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MIGRANTS IN THE MEDIA –
ANALYSIS OF READERS' COMMENTS[1]

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Abstract. *Encountering migration has deeply influenced how migrants are perceived, experienced, and the emotions they evoke. The purpose of this study is to investigate readers' attitudes and beliefs regarding migrants through an analysis of their comments to media texts about the migration issue on the Politika and Kurir websites. The choice of the analysis period, which spans two years, 2015 and 2017, was made with the aim of spotting any shifts in media users' beliefs and attitudes. Readers' comments were analyzed based on the following categories: topic, identification of migrants, attitude towards migrants, way of referring to migrants, aggregation, and collectivization. The research results indicate that readers perceive migrants as a threat (62.72% of the 2,850 comments), although a negative attitude towards them was identified in 32.28% of the content. The public agenda now primarily focuses on Serbia's reception and care for migrants and refugees as a reaction to the migration issue. The biggest threat is economic in nature, and the reaction to the impending danger was to instill a significant deal of racism, xenophobia, and rejection. Through the references they cite to define and characterize migrants, readers convey their antagonism toward them. This vast group's members are seen and felt as the "Others" (foreigners, newcomers, arrivals). They come from a different world and culture, and this perception is supported by readers' doubts about the reasons behind migration, which demonstrates their distrust and fear of newcomers.*

Key words: *migrations, migrants, the Others, reader comments.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 will be remembered as a year of profound political, social, cultural, and moral crises. The events that can be seen as crucial to escalating the migrant crisis are a topic of debate among theorists. While the so-called "Arab Spring" (2011), when people started to emigrate in large numbers from the Middle East, North and Central Africa, and Central and South Asia to Europe mostly to developed Western countries, is linked, on the one hand, to the intensification of the migrant crisis, other authors contend that the crisis peaked somewhat later. They believe that the term "European refugee crisis" began to be used in the media after the drowning of around 400 people off the Libyan coast in August 2015 (Volkan 2017, 9).[2]

Even though a variety of media outlets have the capacity to educate and expand knowledge about migrants, deeply ingrained stereotypes are hard to change and discard. Entrenched cultural patterns–which are mostly transmitted through media representations–as well as opposition to the idea of reevaluating one's own and other people's perceptions all play a part in this. The "Others" is a significant subject in the social sciences, primarily related to the formation of both individual and group identities. The contemplation about the "Other" (Đorđević 2009; Bauman 2018; Todorov 2010) causes one to reevaluate the boundaries of one's identity, while facing the differences–particularly cultural ones–can alter one's sense of self and community. The "Others" are from the outside of our culture, foreign, and belong somewhere else. There is internal conflict in our relationship with them. Despite the potential for expanding the current boundaries of experience, social enrichment with new cultural patterns, and new identities, they arouse dread, anxiety, and frequently even hostility (Đorđević 2009; Zimmel 2017). Contrary to modern societies, where foreigners are often assimilated, excluded, ghettoized, or expelled beyond borders (Bauman 2017), postmodern societies should establish a suitable framework for coexisting with foreigners, since they are coming and staying.

The discursive structure of the "Others" is often based on stereotypes and results in prejudice. An important point highlighted by Allport (1958) is the possibility that victims of prejudice and discrimination develop similar attitudes and behave similarly towards other minority groups. Unequal power is at the core of stereotypes. The "Others" are typically socially powerless and subordinate in public discourse. They cannot represent themselves and their group, but rather meanings about them are produced in higher centers of social power (Hall 1997, 258–259). The media has made a name for itself as a key source of information about the migrant crisis. They have significantly shaped the opinions, experiences, and behaviors of people in the countries receiving migrants or through which these groups of people pass. Technological advancements and the development of digital media have made the new media environment more inclusive than before. Alongside the intensification of intercultural encounters, media users have the opportunity to react to media content about migrants on many platforms. User-generated content falls within the corpus of terms

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[2] According to data provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of migrants and refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 was 3,771. The information was retrieved from the website: https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015 (accessed on 12/07/2018).

According to the Annual Report of the UNHCR titled "Global Trends", there were 65.3 million displaced people worldwide by the end of 2015. The largest number of refugees came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia, while children comprised about 51% of refugees worldwide. The information was obtained from the website: http://www.unhcr.rs/dokumenti/saopstenja-za-medije/rekordan-broj prisilno-raseljenih-osoba-u-svetu.html (accessed on23/01/2019)

appearing in the literature, referring to the active participation of individuals or groups in the "process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information" (Bowman, Willis 2003, cited in Hermida 2011, 15). On news media websites, readers' comments are a well-known and widely used way to engage regular people in discussions about specific news(Jenkins et al., 2009). While there are many purposes for which media professionals and media users communicate, comments are a reaction to the carefully thought-out informational agenda that professional communicators have set forth. This directs collective consciousness toward a chosen set of events that have made it past the media's threshold for visibility and that, in accordance with social norms and a desired worldview, deserve to be part of the media agenda and public discourse.

The problem with reader comments is related to their quality, as quantity does not guarantee their value (Hermida 2011). Weber has established that quality communication depends on the number of active readers, as well as the degree of interaction among them (Weber 2014, 942). Additionally, as comments may contain components of socially undesirable language, hate speech, and various forms of discrimination, the quality of communication between commentators and journalists also depends on the content of the comments. Below the radar of journalists-moderators and programs that automatically react to certain words, certain stereotypes and hate speech pass in a disguised form, in the form of coded language or in the form of seemingly rational beliefs rooted in racial stereotypes, close and common to a particular community. One of the problems highlighted by Hughes and Daniels, when analyzing racist rhetoric in user comments, relates to the strategy of certain media outlets, which by banning racist language lead to the so-called whitening of users' comments. This is related to the possibility of reinforcing racial identity and the comments of allegedly victimized white individuals, who are given the opportunity to speak up, burdened by the demands of politically correct communication (Hughey & Daniels 2013, 342). Although the digitized public space should promote democratic principles, practice shows that marginalized groups are further stigmatized and disintegrated in online communication, while the possibility of hate speech appearing in reader comments simultaneously increases (Erjavec 2014, 453). Exploring what motivates people to read comments containing hate speech, Erjavec concluded that people primarily need guidance and advice from trusted readers-commentators. While foreign media sites include hate speech in more subtle symbolic forms, the domestic and regional media platforms still show less concealed hate speech towards minority groups (Gruhonjić 2012), as well as towards neighbors in the region (Drašković 2013).

The media discourse on the migrant crisis and migrants in Europe has been shaped by homogenizing, stereotypical, and dehumanizing reporting patterns (Berry et al. 2015). Similar to leading European media, the media in Serbia have shown a dichotomous tendency, with serious press fostering a humane reporting model, while tabloid press based its discourse on migrants on sensationalistic patterns, creating xenophobia and Islamophobia (Jevtović and Bajić 2016; Jevtović and Bajić 2017; Jevtović and Bajić 2018a). Over time, the analysis of media reporting on migrants has shifted from a humanitarian to a security aspect (Jevtović and Bajić 2018b). In addition to textual analysis of media content, the visual representation of migrants was also in line with the dominant discourse on migrants, so that female migrants were represented as a threat to personal safety and health, and as an administrative burden (Krstić 2022, 218).

Research on reader comments in Serbia is still in its infancy, although the number of studies on reader comments about migrants is limited in other countries as well. The attitudes of Serbian citizens towards migrants have mostly been explored through surveys and questionnaires. In a study conducted by Vuletić and colleagues, it was found that 75% of Serbian citizens maintain a humane attitude towards migrants and refugees, but the majority of respondents express ambivalent feelings and conflicting attitudes towards these groups of people (Vuletić et al. 2016). Research conducted in other countries has shown that readers' attitudes towards migrants are often driven by the so-called "politics of fear", resulting in the dominance of anti-immigrant attitudes and sentiments in readers' comments, as well as a clear division between "Us" and "Them" categories (Popkova 2014). A number of studies have examined remarks made regarding migrants on social media, given that these channels are becoming more and more important for communication. For example, Ekman found that anti-immigrant groups formed in the digital space of social media represent an affective public. This public contributes to the normalization of racist attitudes and expressions (Ekman 2019).

Hatred in the online setting is usually directed towards people outside the group. As Bauman (2018) emphasized, hatred is expressed by individuals who are socially marginalized, discriminated against, and subjugated. They are emotionally crippled and socially demeaned, and such feelings are released by directing aggression towards groups in a worse social position. Migrants and refugees can be convenient "targets". They lack social power, depend on others, and cannot provide adequate resistance.

2. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the research is the perception and attitudes of readers towards the migrant crisis and migrants. Textual analysis of comments includes several categories[3]: the topic, the tone used when commenting on the texts (positive, negative, neutral), the prevalent framework for perceiving migrants (the framework of threat, victims, active social agency), the way migrants are referenced, and the tendency towards collectivization[4] and aggregation.[5]

Users' comments from the Politika and Kurir daily newspapers' websites, which were published between 2015 and 2017, make up the research sample. The primary unit of analysis is the text written by readers/commenters. Within these two years, each Monday was selected for analysis. This research corpus was chosen for two reasons. The first reason lies in the intensification of migration during 2015, which was reflected in the frequency of texts published in the media, leading to an increase in the number of readers' comments. The second reason is to observe the methods and changes in reporting styles in 2017 when many questions arose about the issues of caring for migrants and refugees across Europe. It is assumed that the media agenda significantly influences the changes in the public agenda.

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[3] Some of the categories in this codebook were derived from previous media and linguistic research (Wodak & Meyer 2018; Milioni et al. 2015).

[4] Collectivization represents a form of assimilation, or the tendency to refer to people as members of a group, without specifying personal details. Linguistically, collectivization is realized through the use of deictic words such as "we", "they", "us", and "them", as well as the use of words like "family", "group", "team", "class", "community", "majority", and similar terms (Reisigl & Wodak 2005, 48).

[5] Aggregation involves presenting groups discussed in the text through numbers and statistical indicators, often based on research results, surveys, and similar public opinion research techniques. Here, aggregation serves the purpose of legitimizing and regulating certain practices and consensus thinking (Van Leeuwen 2003, 49).

3. RESULTS

The total number of comments in the sample is 2,850, 1,982 of which were published in Kurir (1,590 comments in 2015 and 392 comments in 2017). The majority of texts on the topic of the migrant crisis and migrants and refugees in Politika were accompanied by user comments (75.45%). In Kurir, more than half of the texts prompted comments (53.78%). In Politika, 868 comments were published for both years (672 in 2015 and 196 in 2017). In Kurir, the highest number of comments was recorded in August 2015 (34.21% of the total number of comments for 2015), while in Politika, the highest number of comments was published in September (44.94%). These data indicate that users' interest in the topic of the migrant crisis corresponded proportionally to the frequency of media reporting on the topic. The topic of the migrant crisis received significant media attention, which intensified during August and September 2015 due to the death of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea.[6]

Important factors influencing content commenting include the relevance of the topic, proximity to the events being reported, cultural closeness, and the subjects shaping the media narrative on the migrant crisis[7].

Commentators mostly discuss the topic that is closest to them and that can most significantly influence their social environment. This is Serbia's response to the migrant crisis, acceptance, and accommodation of migrants. Readers of both Politika and Kurir equally engaged with this topic, and in the overall sample, it constitutes 36.59%.[8]

The second topic that appears in the comments relates to the European Union (12.41% of the total number of topics in all texts), and it is predominantly discussed from the perspective of the responsibility that member states have towards the large number of migrants and refugees. A significant percentage of reader comments open up a second topic (25.41%), while discussions about the crisis in the region and relations with neighboring countries are less common within the commenting section (9.91% of the total number of topics).

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[6]The attention of people around the world was focused on the news of the drowning of a Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, on September 2, 2015. His body was washed ashore on a beach in the Turkish Aegean region, and this event became a symbol of the suffering, trauma, and hardship experienced by migrants and refugees.

[7]The text with the subtitle "Chaos at the Bus Station" and the headline "(KURIR TV) THIS IS NOT A JOB FOR THE POLICE: Find a Place for Migrants Camping in the Center of Belgrade" was published on the Kurir website on July 20, 2015. The text, with its sensationalist headline comparing migrants to campers, prompted a large number of comments (a total of 164 comments).
The text that received the highest number of comments in Politika has the headline "EU Returning Refugees to Serbia − Possible Countermeasures by Belgrade" (September 21, 2015). In this text, representatives of the European Commission and domestic politicians appear as subjects, and the rhetoric used qualifies migrants and refugees as objects. They are assigned the role of victims, lacking control over what is happening, as decisions about their movement and fate belong to foreign institutions and politicians.

[8]This is in line with Weber's (2014) definition of factors that determine the interaction and participation of commentators. Factors of physical proximity and cultural closeness imply that events reported by the media influence the group to which readers belong and can trigger feelings of group belonging and action, both on a symbolic and physical level.

Table 1 Topics

Topics – comments	2015		2017		Total		Total %
	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	
Serbia's response to the migrant crisis, acceptance, and accommodation of migrants	39.76%	30.44%	32.90%	55.08%	38.15%	35.90%	36.59%
EU –management plans for the migrant crisis, success or failure in crisis management, acceptance, and accommodation of refugees	19.15%	7.22%	23.38%	15.24%	20.14%	9.00%	12.41%
Starting another topic	15.29%	33.80%	12.99%	17.28%	14.75%	30.14%	25.42%
Crisis in the region, regional cooperation	11.70%	10.98%	13.85%	1.63%	12.21%	8.91%	9.92%
Crisis on the international level and the reaction of non-EU countries	10.11%	1.62%	11.26%	3.46%	10.38%	2.02%	4.59%
Actions to rescue migrants, suffering of migrants and refugees	1.20%	0.12%	1.73%	0.00%	1.32%	0.09%	0.47%
Criminal actions of migrants, conflicts, fights, illegal border crossings	1.06%	7.74%	1.73%	4.67%	1.22%	7.06%	5.27%
Information about the accessibility of roads and border crossings, as well as service information like the scarcity of water and food	0.93%	0.29%	0.00%	0.20%	0.71%	0.27%	0.41%
Smuggling and trafficking of migrants and refugees	0.40%	0.75%	0.43%	0.20%	0.41%	0.63%	0.56%
Personal stories of migrants	0.27%	4.91%	1.30%	0.00%	0.51%	3.82%	2.81%
Attacks on migrants and refugees	0.13%	1.16%	0.43%	2.24%	0.20%	1.39%	1.03%
Humanitarian international organizations, UNHCR, Red Cross, civil initiatives, NGOs	0.00%	0.98%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.76%	0.53%
Total	752	1.731	231	492	983	2.223	3.206

Table 2 Identifying migrants in user comments on Politika and Kurir websites

Identifying migrants in user comments	2015		2017		Total		Total %
	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	
Threat	50.55%	69.06%	62.69%	56.65%	53.33%	67.06%	62.72%
Victims	46.78%	28.58%	32.84%	40.89%	43.59%	30.56%	34.69%
Threat/victims	1.77%	1.32%	2.24%	2.46%	1.88%	1.50%	1.62%
Active social agencies	0.89%	1.04%	1.49%	0.00%	1.03%	0.87%	0.92%
Victims/active social agencies	0.00%	0.00%	0.75%	0.00%	0.17%	0.00%	0.05%
Total	451	1.060	134	203	585	1.263	1.848

Analysis of reader comments from Politika and Kurir shows that migrants and refugees are predominantly interpreted as a threat. The percentage of such elements present in the overall sample of Politika comments is 53.33%[9], while in Kurir, 67.06% of the elements create the perception that migrants are a threat.[10]

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[9] The text titled "Hungary Allows Electricity Through Fence on Border with Serbia" (July 5, 2017) has 31 comments, including those that equate migrants with a threat and justify and support the decision of the

In the overall sample of texts and comments on both news websites, published during 2015 and 2017, the framework of threat predominates with 62.72% of the texts, while migrants and refugees are perceived as victims in 34.69% of the comments.

Table 3 The stance of commentators – readers towards migrants

The stance of commentators	2015		2017		Total		Total %
	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	
Neutral	63.54%	52.45%	50.00%	65.56%	60.48%	55.05%	56.70%
Negative	25.60%	40.25%	42.35%	22.19%	29.38%	36.68%	34.46%
Positive	10.71%	7.11%	7.14%	11.99%	9.91%	8.07%	8.63%
Positive/Neutral	0.15%	0.06%	0.00%	0.00%	0.12%	0.05%	0.07%
Negative/Neutral	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.26%	0.00%	0.05%	0.04%
Positive/Negative	0.00%	0.13%	0.51%	0.00%	0.12%	0.10%	0.11%
Total:	672	1590	196	392	868	1982	2.850

Despite the framework of a threat as the dominant way migrants are perceived, there is a neutral stance toward this group, as indicated by 53.12% of readers' comments in the overall sample for both years, while a negative stance was expressed by commentators in 32.28% of user-generated texts. On the other hand, a positive stance is present in only 8.09% of comments.

Readers of Politika and Kurir most commonly perceive migrants as Others (foreigners, newcomers, arrivals) (18.02% of the total number of all references in the overall sample of comment texts). Kurir readers more frequently use this description (23.4%), while in Politika, migrants are depicted in this way in 11.11% of references in the comment texts. Commentators often debate about the motives of migration and displacement (16.88%), making it the second dominant category in referencing migrants and refugees. Readers of Politika more frequently refer to this category when commenting on articles about migrants compared to readers of Kurir (20.16% versus 14.32% of the total references). In third place, migrants and refugees are characterized as aggressive, violent people with suspicious migration motives (14.71% of references), while in fourth place, they are described as people in poor psychophysical condition (tired, hungry, exhausted, at 13.51% of total references).

On the websites of Politika and Kurir, there is a small percentage of comments that employ an aggregative strategy when discussing migrants and refugees (4.46% of comments in the total sample compared to 95.54%). This data may indicate that readers do not have information about the numbers of migrants mentioned in the media because it does not fall within their sphere of interest. A smaller number of comments referring to numbers relate to the immediate social environment and the numbers of migrants coming, passing through, or staying in Serbia.

Hungarian government: "Goran Nešić: European tolerance, if this is what the Swedes do by 'protecting' ISIS fanatics by receiving them and changing their identities to 'reduce their trauma,' as reported by Western media, 'no thanks, Orbán is a man who protects his people from invasion'."

[10] The text titled "Infected Migrants Escape Quarantine: Does Tuberculosis Threaten Serbia?" (August 24, 2015) has 44 comments. Some of them are: "Vožd: How come they don't have the right to keep them?! So migrants can do whatever they want, without documents, with knives, infected, and we still have to give them food and medicine. Well, it's best to be a migrant, they have more rights than the royal family in England"; "Jova85: Citizens of Serbia, you are still not aware of all the dangers lurking from the tsunami of Arab migrants. If rigorous measures are not taken in the near future, both compulsory legal and protective health consequences will be immeasurable in the future".

Table 4 The way migrants are referred to in reader comments

References and predicates	2015		2017		Total		Total %
	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	Politika %	Kurir %	
Motives of migration and displacement (war, destruction, poverty, destitution)	21.36%	14.67%	15.11%	11.71%	20.16%	14.32%	16.88%
People in a poor psychophysical condition (tired, hungry, stressed, victims)	19.32%	10.67%	8.63%	9.91%	17.28%	10.58%	13.51%
Aggressive, undesirable, violent, with suspicious intentions	14.41%	14.67%	12.95%	18.92%	14.13%	15.17%	14.71%
People, citizens, residents	11.86%	9.94%	8.63%	7.21%	11.25%	9.62%	10.33%
Others: foreigners, newcomers, immigrants	9.15%	23.27%	19.42%	24.32%	11.11%	23.40%	18.02%
A burden and strain on the local population	4.41%	2.42%	5.76%	4.50%	4.66%	2.67%	3.54%
Women, children, families	2.88%	2.06%	4.32%	4.50%	3.16%	2.35%	2.70%
People from Africa and Asia	2.37%	0.36%	0.72%	0.00%	2.06%	0.32%	1.08%
Terrorists, extremists	2.03%	4.85%	7.91%	2.70%	3.16%	4.59%	3.96%
Represented as people with positive traits (good-natured, cheerful, welcome...)	2.03%	5.21%	6.47%	3.60%	2.88%	5.02%	4.08%
Quantification (thousands, hundreds)	1.69%	1.58%	0.00%	1.80%	1.37%	1.60%	1.50%
Illegal immigrants	1.19%	0.97%	0.00%	3.60%	0.96%	1.28%	1.14%
Syrians	1.19%	2.06%	0.72%	0.90%	1.10%	1.92%	1.56%
Males	1.19%	1.09%	0.00%	0.90%	0.96%	1.07%	1.02%
Muslims	1.02%	2.06%	0.72%	0.00%	0.96%	1.82%	1.44%
People from the Middle East	0.85%	0.12%	0.00%	0.00%	0.69%	0.11%	0.36%
Occupational affiliation	0.85%	0.24%	0.72%	0.90%	0.82%	0.32%	0.54%
Young	0.68%	1.33%	2.16%	0.00%	0.96%	1.18%	1.08%
Economic migrants, immigrants, and refugees	0.51%	0.36%	2.88%	1.80%	0.96%	0.53%	0.72%
Group affiliation	0.34%	0.12%	0.00%	0.90%	0.27%	0.21%	0.24%
Iranians	0.34%	0.36%	1.44%	0.00%	0.55%	0.32%	0.42%
Afghans	0.17%	0.24%	0.72%	0.00%	0.27%	0.21%	0.24%
The elderly	0.17%	0.97%	0.00%	1.80%	0.14%	1.07%	0.66%
Illegal migrants	0.00%	0.24%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.21%	0.12%
Iraqis	0.00%	0.12%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.11%	0.06%
Illegal refugees	0.00%	0.00%	0.72%	0.00%	0.14%	0.00%	0.06%
Total	590	825	139	111	729	936	1665

The strategy of portraying migrants and refugees as members of a group using the strategy of collectivization is present in 56.49% of the comments, while in 41.19% of the texts, this representative form is not observed. Discussions about migrants and refugees in a personalized style account for only 2.32% of the comments. They are viewed and perceived as a group rather than individuals because a common origin is assumed.

4. DISCUSSION

Considering that media representations are a powerful means of shaping public opinion about migrants, this study focuses on analyzing readers' comments published on the websites of two daily newspapers in Serbia, Politika and Kurir. In order to identify the attitudes and perceptions in readers' comments on articles about migrants, the comments were analyzed with several categories in mind: the topic, tone of the comments (positive, negative, neutral), dominant framing of migrants (threat framework, victims framework, active social agency framework), way of referring to migrants, as well as the tendency towards collectivization and aggregation. The comments published during 2015 and 2017 on the websites of Politika and Kurir were analyzed.

The number of comments followed the trend of media reporting on the migrant crisis, and increased reader engagement in the process of commenting and expressing opinions and feelings can be understood as a natural consequence of limited access to information and interaction with migrants. Uncertainty about the future, increased fear through the use of sensationalist texts, creates collective anxiety among the domestic public, which, in such circumstances, becomes susceptible to any information. Despite the questionable quality, available information serves to reduce discomfort and uncertainty, as well as to reduce symptoms of anxiety.

Media data analysis in Europe indicate that there is accumulated dissatisfaction among Europeans towards migrants. They, in Zygmunt Bauman's opinion, usually belong to lower social strata, to the layers of the discriminated, dispossessed, impoverished, and socially marginalized (Bauman, 2016). Migrants and refugees are perceived as objects of aggression, while at the same time migrants arouse fear. The lack of interaction with migrating people further complicates overcoming prejudices and negative beliefs. Where there is no willingness to exchange knowledge and imagination, the will to dominate destroys dialogue. Such circumstances lead to various forms of violence and aggression, such as verbal aggression, subjugation of others, manipulation, and physical violence (Jovanović 2015).

The topic that generated the most reader comments was Serbia's response to the migrant crisis, particularly the acceptance and care of migrants. Research on the attitudes of local communities about migration conducted in Serbia in 2020 yielded important results. They show that the local populace is not just afraid and feels that their security is in jeopardy, but they are also not happy with the way of life in Serbia. Additionally, there is a belief that migrants and refugees receive more assistance than the local population, which is socially and economically vulnerable (Bjekić et al. 2020, 25). Many of the obstacles hindering dialogue with others do not stem from cultural differences, but rather from economic and social conditions in which the local population lives. Although there are indications in reader comments that migrants are perceived as a cultural and religious threat to the local population, the fear among Serbian citizens can be linked to the economic conditions in Serbia, the poor economic status of the majority of citizens, and the uncertain conditions in the labor market. Social and economic instability caused by changes in the labor market is interpreted by Bauman as one of the causes of the identity crisis, while another possible cause is the growing cultural pluralism (Bauman 2017).

The majority of readers expressed a neutral stance towards migrants. This data can be explained by a sense of responsibility for the crisis situation, attributed by readers of Politika and Kurir to EU member states and countries that did not respond to the problems in conflict-affected areas in a timely manner. The neutral stance may conceal a conflict between

one's own and others' needs, as well as essential passivity and disinterest in actively engaging Serbian citizens in the debate on the migrant crisis.

In line with media representations, readers view migrants as the Others. They do not belong to the group, hence they are on the other side of what is civilized, acceptable, familiar, and normal. Any crossing of borders, which are established and normalized in society, provokes a whole spectrum of negative responses from the local population: fear, anger, resentment, rejection, resistance, and even physical attacks.[11]

Although there is no tendency to discuss migrants in terms of numbers in user comments, readers treat them as a group of people with uniform characteristics and qualities. This leveling of differences among migrants leads to a homogenization of readers' attitudes, denying them individuality and assigning them typical, sensationalist dimensions, especially those based on religion with a negative Islamic connotation. Zimmel laid the groundwork for contemplating the dimensions of the modern stranger. Instead of focusing on the positive aspects of contemporary migrations, the focus is on the negative consequences and the idea of incongruity of those who come into the existing social structure (Zimmel 2018). Therefore, the search for a successful model of social integration remains an important objective for the countries where migrants arrive and stay.

4. CONCLUSION

A significant social phenomenon that has transformed the population structure and triggered a major social, political, and economic crisis worldwide is contemporary migration, driven by conflicts in the Middle East as well as crises in Central Africa and Central and South Asia. The process of creating meaning and understanding migration processes is influenced by the media, which operate in a social environment shaped by complex political, economic, cultural, religious, and other factors.

Managing the fears and concerns of the domestic public falls on the media, which relieve their political partners and allies of the burden of responsibility for neglecting the public interest, but instead, through calculated actions, redirect citizen dissatisfaction toward migrants, marking them as the main culprits for the social crisis. Therefore, commentators see migrants as a threat, and the neutral stance of the domestic public towards them indicates an indifferent attitude of citizens towards people migrating through Serbia. Migrants and refugees are seen as the Others (foreigners, newcomers, outsiders), not belonging there, people with suspicious motives and migration intentions, aggressive, regressive, violent. Such a model of referencing migrants suggests that underlying opinions about them involve various emotions from readers-commentators, such as fear, anxiety, apprehension, anger, rage, and similar emotional reactions. Commentators do not see migrants as numbers, except in isolated cases, while there is a tendency to view them as a group with uniform abilities, knowledge, skills, and interests. The individuality of migrants is denied, thereby implicitly denying them the right to different needs and recognition of authenticity and humanity.

Deeply ingrained in a cultural matrix, the media has taken on the responsibility of presenting others by putting them inside preexisting cultural schemas, speaking in accordance

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[11] In a study on stances toward migrants and refugees conducted by the Open Society Foundation in Serbia in 2020, it was found that migrants from the Middle East and Africa ranked third in terms of negative feelings expressed by citizens toward various ethnic groups (39.3%). Albanians ranked first, while Croats ranked second (Bjekić et al. 2020).

with preexisting thinking and emotion patterns, and preventing the reexamination of the adopted perspective from which others are perceived. In an atmosphere of submission to political and economic forces, the media are becoming increasingly active in constructing social reality in which cultural differences are not respected but identified as a source of civic dissatisfaction that should be directed towards groups with less social power. Although they have been granted the freedom to express their opinions in the comment sections, media users are not exempt from the decades-long influence on their opinions and feelings about other cultures. Adopting skills for critically interpreting media texts and the factors of media content production represents a fundamental path towards creating an informed and democratic society.

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MIGRANTI U MEDIJIMA: ANALIZA KOMENTARA ČITALACA

Suočavanje sa iskustvima migracija proizvelo je preplavljujuć efekat u pogledu načina na koji se migranti percipiraju, doživljavaju, kao i u odnosu na osećanja koja oni pobuđuju. Cilj rada je ispitati kakve su percepcije i stavovi čitalaca o migrantima, na osnovu analize njihovih komentara na medijske tekstove o migrantskoj krizi na sajtovima Politike i Kurira. Period analize obuhvata dve godine, 2015. i 2017. sa namerom da se uoče eventualne promene u stavovima i mišljenjima medijskih korisnika. Čitalački komentari analizirani su na osnovu sledećih kategorija: tema, identifikacija migranata, stav prema migrantima, način referisanja na migrante, agregacija i kolektivizacija. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da čitaoci migrante smatraju pretnjom (62,72% u odnosu na 2.850 komentara), iako je izraženo negativan stav o njima identifikovan u 32,28% sadržaja. Reakcija Srbije na migrantsku krizu, prihvatanje i zbrinjavanje migranata i izbeglica dobila je primarno mesto u agendi javnosti. Najveća pretnja je ekonomskog karaktera, a reakcija na nadolazeću opasnost sastojala se od uspostavljanja visokog stepena odbacivanja, ksenofobije, čak i rasizma. Otpor prema migrantima čitaoci ispoljavaju i referencama kojima ih opisuju i određuju. Pripadnici ove velike grupe opaženi su i doživljeni kao Drugi (stranci, došljaci, pridošlice). Oni pripadaju drugačijem svetu i kulturi, a, u skladu sa ovim tumačenjem, postoji i upitanost među čitaocima o motivima migriranja, što pokazuje njihovo nepoverenje i strah od ljudi koji dolaze.

Ključne reči: *migracije, migranti, Drugi, komentari čitalaca.*