Original scientific paper
Submitted: 31. 3. 2023.
Accepted: 27. 3. 2024.
DOI: 10.15176/vol61no14
UDK 314.151.3-054.7
39:314.15(497.561)

THE PERCEPTION OF THE "MIGRANT THREAT" IN CROATIAN GORSKI KOTAR BY THE LOCALS AND MIGRANTS THROUGH THE PRISM OF VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY

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Focused on the aftermath of the so-called migrant crisis of 2014 in the Croatian region of Gorski Kotar, this paper presents an analysis of the processes involved in constructing the idea of the "migrant threat" both among the locals whose settlements, towns and villages lie on the path of the people on the move, as well as among the migrants themselves traversing that area. More specifically, we analyze juxtaposed perceptions of threat. For the locals, the threat seems to stem from the visibility of migrants (their presence in a sparsely populated region) layered with the perception of their own invisibility as a result of economic and infrastructural disregard by the state, as well as of the lack of greater military activities at the border. For the migrants, the threat comes from the possibly highly dangerous visibility enforced by different kinds of surveillance technologies, making them vulnerable to documented strategies of expulsion. The paper employs ethnographic fieldwork and a visual analysis of migrant self-representation online to underline the importance of studying migration from an integrated point of view which includes both local and migrant visual and narrative articulation of the same (border) space between the Schengen area and "the other space". Based on interviews, a review of the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of migration today, and a visual analysis of migrant self-representation practices, we show that different spheres of migration (in)visibility cannot be separated.

Keywords: migration, self-representation, visual analysis, Balkan corridor, migrant ethnography

INTRODUCTION

The end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 in Europe saw a notable rise in immigration, mainly from Syria and later from other countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The increase in immigration to Germany, Greece, Italy, and other European countries was first followed by a cautious welcome for those in need. In 2015, migrants represented around 6% of the total EU population, "and in that same year illegal entrances peaked at 5.2%, a representative figure if we consider that there was an increase of 100% in detections of illegal border crossings compared to the previous year" (Ferreira 2018: 68). However, already in 2015 and 2016, the initial welcome (mainly a result of Germany's willingness to accept people on the move) started giving way to anti-immigrant sentiments echoed by some European populist political parties (Hars 2019; Gattinara 2016) that resulted in, for example, the erection of barbed wires at natural borders (HINA 2021). Scholarship on these processes is well established (Brkovic, De Lauri and Hess 2021).

In order to better understand the link between the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and the perception of the so-called "migrant threat", this paper provides an ethnographic analysis of specific events related to recent migrations in the Croatian region of Gorski Kotar, with a particular focus on 2019 and 2020. The aim is to understand some of the underlying processes involved in constructing the idea of the "migrant threat" by the people whose settlements, towns, and villages lie on the path of the people on the move, and in so doing, to discuss the local perception of migration. Simultaneously, we look into what migrants themselves perceive as a threat while crossing those localities (Geenz and Ozdemirkiran 2015).[1] The border space will serve as a way to analyze juxtaposed perceptions of threat. For the "local population", the threat stems from the invisibility of migrants traversing the land (but leaving traces of their past presence) and from the absence of greater military activities at the borders aimed at "protecting the land". On the other hand, for the people on the move, the threat comes from their very visibility when faced with different kinds of surveillance technologies, making them vulnerable to expulsion practices. Therefore, we will simultaneously investigate the migrants' perception of threat stemming from their *visibility* when faced with fortified border regimes and contrast it to the locals' perception of threat stemming from their own *invisibility* in the eyes of the institutions that should protect their safety. The relation between the perception of threat and concepts of visibility and invisibility came out of the research that focused on the locals' perception of the migrants in the mountainous region of Gorski Kotar, and on a visual analysis of migrants' communication on selected private Facebook groups pertaining to the same

[1] The relationship between the locals and migrants was also dealt with by Nadia El-Shaarawi and Maple Razsa in their research of the interaction of the Balkan route with the earlier migration and social movements generated by the wars of Yugoslav Succession (2018). Although El-Shaarawi and Razsa primarily examine social movements and activism, when describing the route node in the Southern Serbian municipality of Preshevë, they recount how the local community was involved and guided by the local activist organization Youth for Refugees.

region. Croatia provides a fertile ground for analysis because it is located directly on the migrant route established in 2014 and 2015, the so-called *Balkan Corridor*, or more specifically, *the Western Balkan route* running mostly from Turkey via Greece towards the Schengen Area.

It is important to note that the Balkan Corridor was an EU and state-approved route for the delegation of the "migrant problem" from non-Schengen countries to Germany, which was willing to accept most of the refugees at that time. Therefore, for this study, the corridor will not be a direct point of analysis, as most of those people were monitored in transit with the help of state institutions.[2] Instead, our analysis will encompass those "left behind" after 2015, those whose travels and border crossings are illegalized by the EU member states and are carried out in secret through forests and river paths towards the West.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE MIGRANT THREAT

In the context of our research, the connecting tissue between perception and threat is pertinently postulated by Susana Ferreira. She argues that the "feeling of insecurity is *the result of a perception* (original emphasis) of a threat posed by the growing number of irregular migrants entering the EU during this period" (Ferreira 2018: 68), and not by migrations and consequent integration in EU states. If pertinent data point to the fact that less than 0.1% of migrants crossing Croatia wish to apply for asylum,[3] how has the perception of the migrant threat been able to take such deep root in public and private discourse, and become received knowledge? Social representations theory refers to "a way of thinking and producing knowledge that is public, created in the flowing of social life, and interdependent with the particular context of its production" (Rochira et al. 2015: 98). Like all social phenomena, this "migrant crisis" is "increasingly shaped by political and media discourses, economic and other interests and conditions inside Europe and across its borders [...]" (Da-Boi 2021: 2).[4] We see people on the move as a social phenomenon that reflects and is influenced by a social and political climate emerging in places of its occurrence. One could refer to social phenomena as the interaction between human beings, including their behavior that affects this same interaction and influences from

[2] For an analysis of the Balkan Corridor see, for example, Petrović 2017; Hameršak and Pleše 2017.

[3] For example, from 2016 until 1 February 2020, only 7,618 asylum applications were submitted. Only 400 migrants stayed in the country. For more, see https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/velika-drama-u-hrvatskom-susjedstvu-ocekuje-se-10000-migranata-dnevno-imam-informaciju-sto-hrvatska-namjerava-napraviti-to-me-brine-10041016.

[4] At the time of writing this paper, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there is currently 1 million refugees fleeing the country towards Poland, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, etc. Unlike the influx of war refugees from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Ukrainian refugees are (thankfully) met with acceptance (with only black students as residents from Ukraine having trouble crossing the border into EU, thus proving the underlying racist apprehension of the EU).

historical or past behaviors (Cacciattolo 2015). In our case, the interaction between human beings refers to several actors. Firstly, there is communication among the people on the move themselves and their communication with those who remained in the country of departure, the interaction that is nowadays performed via numerous channels afforded by digital technologies and telecommunications, or simply, in the everyday face-to-face manner. This communication includes pieces of information about the difficulties of travel, obstacles on their way, immigration rules and policies of the destination country, living standards, and various opportunities (for one such research perspective, see Alencar, Kondova and Ribbens 2019). Secondly, there is an ongoing discussion about migrants between people living in the so-called destination and transit countries. This communication entails local "knowledge" about the people on the move. It is based on information disseminated by official news channels, discussions between politicians, economic experts, human rights activists, etc. Ideas circulating in the public are then strengthened, altered, or rejected in everyday conversations, interactions, and behavior, forming people's perceptions of the migrants until finally, those ideas grounded in the locals' minds are perceived by them. This knowledge is always contextualized by the locals' everyday life circumstances and, the social, political, and economic living conditions in general.

We therefore contend that the perception of "the migrant threat" in Gorski Kotar is not the exclusive result of a process of immediate "othering", but is an outcome of more profound institutional, cultural, and economic changes not only in the country of departure of the migrants but more importantly, in the destination country. We argue that in studying migration, besides global processes, local and national processes need to be taken into account. In short, the idea or the "perception of the migrant" (which is never uniform) in the locals' point of view is just a starting point of this investigation towards the processes that help its construction, which (for the most part) lie outside the point of view of the local.

The perception of migrants is furthermore construed through the effects of visibility and invisibility, here treated separately only for analytical purposes. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary refers to the importance of the inability to separate the observer from the image they observe stating that "vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification" (Crary 1990: 5). In the context of our research, this means that the relation between the perception of the migrant and the local is interdependent and entwined. Visibility and invisibility are related to the point of view of the observer and the observed. In this analysis, we decided to focus specifically on investigating institutional policies and state regulations that enable the establishment of specific perceptions of migrants that support the idea of a "migrant threat" (migrant visibility in precarious settings), and on investigating the locals' invisibility (social and economic abandonment). Moreover, we suggest that the self-representational perspective (established online) by migrants is not only a visual counter to the locals' perspective of threat, but also a result of structural inabilities of representation in other forms.

THE INVISIBLE LOCALS

The region of Gorski Kotar is at the center of our analysis. It is a mountainous region in Croatia, with 85% of its surface forested, and the largest town, Delnice, has four and half thousand inhabitants.[5] Due to scarce job opportunities, the region has lost more than seven thousand inhabitants in the last 20 years. In 2023, out of 256 settlements, 45 were without inhabitants, 77 had up to 10 inhabitants, 101 had between 11 and 100 inhabitants, 30 had between 101 and 1000 inhabitants, and only 3 settlements had more than 1000 inhabitants.[6] Gorski Kotar borders the westernmost part of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the east and the easternmost part of Slovenia in the west. The region forms the last part of the so-called Balkan route, with well-documented instances of violence and pushbacks aimed at migrants. For example, Border Violence Monitoring Network and its many partners have continuously been reporting on the forceful expulsions from various countries, including Croatia. The gravity of the issue related to migrant crossings can be seen from mere statistical data until 2020: BVMN collected "628 pushback testimonies, detailing the treatment of 6,328 people" (Barker and Zajović 2020: 675), with up to 90% of the cases involving some forms of violence. Both accounts will be vital in understanding the dynamics of the construction of the "migrant threat"; local fear of the people on the move, as well as the well-documented and illegal mistreatment of the people on the move on their travels.[7]

By combining a visual analysis of posts made by migrants on four private Facebook groups and ethnographic research in Gorski Kotar, we hope to amplify the presence of the people on the move, as well as of the locals in Gorski Kotar witnessing their passage. Between 2019 and 2020, we followed in the footsteps of the people on the move. In the towns and villages of Gorski Kotar, we talked to the locals during our visits. In the Casa Malala reception center near Trieste, we talked to the people on the move who traversed Gorski Kotar on the way to western Europe. These places are easily reachable from our residence; hence, we could go there frequently, on demand, and stay there as long as required. In all, we conducted thirty-five semi structured interviews for the purposes of this paper, fifteen in the Casa Malala reception center, and twenty in towns of Gorski Kotar: Mrkopalj, Delnice, Čabar, Parg, and Crni Lug. People in Casa Mala came from Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Iraq. For some, it took 6 years to reach Italy, and for some only 3 months. Crossing Gorski Kotar in general lasted 10 days, although it usually

[5] https://www.novilist.hr/rijeka-regija/tuzne-i-uznemirujuce-brojke-gorski-kotar-izgubio-grad-koji-bi-bio-drugi-po-velicini/?meta_refresh=true.

[6] https://www.novilist.hr/rijeka-regija/gorski-kotar/broj-stanovnika-gorskog-kotara-se-u-70-godina-prepolovio-u-cak-45-naselja-ljudi-vise-uopce-nema/.

[7] It should be noted that although the timeframe of our research was 2020, in 2022 there were some changes in pushback regimes. The Asylum Information Database study for Croatia, following the reports by the Centre for Peace Studies, noticed that besides pushbacks, there was a "change in approach of the police towards migrants as police has started issuing more return decision, through the so-called 7-days papers ordering applicants to leave the European Economic Area" (Tučkorić 2022: 26).

took 3 to 10 attempts due to pushbacks. People in Gorski Kotar were local residents, some employed in forestry and the lumber industry, a mayor, a priest, two teachers, and women employed in public institutions and tourist agencies. In our research we continuously followed and observed both migrants and the locals, believing that both groups play a part in the same phenomenon. By studying the perception of migrants in Gorski Kotar, we were able to follow and trace some of the major public disputes about public security, the role of the army, economy, and business. In the summer of 2019, we talked to the mayor of the Mrkopalj municipality, trying to understand the local perspective on the "new reality" of Gorski Kotar as it became the passage for people on the move towards Trieste. According to him and three other residents of Mrkopalj who were involved in organizing food collections for people on the move, the local perspective shifted dramatically in 2018 due to several reasons. In the beginning, the locals were trying to be cooperative: they would leave food in hunting lodges and weekend houses, while people who mainly came from Syria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan would leave 5 or 10 euros in return. "They were decent, mostly men in their twenties and thirties, and the locals tried to help them", the mayor said. "We used to organize collecting stations with food and clothes, and they were grateful. Besides, we understand how it feels to be in the woods for days. We also remember the recent war; many of us fought, hungry and frozen. But then, a year ago, people from North Africa started to come; we call them Carthaginians. They would break into hunting lodges and mountain houses, destroy doors and windows, although everything was open. The locals don't understand that". According to the mayor, this did not happen often, maybe only two or three times, but a TV crew was there immediately, spreading the story in a sensationalist manner when it did.[8] Gorski Kotar is not often featured in Croatian news headlines, and now those few mentions were being associated with bad news such as "Migrants demolished the mountain lodge Risnjak and weekend houses near Gornje Jelenje".[9]

Local people in Gorski Kotar, even with biased reporting in the media, feel underrepresented and in that sense invisible. This feeling was expressed in many conversations we held during our research. A woman from Čabar, a long-time resident, explicitly referred to this feeling in our conversation in the winter of 2019 by saying: "Before this media coverage, nobody was interested in what was happening in Gorski Kotar". She explained that people in Gorski Kotar, in general, feel that they have been "forgotten" by the rest of Croatia (this issue will be discussed below), but they also see that the media started to report about migrants' crossing only when some sort of violence occurred; before that happened, Gorski Kotar was forgotten also in relation to the passage of the people on the move. Biased reporting in Gorski Kotar began with the media coverage of the break-ins. Before the news headlines about destroyed properties, the media never covered the

[8] For an analysis of media discourse, reporting practices, and the reaction of the local population to migrants, see Hameršak 2021.

[9] https://www.novilist.hr/novosti/crna-kronika/nepozvani-gosti-u-susjedstvu-migranti-demolirali-planinarski-dom-risnjak-i-vikendice-kod-gornjeg-jelenja/.

actions of the locals coordinating or helping with food collections or protecting their properties. Only with the first sign of violent break-ins, the newspapers, the internet, and television were flooded with stories of those wandering in the woods. Here we notice a specific correlation between dangerous people and the woods, thick and dark enough to associate them with non-transparency, hiding, and danger in general. Sarah Czerny, Marijana Hameršak, Iva Pleše, and Sanja Bojanić recently discussed whether the forests of Gorski Kotar (taken as agents) distinguish between those who pass through them: migrants, residents, or the police. The authors concluded that the forests are, indeed, neutral regarding those to whom they offer cover, but "that the cover they offer is actually revealing in that it discloses the status and perception of migrants and current migration practices in local societies [...]" (2023: 224). Hence the image of a "dangerous migrant" travelling in the mountains, which is taken very seriously in the impoverished region turning to tourism for economic development. The locals started to worry about tourism because of "bad rumors spread via the media", said one woman in Delnice who supplements her monthly income by renting an apartment. Sentiment towards migrants started to shift from willingness to help as much as possible (given one's possibilities) to intolerance towards those who endanger one's earnings.[10] People turn to service activities and tourism or leave Gorski Kotar mainly because there are no jobs; the only productive industry is the lumber industry. It is a significant force in Gorski Kotar, a "state within a state", as Gorani would say; and those employed by the public company Hrvatske šume d.o.o. (Croatian Forests, Limited Liability Company) are considered lucky. There are seventeen branch offices throughout Croatia, and the one in charge of Gorski Kotar is Uprava Šuma Delnice (Delnice Division), which is again divided into fifteen Forestries.[11] The Company had a profit of 64.2 million Croatian kuna in 2019. Still, when the mayor of Mrkopalj requested the Forestry Mrkopalj's help in repairing the roads in the municipality (mainly destroyed due to the Company's heavy machinery), the request was denied (conversation held in the summer 2019). Investment in regional development barely appears in the Company's annual report for 2019;[12] it states investment in constructing forest roads, but not in Gorski Kotar.

As stated above, the people of Gorski Kotar turn to service activities and renting apartments as a side job.[13] Therefore, when the municipality organized collecting stations for migrants it also had tourism in mind; they were trying to keep the situation "under control".

[10] Uršula Lipovec Čebron, Eva Fekonja and Tina Ivnik (2020) examine the transformation of local hospitality practices towards migrants in Velika Kladuša from open to criminalized hospitality. In this case, the authors analyze the transformation in the context of the authorities' criminalization of hospitality. In our research in Gorski Kotar, we focus on the development of the perception of threat in the light of conditions discussed further in this paper that augmented the locals' sense of abandonment. For more on the criminalization of solidarity, see Zorn 2021.

[11] https://www.hrsume.hr/.

[12] https://www.hrsume.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/godisnje_izvjesce_za_2019.pdf.

[13] https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/mozaik/panorama/smjestaj-u-gorskom-kotaru-pun-je-zimi-i-ljeti-a-brojke-im-rastu-preko-30-posto-u-odnosu-na-rekordnu-2019-1232409.

Tourism is still developing there, although it includes several branches: ecotourism, rural, and adrenalin tourism. In October 2020, small tourist boards of different municipalities in Gorski Kotar were abolished and substituted with one big Tourist board of Gorski Kotar.[14] A woman working at a tourist agency in Delnice explained that the locals see this event as proof of abandonment, rather than an investment in the tourist industry, as the state is trying to represent it. She argued that, by consolidating tourist boards, a developed tourist board may apply to fewer funds than several less developed branches. This means, our interlocutor continues, that "tourism survives without significant state support, although it is an important source of income for individual families" (conversation held in the autumn of 2020).

Another example of public and state companies' lack of involvement in regional life is when Hrvatska elektroprivreda d.d. (Croatian national power company) declined the request of the mayor of Mrkopalj to finance the construction of a retention basin to protect a ski resort. When giant public firms like Hrvatske šume and Hrvatska elektroprivreda refuse to invest in an already impoverished region, "people in the local community feel left to their own devices", explained the mayor. The lack of investments is the cause of a permanent feeling of abandonment in Gorski Kotar. This feeling plays an important role in understanding their attitude towards migrants (which will be elaborated later). On the other hand, the migration wave came as a force that additionally exposed the problematic situation. Renting apartments and houses to tourists in a beautiful mountainous region[15] is a reasonable solution to supplement one's household income when faced with the lack of more organized infrastructural support and investment in the area. We already mentioned that the municipality organized collecting stations for migrants to keep the situation under control so that it would not hurt tourism. The other equally important reason for "keeping the situation under control" was and still is the insecurity that the locals feel in their everyday social space. They are aware that desperate, hungry, and tired travelers could do violent things to satisfy their immediate needs (from the conversation with forester N. N. in the winter of 2020). "We behave towards them as we are used to behaving towards bears: you know they are there, but you try to carry on with your errands and life in general. But, when you see them, keep your distance, and try to avoid them. Because you never know how the bear will behave", said N. N. Many aspects of the bear metaphor reveal the locals' disposition: it is one of vigilance and respect at the same time, although remaining in the imaginary of migrant othering, or dehumanization. Nevertheless, in our view, in this particular instance the metaphor discloses something more than othering: it links two beings that are at the same time distant and spatially close. Such a relationship between vicinity and distance is well known to people who live near woods, as the forester tried to explain. But the main point is that distance implies respect more than indifference. In that sense the comparison of a person on the move with a bear does not necessarily

[14] https://mrkopalj.hr/index.php/koordinacija-gradonacelnika-gorski-kotar-dobiva-jedinstveni-tz/.

[15] https://www.gorskikotar.hr/turizam/business/turisticke_zajednice_gorskog_kotara.

aim to dehumanize, it simply draws from the everyday experience of the locals and their perception of the multispecies social space.[16]

Besides situated experience that forms the locals' perception of migration, mass and digital media are a constitutive part of their everyday experience. The locals' view of a local event (like the passage of the people on the move) is therefore shaped by their own experiences and by the information offered by the media to a similar extent. John Durham Peters described this intertwining of the view from afar and the close view as "seeing bifocally" (Peters 1997). Helping with food and keeping a respectful distance are practices derived from the "close view". They are an expression of a particular mixture of empathy, caution, and desire to carry on with one's life undisturbed. Still, when the view widens, when pieces of information circulated by the media about violence (although they are based on isolated cases of break-ins in empty shelters) enter one's perspective, caution develops into fear. Combined with a learned distrust of institutions that should handle the situation, the perception of the migrants led people to organize themselves to protect their properties, their safety, and their developing tourist economy.

Break-ins into mountain and hunting lodges and their media coverage were accompanied by the emergence of "Facebook warriors" or "Internet warriors"[17] (as the locals from Delnice and Mrkopalj called them on multiple occasions during our conversations). They are mainly veterans of the War of Independence who sometimes meet in order to guard villages and towns from migrants. It is not clear what they intend to do in the case of an encounter. They usually meet in the local pub with the intention of patrolling the woods, but their efforts typically end where they started. This is fortunate since they, being sixty or so, hardly stand a chance of running after much younger people on the move through the forests of Gorski Kotar. Their presence is significant, though, because it again says a lot about the overwhelming lack of confidence in organizations on a higher level, be it local, regional, or European, to resolve their problems. Their feeling of invisibility is based on their experience with state institutions and organizations in dealing with completely different issues, but they relate it to the present "migrant crisis" as a synecdoche for their troubles.

While the scholarly literature typically discusses migration and policymaking on the institutional and (supra) national level (see Boswell, Geddes and Scholten 2011; Geddes and Scholten 2013), we wanted to investigate what else, besides the official narrative, contributes to the "image of the migrant" on the local level, such as investigating the local circumstances that contribute to how migrants are perceived. The circumstances of people's everyday life are essential in this sense: a lack of investment in the region coupled with the closing down of schools (the Forestry school in Delnice was closed in the 1990s)[18] and emigration make the local people feel invisible to the institutions and powerless to

[16] For more on the more-than-human-sociality see Tsing 2013.

[17] https://mrkopalj.hr/pravasi-hrvatska-je-granica-trenutacno-tek-crta-na-papiru/.

[18] https://www.novilist.hr/regija/zele-sumarsku-skolu-sume-na-sve-strane-a-mladih-sumara-niotkud/).

change or to influence their surroundings. Paradoxically, this sensation of invisibility is what links them with migrants, who are made visible only by surveillance cameras, but otherwise remain unheard and unseen.[19]

VISIBLE MIGRANTS

As already mentioned, investigating the locals' perception of migration is complementary to the analysis of personal migrant stories and images, which are almost non-existent in the dominant media systems and the everyday lives of the locals. Therefore, our focus is on the analysis of various image-making practices that show the process of documenting migrant travels by the migrants themselves, in this case largely limited to Facebook private groups that the migrants use. Through these image-making practices people on the move connect and share their personal experiences of their voyage recorded on their phones, thereby constructing a space of visibility that is not always recommendable while crossing borders. Those groups represent heterogeneous spaces of connection – some are private groups, others are general "pages". Some of them get shut down, either by Facebook or of their own volition. There are more than a dozen specialized pages for migrant travels through the Balkans at any given time. Our analysis will center on two Facebook groups that feature images from the routes through Croatia, mostly visited in the second half of 2020 and first half of 2021. We focus on personal images mostly used to communicate within migrant groups and individuals, even though recording abilities proved valuable in recent years in documenting various illegal practices towards migrants, such as pushbacks.[20] Pushbacks violate – among other laws – the European Convention on Human Rights.[21] They are usually carried out in bordering regions by state authorities or their proxies, from Greece in the south of Europe to Croatia and Slovenia in the western Balkans.

While pushbacks are not the central topic of this paper, they can help us recognize at least three types (with various subtypes) of visual representations of migrants today: a) the dominant, scopic regime of image-production; b) the counter-visual image production (made mainly by various NGOs) that aims to visually articulate migrants by focusing on migrant mistreatment thereby resisting to generalize their appearance, and c) the personal images by the migrants themselves, usually not available for dissemination to wider audiences. The first can be described as the one that uses generalized (migrants depicted as an invading force) or iconoclast (victimization and passivation) imagery, catering to

[19] For a significant study in migrant invisibility, cf. Bischoff, Falk and Kafehsy 2010.

[20] See, for example, https://aegeanboatreport.com/2021/06/28/human-rights-in-europe-are-at-a-crossroads/.

[21] https://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/push-back/#:~:text=Push%2Dbacks%20are%20a%20set,arguments%20against%20the%20measures%20taken.

the scopic regime, which Foucault famously described as seeing without being seen.[22] The second can be seen mostly on websites specialized in human rights, in reports, or in civic initiatives focused on migration, sometimes using voices, images and testimonies by migrants in their reporting. The third is concerned with the approach to images of the migrants by emphasizing the importance of images not made of them but those made by them. By sharing various fragmented, subjective stories, the aim is to use them as constructive for more pertinent narratives of recent migrations. To be more precise, when we say "self-representation", we mean the analysis of the visual production by migrants or refugees of their travels shared with private groups on Facebook. In short, our point of departure in this section are the very practices of visualizing made by the migrants themselves: how they see themselves; how they use those images and to what extent, and how those images help to create specific (although heterogenous) mental images of migration *in situ* (see Ponzanesi and Leurs 2022), and how they contrast with the local (mis)understanding of migration.

This image was created on the Facebook page of one of the many private groups for the so-called Harragas. Harraga is a term that originates from an Arabic-Moroccan dialect meaning "those who burn", denoting their discarding of identification documents before entering a country. We gained access to private groups that are used in various ways: for

[22] *Regards qui doivent voir sans être vus*, see Foucault 1975, 1994.

sharing safe routes while passing borders, tips on how to avoid dangers on the road, or for communication with others. "These groups' members often post selfies made in camps, forbidden bordering regions, or boats in the Mediterranean. [...] Those groups underline the importance of digital media in representing those who have no other means of making themselves visible" (Ružić 2021: 101). These images are difficult to understand or interpret in isolation as they are fragmented, have poor resolution, and lack broader context. Visual records of migrants' travels through Croatia are mostly articulated either from a distance, showing blurry images of people, or frontally, reminiscent of portrait photographs or early ethnographic visual representations. The ones we are interested in can be found, besides those on private Facebook groups, on migrants' phones or can be sourced from activists helping the migrants. Some of those images include humiliation and beatings in various forms, from spraying crosses on migrants' heads as documented by the Danish Refugee Council to videos of "men in black" overseeing the departure of beaten or extremely maltreated migrants. They can be used as evidence for reports of mistreatment and violation of human rights, and can provide insight into the subjective world of stories we usually hear only by narrativization of hegemonic media discourses (Ružić 2021).

The second type of images can be categorized as motivational or "assertive", and they are mostly uploaded on various social networks, either by migrants in Europe or those planning to start their journey. Among those, there are several subtypes, such as images that (falsely) advertise forging fake IDs or photoshopped images of people in western cities such as Rome, Paris, or London. In this paper, we focus on images that can be described as the political encounter between the subject in the image and its viewer, what Chouliaraki et al. describe as an encounter that forms "the migrant in the photograph [as] not simply an image but importantly an 'active participant' calling out to us to take a stance that enables the focus on the migrant agency" (Chouliaraki, Orwicz and Greeley 2019: 314). One of the ways of achieving that agency is the specific way in which self-representational visuality functions: there is no singular representation of a migrant, no icon that can show their

cohesion. Their images are often dissonant, showing people who do not necessarily know each other. Here, the absence of totalization is productive. Videos and photos of migrants in forests sometimes lack solidarity, given that the groups are divided along class, religious, political, and gender lines. The forest or a camp is a microcosm of the same diverse society that we can relate to and understand. Unlike the locals' understanding of migration as a teleological and cohesive force that destabilizes the already fragile living conditions in Gorski Kotar, the subjective perspective afforded by Facebook communication shows a much more heterogenous and precarious but subjective and not generalized insight into migration. That includes, as already noted, the need to communicate with their families, the need to see and show themselves (amidst the visual prohibition in "real life"), as well as to share the date of their passage to others in a similar situation.

As we have already stated, the analyzed images made by the migrants passing through Gorski Kotar often show secluded forest areas, people in body positions mostly near the ground, presumably to avoid border surveillance and police controls. Such photographs are already framed by the extra-visual circumstances: body positions, bags with food, and winter clothing even during the warmer season underlining the paradox of migrant invisibility in the forest as a prerequisite for their visibility online. From the description of images as well as the comments, we can draw attention to two main aspects of the photos in constructing the perception of migration: one is the need to traverse the land safely towards a "better life in the West", and the other is to communicate to others (mostly family, judging by local interviews) that they are well and motivated to continue. Sometimes the two aspects overlap, but mostly they are distinct: some images state the tiredness of being expelled from the land and the hopelessness related to trying again, for example. Comments can indicate disappointment by the Croatian police or the fear of weather conditions. Sporadic images include recognizable features such as villages and cars. Almost none of them feature the local people, apart from images made in migrant camps. The visibility afforded by those Facebook groups is internal (between family members, friends,

or people in a similar situation), affective (motivational or cautionary), and communicative. As such, the visibility online (although in the symbolic domain) is one possible remedy for their invisibility in discursive spaces while travelling Europe. Returning to the "bear metaphor", it seems as though the visual recognition between the two groups occupying the same space is practically non-existent (aside from groups that are organized around helping those in need). Having analyzed four distinct Facebook groups, it seems as though for the migrants the threat does not stem from the fear of the local people per se, as much as from either sociopolitical injustice (such as pushbacks or the inability to apply for asylum) or physical, geographical hardships encountered on the way as a result of hiding. In our research, those images, even though mostly absent from dominant media reports, still play an important role in creating a mental image of migration for the migrants themselves, as well as the locals who testify (often unintentionally) to their passage.

The locals are also active online. For example, the Delnice branch of the far right party HSP (Croatian Party of Rights) posts YouTube videos, regularly reporting about places where migrants have slept, be it a mountain, a weekend cottage, or a hunting lodge.[23] Videos show messy rooms, nylon bags, leftovers of any kind, on some occasions burned furniture, etc. Seven videos (some of them showing more than one incident) have been posted until now: the comment section below each video is not edited and is filled with fear and racial hatred. The local branch leader of HSP hosts those videos, instilling fear in the locals of "violent migrants" and accusing the authorities of neglecting the issue.

There are no better words to describe this fear than those received through personal correspondence coming from a resident of the Kupa valley:

> There are many. Sometimes there are thirty of them in one group. Sometimes there are ten. They walk one after another. They break into houses. Do damage. You have to put away sacred images and crucifixes in your house, so they don't damage them. You are afraid. Fear. It's an army. Only to "modern" people in cities do they seem poor. They want to help them, but nobody comes and helps. Why? Full of empathy... Today that's what's IN.
>
> There are no older people, no women, children. Only men in their prime. An army.
>
> Nobody does anything about this. Rarely anyone. Nor will they. Politics.
>
> Army at the borders. That is what people here say. They are not in pursuit of a better life. I don't feel safe. Neither does a great part of my community. In my country, in my house. Disgraceful.

It is indicative that none of the videos posted feature a single refugee or a migrant. Unlike our online investigation into the subjective lives of the migrants, these visual objects seem to focus on the racially biased and xenophobic interpretation of the supposed threat left lingering after migrant passage. The points of connection between the migrant visibility and locals' invisibility lie precisely in the caution deployed by the migrants as a counter to

[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neN6EiQwyBA.

the threat of being visibly detected and/or mistreated, as well as the threat that the locals feel from their own invisibility in a structural sense, mirrored by migrant passage and enhanced by media reports.

POINTS OF CONNECTION

The dissonance between what is deemed important to see and show in migrant visual imagery online and that of the locals is of note. As we have stated, although both sides articulate "the threat" through the interplay between visibility and invisibility, for the migrants, their invisibility in a space is a prerequisite for their successful border crossing, even though their very travels make them potentially visible to the increasingly restrictive and violent regimes of border policing, as well as vulnerable to illegal pushbacks and other forms of unsanctioned violence. They compensate for that invisibility by their (hidden) visibility online to document, communicate, and archive their existence. On the other side, for some locals, the visibility of migrant activities is both the proof of porous (and physically invisible) borders, as well as their own invisibility in social and political everyday life.

The desire of some "local" people in Gorski Kotar to better uphold a border control regime contrast with the image of a border as an "unseen space" to be traversed as soon as possible by the migrants. Both groups share the desire to control the same place, and that desire manifests itself in the range from visibility to invisibility. Meanwhile, the control holds an entirely different entity: complex political entanglement of national and international forces for both sides. This ranges from the economic instability and infrastructural decay that – in conjunction with the dominant media's generalized and biased reporting – fuel the locals' perception of migration, to political irregularization of migration, weaponization of the landscape (as seen in their visual representation online) and pushbacks that structure the "migration threat" for the people on the move. While the threat is perceived by both sides, its symptoms or its referents differ. For the locals we talked to, it seems that migration is a synecdoche or an added layer to the more general hardships of living in the area. For them, the threat is a complex interplay of local, regional and international forces further incited by populist political parties, local persistence on upholding tradition and economic hardship. For the migrants, a visual analysis of their own perception of migration while passing through Gorski Kotar seems to indicate that the threat stems from the geographic (landscape), the material (policing the borders) and the symbolic (unlikelihood of being represented). It also underlines Thomas Nail's argument that "the figure of the migrant is a socially constitutive power. It is the subjective figure that allows society to move and change" (Nail 2015: 13). The analysis of the asymmetry and the vicissitudes that arise from it show the need to further investigate this relation if we are to better understand migration, quite possibly one of the major forces that will mark the 21st century.

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LOKALNA I MIGRANTSKA PERCEPCIJA FENOMENA "MIGRANTSKE PRIJETNJE" U GORSKOM KOTARU IZ RAKURSA VIDLJIVOSTI I NEVIDLJIVOSTI

Fokusiran na posljedice tzv. migrantske krize iz 2014. godine u Gorskom kotaru u Hrvatskoj, rad analizira procese koji su uključeni u konstruiranje ideje o "migrantskoj prijetnji" među lokalnim stanovništvom čija naselja, gradovi i sela leže na putu ljudi u pokretu, kao i samih migranata koji tim područjem prolaze. Konkretnije, analiziramo jukstaponirane percepcije prijetnje. Dok se "lokalnoj strani" čini da prijetnja proizlazi iz vidljivosti migranata (prisutnost u regiji s rijetkom naseljenošću) uz percepciju vlastite nevidljivosti u kontekstu ekonomskog i infrastrukturnog zanemarivanja države, kao i od nepostojanja jačih vojnih aktivnosti na granicama, za migrante prijetnja dolazi od potencijala veoma opasne vidljivosti, pri čemu su suočeni s različitim vrstama tehnologija nadzora što ih čini ranjivima na dobro dokumentirane strategije protjerivanja. U radu se koriste etnografsko istraživanje i vizualna analiza samoreprezentacije migranata na internetu kako bi se naglasila važnost međusobno povezanog proučavanja migracija uključivanjem lokalne i migrantske vizualne i narativne artikulacije istog (graničnog) prostora između schengenske Europe i "drugog prostora". Provođenjem intervjua, razmatranjem sociopolitičkih, ekonomskih i kulturnih aspekata današnjih migracija te vizualnom analizom praksi samoreprezentacije migranata, pokazujemo nemogućnost razdvajanja različitih sfera migracijske (ne)vidljivosti.

Ključne riječi: migracija, samoreprezentacija, vizualna analiza, balkanski koridor, etnografija migranata