly rejected the idea. He insisted that the borders should remain open, but also emphasised that Croatia would not become a hot spot for refugees.[67] However, as Schenk argues, "…the securitisation strategies used by elites do not always work […]. They sometimes fail to convince the public because of competing humanitarian framings of refugees. […] The public may not accept the othering of securitising discourses but instead choose an alternative framing."[68]

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[62] Pfoser, Alena. 2020. Memory and Everyday Borderwork: Understanding Border Temporalities, *Geopolitics*, 1-18, 2.
[63] Pfoser, *Memory and Everyday Borderwork,* 2.
[64] Rebac and Repan, *'Sjećam se kada su Mađari bili izbjeglice'.*
[65] Terzić, Olja. 2015. Izbjeglicama donirao bika od 600 kg. *Brodportal*, 23 September 2015 (accessed on 17 June 2021).
[66] Jutarnji list, *Predsjednica Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović za Jutarnji.*
[67] Hina. 2015. Milanović ususret današnjem sastanku u Bruxellesu: Hrvatska neće postati 'hot spot'. *Večernji list*, 25 October 2015 (accessed 17 June 2021).
[68] Schenk*, The Migrant Other,* 400.

The mass arrival of refugees at the borders enabled discursive constructions of what Nicolas DeGenova calls 'the Border Spectacle', "a spectacle of enforcement at 'the' border, whereby migrant 'illegality' is rendered spectacularly visible."[69] DeGenova also argues that the border encompasses a wider variety of spaces and that borders are enacted through practices of control and inspection.[70] Borders may thus involve temporary camps and other asylum centres in informal spaces. In Croatia, the border control moved from the actual, physical border between Serbia and Croatia to Opatovac, a transit centre opened for accommodating refugees before they were to be transported to the border with Slovenia. The visibility of refugees at the border turned into attempts to make them invisible in the local context and separated from the local population. Refugees were transported and settled in the transit centre in Opatovac to secure an undisturbed life for the local population. The Opatovac centre was physically separated from the rest of the village by an iron fence, which is why the local residents started to call it colloquially 'a camp'.[71] Thus, a new border was also the one between the local population in their villages and refugees settled in the transit centre. Lisa Malkki argued that "the camp presents itself, socially and juridically, as a 'space of exception', and as an emergency measure, and is yet startlingly routine."[72] Local politicians presented the transit centre exactly as an 'emergency measure' undertaken for security reasons, as refugees were being kept inside the camp in order to protect the local population's safety and to enable their undisturbed everyday activities.[73]

In the winter of 2015, due to bad weather and conditions within the camp, the transit centre in Opatovac was closed and the Winter Reception and Transit Centre in Slavonski Brod was opened. The new camp was outside the town, in an industrial zone, and was very isolated. Although there was a railway line that ended at the camp, only trains with refugees arriving from Serbia, escorted by the police, would go there.[74] This camp again made visible borders between refugees and the local population, and any contact between them was severely limited. Hameršak and Pleše write that there was even a ramp inside the camp that divided the refugees from all the others (police employees, Croatian Red Cross and army employees, healthcare workers and employees providing other services in the camp).[75] The argumentation for limiting the contact between local residents and refugees was based in discourses on security and health threats, but also on "the premise of refugees as a potential infrastructural (e.g. traffic-related) threat, or some sort of obstacle."[76] The Minister of the Interior even argued that "there was not a single person at any time, except for those suffering

[69] De Genova, Nicholas. 2013. Spectacles of migrant 'illegality': the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(7), 1180-98, 1181.
[70] De Genova, *Spectacles of migrant 'illegality'*, 1183.
[71] Čapo, *Dva svijeta: Od Opatovca do Strasbourga*, 11.
[72] Malkki. *News from nowhere*, 353.
[73] Cirba, Tanja. 2015. Izbjeglička kriza zahvatila i područje Općine Lovas. *lovas.hr*, 22 September 2014 (accessed on 17 June 2021).
[74] Hameršak, Marijana and Iva Pleše. 2018. *Winter Reception and Transit Center in the Republic of Croatia: An Ethnographic Research in the Slavonski Brod Refugee Camp*, in *Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor: Camps, Routes and Borders in Croatian Context*, edited by Bužinkić, Emina and Marijana Hameršak. Zagreb and München: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Centre for Peace Studies, Faculty of Political Science University of Zagreb – Centre for Ethnicity, Citizenship and Migration, bordermonitoring.eu e.V, 109-42, 122.
[75] Hameršak and Pleše, *Winter Reception and Transit Center*, 124.
[76] Hameršak and Pleše, *Winter Reception and Transit Center*, 114-15.

from hallucinations, who has ever seen a refugee in Croatia other than in Opatovac, and no one will see them in Slavonski Brod either", promising that citizens would not only be protected against, but also unbothered by refugees.[77]

The local population initially rejected the building of fences at the borders and questioned the legitimacy of their construction. However, when refugees started to arrive in their villages and towns in later stages, borders separating the local residents from refugees became acceptable as they ensured the undisturbed living of the locals. The discourse on borders thus shifted from a rejection of fences, due to their own experience of crossing borders when fleeing the war, to their acceptance when fences meant one's own safety and when they served to remove obstacles to everyday life.

The frame of the economy: 'I am glad I have helped these poor people, but I have also earned some money'

Local residents living near the Opatovac transit centre mostly ignored the presence of refugees and the opening of the centre in Opatovac was not met with protests. This was mostly because the Opatovac centre was presented only as a 'transit', i.e. temporary, settlement, but also because it meant certain economic benefits from the refugees' presence. As one local politician said, "the majority of local residents was not against it. […] Also, because such a centre could mean a certain number of job openings for the local population".[78] A local resident ironically noticed it was good that something was being built in the area "even if it was a centre for foreigners."[79] Protests against refugees were, however, organised when the camp was being moved to Slavonski Brod in the winter of 2015. The protests were mostly framed through the economic aspect of the 'refugee crisis'. Thus, a protest organised in October 2015 called for the termination of construction work on the new winter reception centre near the town. As one of the protesters stated, "instead of developing the industry, they are bringing us refugees".[80] Economic reasons, arguably, were not the only reasons for protesting, as some protesters feared 'terrorists' were hiding among refugees and protested against their town being turned into an 'immigrant camp'.[81] On the other hand, devastated by the catastrophic unemployment in their hometown, many local residents actually saw economic opportunities in the arrival of refugees. Even before the arrival of refugees to the camp, in October 2015, one local news portal published a job advertisement for 100 workers to be employed in the camp,[82] while another advertisement for additional 10 workers was published in November.[83] Moreover, the daily *Glas Slavonije* emphasised

[77] Bportal. 2015. "Haluciniraju oni koji izbjeglice vide van Opatovca". *Brodportal*, 14 October 2015 (accessed 17 June 2021).
[78] Butigan, *Mještani Tovarnika.*
[79] Tešija, *Hrvatska je spremna za izbjeglice.*
[80] Balen, Vedran and Branimir Bradarić. 2015. Brod se priprema za prihvat izbjeglica, Brođani podijeljeni. *Večernji list*, 13 October 2015 (accessed 12 October 2021).
[81] Balen, Vedran. 2015. Stotinjak Brođana prosvjedovalo protiv izbjegličkog kampa. *Večernji list*, 22 October 2015 (accessed 12 October 2021).
[82] Bportal. 2015. Zapošljava se 100 radnika u izbjegličkom kampu. *Brodportal*, 20 October 2015 (accessed 1 July 2021).
[83] Bportal. 2015. Otvoreno 10 novih radnih mjesta u tranzitnom kampu. *Brodportal*, 13 November 2015 (accessed 1 July 2021).

that the camp brought an improvement of the economic situation in the town, since

> *"companies and people from the Slavonski Brod area also worked in the construction of the Slavonski Brod transit centre. The 'refugee crisis', as it seems now, was also an indirect way to help the stumbling economy of Slavonski Brod, because, given the overnight stays of numerous crews of journalists, restaurants had a higher turnover, and the shops sold more."*[84]

One of the local residents who gained temporary employment in the camp remarked that "there were days that were hard, especially in the beginning, and there was a lot of work, but I am glad I have helped these poor people, while I also earned some money."[85] The local population thus negotiated refugees' presence, since their presence was not entirely welcome, but the locals were still aware there were economic benefits from having the camp near their hometown. These discourses reflect a kind of inclusion through exclusion: refugees were welcome (included) because they were isolated (excluded) in the camp, which created opportunities for employment and brought economic benefits. As Škokić and Jambrešić Kirin also observe:

> *"the process of humanitarian 'exceptional inclusion' of refugees and migrants into the European social and economic system is achieved by temporarily including the 'socially excluded', long-term unemployed people in public works and humanitarian projects that can be considered a part of the 'humanitarian business'"*.[86]

In the later phase, therefore, what could be observed was a more narrow set of discursive frames, focusing mainly on long-term, economic aspects of the 'crisis'. These frames shift the focus towards economic consequences for the local community. The discourse of the local population can be interpreted as acceptance of refugees due to the economic benefits of their presence. The frame of the economy in other European countries, on the other hand, is built with the use of discourse on the labour market integration of refugees. It focuses on refugees' access to and their effects on the labour market, including social integration and employment.[87] In Croatia, the political discourse never included a debate on the potential positive effects of refugee settlement, as refugees were not welcome to stay long-term. As President Grabar-Kitarović argued, in some EU countries "migrants may be needed as workforce, but Croatia is currently in such a position that we must think of our young people who are searching for employment, and of some 17 percent of our own unemployed population."[88] Thus,

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[84] Radošević, Marija. 2016. Iz tranzitnog centra u Slavonskom Brodu otišla i zadnja izbjeglica. *Glas Slavonije*, 13 April 2016 (accessed 1 July 2021).
[85] Radošević, *Iz tranzitnog centra u Slavonskom Brodu.*
[86] Škokić, Tea and Renata Jambrešić Kirin. 2018. *The Shopping Center of Abnormal Normality: Ethnography of the Distribution Tent in the Refugee Camp in Slavonski Brod*, in *Formation and Disintegration of the Balkan Refugee Corridor: Camps, Routes and Borders in Croatian Context*, edited by Bužinkić, Emina and Marijana Hameršak. Zagreb and München: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Centre for Peace Studies, Faculty of Political Science University of Zagreb – Centre for Ethnicity, Citizenship and Migration, bordermonitoring.eu e.V, 87-107, 91.
[87] Greussing, Esther and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. 2017. Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43(11), 1749-74, 1757.
[88] Jutarnji list, *Predsjednica Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović za Jutarnji.*

the labour market integration of refugees was not discussed, while their presence was only ever considered through the prism of a crisis.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the discursive framing of the 'refugee crisis' by analysing Croatian online media in order to examine the extent to which discourses about refugees crossing borders in 2015/2016 were informed by Croatia's recent history and collective memory of the 1990s war. The paper particularly focuses on the local population's perception of and reactions to refugees' arrival. The analysis shows that the so-called refugee crisis, which dominated the European and world media in 2015/2016, triggered memories and narratives of the Croatian population's own experience of displacement and forced migration, due to their own – not so distant – experiences of the war.

In the initial phase of the 'crisis', the local population, in places in which refugees were arriving, for the most part identified with the refugees crossing their territories, since they had themselves personally lived through a similar experience in the past. This discursive frame, which I call 'the frame of collective memory', is arguably specific to Croatia in the wider European context. Local discourses in Croatia defy the usual pro- and anti-refugee discourses that were present in other societies in Europe where refugees were arriving, due to a different historical memory and experience. In other societies with no recent war experiences and with little relevant historical memory to draw upon, public debates were limited to discussions of control, threat, and security, but also European values. For example, what in Croatia appears as the frame of collective memory, which is grounded in the humanitarian discourse and in calls for empathy and solidarity, is present in other European countries as a frame of higher moral ground, an obligation of Europe to stand true to its humanitarian values and to show its humanity.[89] In Austria and Germany, borders were also contextualised as morality borders, and it was argued that these people deserved protection because they were fleeing war.[90] In Serbia, the frame of collective memory of the 1990s wars started to appear only in August 2015, when Serbia was marking the 20th anniversary of the most massive arrival of refugees from other parts of former Yugoslavia.[91] As Marta Stojić-Mitrović argues, this was when "the concept of 'we were refugees, too' on the national level, and the potential image of 'we are humane' on the international, became part of official Serbian migration policy."[92] Furthermore, the frame of othering, used in local discourses in Croatia to make a distinction between 'our' refugees from the 1990s and today's refugees as 'other' refugees, is used in some countries in Europe to clearly oppose 'us' – the natives, the Europeans – and 'them' – the migrants, the newcomers. The frame of borders, which I identified in Croatian local and political discourses, is also present in other countries in Europe, but with a different meaning. For example, Markus Rheindorf's and Ruth Wodak's research in Austria showed that the frame of 'border fences' in Austria is built with the

[89] Triandafyllidou, Anna. 2018. A "Refugee Crisis" Unfolding: "Real" Events and Their Interpretation in Media and Political Debates. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16(1-2), 198-216, 211.
[90] Triandafyllidou, *A "Refugee Crisis" Unfolding*, 212.
[91] Stojić Mitrović, *The Reception of Migrants,* 20.
[92] Stojić Mitrović, *The Reception of Migrants*, 20.

use of the discourse of a 'Fortress Europe' which needs to be protected.[93] When border fences are erected, the regulation of the numbers of refugees allowed to enter becomes possible. Thus, the frame of border fences is also built with the use of the discourse of setting a maximum limit on the number refugees that can be accepted. The discourse on the high numbers of refugees, also used to build the frame of securitisation, existed in the media framing of the 'refugee crisis' in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, where the threat that refugees posed was interpreted as a threat to the existence of the European Union as a whole.[94] In Croatia, the frame of the economy is grounded in local discourses on economic benefits from the (short-term) presence of refugees, but it does not include the possibility of their integration in the long term. In other countries this is usually the labour market integration frame, because it emphasises the long-term consequences of the crisis. It focuses on refugees' access to and their effects on the labour market, including social integration and employment.

What is also specific to the Croatian case is that the 'refugee crisis' was continually connected to the cultural trauma of the Homeland War. Thus, the narratives about the 'refugee crisis' among the local population in Croatia were also narratives of their own victimhood and trauma. In order to find meaning in the current situation, the local population articulated trauma narratives that competed for attention and acceptance. Parallels with the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, when a large number of Croatian citizens became refugees fleeing the war in Croatia and were welcomed by others, triggered memories of their own refugee and war experiences among the local population. What emerged was a discourse on the collective 'we' that centred on the shared experience of being refugees. As the paper shows, the 2015/2016 'refugee crisis' created an opportunity for the local population to make sense of and 'work through' an older cultural trauma. The local population was, therefore, connecting the unconnected events and reframing the current 'refugee crisis' through narratives of their own experiences in order to better understand their own story. In this sense, the 'refugee crisis' could be understood as a more general phenomenon, which triggered the re-actualisation of a nation's older traumatic experience.

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[93] Rheindorf, Markus and Ruth Wodak. 2018. Borders, Fences, and Limits—Protecting Austria From Refugees: Metadiscursive Negotiation of Meaning in the Current Refugee Crisis. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16(1-2), 15-38, 26.

[94] Delić, Amela. 2016. Predstavljanje izbjeglica na informativnim webportalima u Bosni i Hercegovini. *DHS-Društvene i humanističke studije: časopis Filozofskog fakulteta u Tuzli* 1(1), 327-42, 333.

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