

“Us vs. Them: Populism, the Refugee Other and the Re-Consideration of National Identity in Central and Eastern Europe”

May 29, 2017, Central European University

N15 Building, Room 103

CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

PANEL I. Identity Politics along the “Balkan Route”

1. Populist, Radical and Extreme Right Parties in Visegrad countries: In the name of the people and the nation in Central Europe

Věra Stojarová, Masaryk University

Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to look at the political party scene in Visegrad countries before and after the influx of refugees and compare how much the negative reactions were instrumentalized not only by the extremist and radical right parties but by the newly emerged populist formations as well as the well-established mainstream parties across the whole political spectra. How has the communicative repertoire of extremist and radical right parties evolved as their mainstream counterparts have attempted to reposition themselves? How has the communicative repertoire of all the parties across the political spectrum changed? What role did social media play in the repositioning? The ambition here is thus to track the communication patterns of extremist and radical right parties, populist formations and lonely wolves within the mainstream parties as well as the various aspects of discursive opportunities as integral to opportunity structures.



Věra Stojarová works as an Academic Researcher and Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science at Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. She has been focusing her whole professional career on the nationalism, far right politics and security and politics in the Western Balkan as well as Central Europe. Věra Stojarová has published many texts dealing with the far right politics in the Western Balkan region (e.g. Stojarová, V. *The Far Right in the Balkans*, Manchester University Press, 2014). She has also cooperated with NGO sector providing them with lectures about security problems which societies in transition face (People in Need Foundation, lectures for Burmese dissidents in Thailand, lectures in Transnistria). She belongs to the leading Balkan security experts in the European academic community. She completed a study stay in Haag in 1997, a granted stay at the J.F. Kennedy Institute in Berlin in 2004, study stay in Heidelberg granted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2005-2006 and the Fellowship at the IWM Institute in Wien in 2009.

2. Defending European Values during the Refugee Crisis: Reconceptualization of a National Identity or the New and Improved Nationalism in a Transit Country?

Tamara Petrović Trifunović & Dunja Poletić Čosić, University of Belgrade

Abstract:

In this paper we examine the specific type of instrumentalization of the migration crisis by state actors and political elites in Serbia, which brought to life a distinct sub-discourse about *Serbia's role as the defender of European values*. According to world polity theory, state actors are routinely motivated by status concerns and guide their actions towards obtaining legitimacy among their (more legitimate) peer states. The foreign symbolic approval, indeed, often serves as an important factor in legitimating internal political positioning within Balkan societies. We argue that discourse employed in Serbian media during the crisis can be seen as a strategy of Serbian government to reposition country on the symbolic maps both in the regional and European context and to (re)construct the role of Serbia as an important (and "righteous") actor on the international political scene. We further distinguish between three contextual factors that separate Serbia from other European countries, but also from its neighbour-countries along the Balkan route. More precisely, it is the combination of these factors that contributed to the construction of the observed discourse, namely: a) Serbia being the country of transit, b) Serbia being the EU candidate state; and c) Serbia as the political community that carries the unique burden from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and war crimes during the 1990s. The framing of "the Serbian response to crisis" thus became a litmus test to prove both state competence and "behaviour in European fashion". This helped to reduce the pressure towards political actors and media to rely on overtly xenophobic rhetoric, and marginalized right-wing populist reactions. On the other side, just as the actual services provided for refugees did not match the rhetoric, so were the ideas of Europe and Europeanization "hijacked" by political elites and instrumentalized in an attempt to reframe and normalize Serbian nationalism. By revitalizing it with a mixture of "European values" and "civilisation standards", the *Us* in this formula became the Serbian nation, hospitable to the refugees in transit, and *Them* were some other "less European" EU countries, who prefer to build walls and fences from the people in need. We apply critical discourse analysis to a corpus of media reporting in broadsheet and tabloid dailies in Serbia during 2015 and the first part of 2016.



Tamara Petrović Trifunović is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology, University of Belgrade. At the same department she was a teaching assistant from 2010 to 2014, and then worked as a researcher at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade from 2014 to 2016, where she was previously junior associate in the *Politics of Social Memory and National Identity: Regional and European Context* project. She specializes in critical discourse analysis and she participated in several national and international research projects dealing with the study of political communication and media discourse, including *The Dictionary of Populism and Demagoguery* and *Figuring Out the Enemy: Re-imagining Serbian-Albanian Relations*. She attended Friedrich Ebert Foundation's *University of Social Democracy* in Belgrade in 2009, summer school *Democracy and Debate* in Varna in 2012, and the 2014 European Summer School *Prejudice, Genocide, Remembrance* in Budapest. She is currently finishing her dissertation on the interplay of discourses of culture, class and politics in the symbolic struggles of contemporary Serbian society. Her research interests lie in the fields of discourse studies and political sociology but also involve subjects such as politics of remembrance and theories of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. She co-edited three volumes, including *Collective memory and the*

politics of remembrance (2015), and published her research in peer-reviewed journals and volumes, including *Us and Them: Symbolic Divisions in Western Balkan Societies* (2013).



Dunja Poleti Ćosić completed undergraduate studies in sociology at the *Faculty of Philosophy* in Belgrade, and is currently a PhD candidate at the same department. As a scholar of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in the period from 2011 to 2015, she joined projects conducted by the *Institute of Sociology and Social Research* in Belgrade. During 2010 she attended *University of Social Democracy* (organized by *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*, Belgrade) and since then has been engaged in topic of social inclusion through different international projects (Tempus Project: "Equal Access for All: Strengthening the Social Dimension for a Stronger European Higher Education Area"; "Causes and Faces of Roma Marginalization in Local Settings"). In 2013 she was a participant of the program *ToTaL – training of trainers and lecturers* (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Belgrade), which contributed to her teaching performances at the Department of Sociology, where she was engaged as teaching assistant in a period 2013-2015. She has been awarded *The Civil Society Scholar Award* for the ongoing project on the intersection between gender regimens and migration practices in European context, through which the

3. Constructing national and supranational identities in times of crisis: A comparison between the Greek “bailout” referendum and the Hungarian “migrant quota” referendum

Anna Kyriazi, European University Institute

Abstract:

For decades, most national referendums endorsed EU membership or policies. In a recent round of ballots, however, the European cause has not fared as well. Arguably, this trend is symptomatic of increasing resistance of certain social segments against the large-scale structural transformation engendered by globalization. As interdependence increases and borders become more porous, they also become more contested and more politicized. The multiple crises facing the EU – from the financial meltdown to the refugee and migrant emergency – feed into contention, by shifting that what was hitherto largely unnoticed and taken-for-granted, i.e. our nationally conditioned minds and nationally lived lives, from the background to the forefront of politics.

Amidst these crises the idea of national self-determination has made a spectacular comeback, along with the upsurge of populist politics and the mainstreaming of Euroskepticism, on both the left and right. Referendums seem to be especially well suited for populist projects in that they allow for the “will of the people” to be defined and expressed, and in that they encourage a dichotomous view of complex issues. Therefore, referendums constitute unique points of entry into the *hows* and *whys* of the construction of political communities.

The paper presents the systematic quantitative and qualitative media analysis of the referendum campaigns in Hungary and Greece. Through this lens, it maps up and evaluates the different modalities of opposition to the EU, with the aim to better understand the ways political communities are imagined and constructed, and, especially, what difference it makes when group-discourses are centered on *culture* as

opposed to the *economy*. I find that rather than a wholesale rejection of the European idea, the referendum campaigns reflect the governments' desire for a more equitable form of discourse and treatment and, even, a claim that they will lead Europe back to its – variably defined but invariably presented as lost – values and ideals.



Anna Kyriazi is a doctoral researcher at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Her primary academic interest is in the field of comparative ethnicity and nationalism, with emphasis on the peripheries of Europe (East and South). In her thesis project she examines the education of minorities in a comparative perspective. Her work has appeared in *Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *Ethnicities*. She has also worked as a researcher in a number of research projects (POLCON, Euandl, EduLife).

4. Negotiating East/West & North/South: Borders and boundaries in Austrian asylum politics 2015-16

[Anna Wodička, Central European University](#)

Abstract:

In the literature dealing with policy making in reaction to what is commonly framed as 'refugee crisis' a gendered analysis is mostly missing, although official and popular discourses have been heavily gendered. With my paper, I aim to fill this gap and analyze shifts in the construction of the Austrian nation from summer 2015 to spring 2016 through a feminist lens. In the mentioned period, Austrian asylum politics have seen radical changes, from open borders policies and a rhetoric of humanitarianism to the initiation of the closure of the 'Balkan route' accompanied by a language of securitization. Through an interdisciplinary approach and working with Critical Discourse Analysis I look at governmental media work, policies and legal changes of that time to see how through those materials borders and boundaries of the Austrian nation are (re)produced. Building on theoretical insights from feminist perspectives on nationalism, biopolitics and (post)colonialism and combining them with historical-materialist approaches within migration studies I show how the legitimation of the law and policy making builds on gendered neoliberal tropes, figuring in the 'economic migrant' - 'war refugee' binary. Fundamentally, I argue that asylum politics are instrumentalized to reproduce the geopolitical position of the Austrian nation on East-West and North-South axes. With the European context, I show that the discussions of migration policies work to differentiate Austria as 'Western' and morally superior from Hungary and the Balkans and how this distinction evolves around the topics of smugglers and fences. Within a global context, I argue that for the formation and maintenance of 'Austria' the racist (post)colonial mobilization of 'Europeanness' and 'humanity' are fundamental. My paper thus shows the direct connection of migration politics to national and supranational political agendas through gendered mechanisms intertwined with economic and racialized arguments, which can only be understood using an intersectional feminist approach.



Anna Wodička is currently finishing her Master degree in Critical Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest. She has previously studied Development Studies, Slavic studies and Political Science at the University of Vienna. Her research and political work is mostly centered around European migration politics.

PANEL II. From State Discourse to Local Communities: Refugees and the Everyday

1. Refugees like us: Solidarity in transition along the Western Balkans route

Chiara Milan, Scuola Normale Superiore

Abstract:

The countries of former Yugoslavia have a long history of dealing with refugees. However, the so-called “refugee crisis” started in 2015 represents an unprecedented phenomenon for the Yugoslav successor states, affected for the first time by the mass inflow of people fleeing mostly from Middle East rather than from the neighbouring countries.

Since 2015, a number of individuals, local and grassroots groups decided to mobilize in solidarity with refugees passing across the Balkan territory during their journey towards the EU. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon reveals that two factors fostered the feeling of empathy driving the solidarity initiatives of the local communities with refugees. On the one hand, the local population identified with the migrants transiting across their countries. This stems from the fact that the majority of pro-refugee activists had personally experienced a situation of forced displacement during the Yugoslav wars of the 90s. On the other hand, the special position that the Yugoslav successor states occupy in the geography of migration compel them to be merely transit countries, rather than countries of destination. This situation of temporality of migration contributed to fuel empathy towards the migrants, who were perceived as not constituting a real threat for the local population.

Based on a series of in-depth interviews conducted during summer 2016 with solidarity activists in FYROM, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, the paper explores the process of identification of the local population with the refugees transiting across the so-called “Western Balkans route” by focusing on both its emotional and spatial dimensions. The paper explores in particular how both dimensions informed and shaped the “us” versus “them” discourse among local population mobilizing in solidarity with refugees along the Western Balkans route.



Chiara Milan is a research fellow at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Scuola Normale Superiore, where she is part of the COSMOS (Centre on Social Movement Studies) research team. She investigated the protests and grassroots initiatives in solidarity with refugees in Austria and in the countries of former Yugoslavia in the context of the 2015-16 so-called refugee crisis, in the framework of the ERC-funded project “Mobilizing for Democracy – Collective Action and the Refugee Crisis”. She holds a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute (EUI), and was a visiting fellow at the Center for Southeast European Studies of the University

2. Understanding the host populations at Europe’s “new” frontiers: the case of the Greek island of Lesbos in the framework of the European refugee crisis

Effrosyni Charitopoulou, Oxford University

Abstract:

Over the past year, approximately one million of refugees have crossed into European territory, while half of them have used the island of Lesbos as their gateway to Europe. The lack of a collective management of the so-called European refugee crisis on a European-level, most often left local communities dependent on their own resources and will to create the necessary infrastructure for refugee accommodation at Europe’s “new frontier”. Based on ethnographic research conducted in three villages of Lesbos, I explore the social dynamics developed across the receiving communities. I therefore address the following research questions: how do receiving communities respond to and interact with refugees? What explains for the diverging reactions across the three villages under consideration? How were social relationships within the receiving communities were altered following the outbreak of this crisis? The ways in which local populations react to this phenomenon have been largely dissimilar. On the one hand, locals express their pure solidarity with refugees; on the other, a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments is noted, a fact implicitly underlined by the results of the September 2015 Greek national elections, while attempts to profit on the expense of refugees have been undertaken by another strand of the local population can be observed. By delving into the social, economic, and ideational spheres, this paper sheds light on the nature of the first encounters between the local population and refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos.



Effrosyni Charitopoulou is a DPhil candidate in Sociology at the University of Oxford. Her research interests broadly lie in the fields of migration, ethnic relations and social movements. Her DPhil thesis focuses on the current European refugee crisis as this is expressed in the Greek context. Focusing specifically on host communities, she explores the social dynamics developed within local contexts, while also examines the nature of interactions between host and incoming populations. Effrosyni holds an MA (Scottish) in Economics and International Relations from the University of St Andrews and an MSc in Sociology from the University of Oxford.

3. Political Discourse on Refugees Compared to Refugees' Individual Stories: Case of Croatia

Rahela Jurković, University of Zagreb

Abstract

While discussing nationalist practices, Ghasan Hage (2000) introduced a story of ants for explaining the actions of protecting the national space: people start to perceive ants as “undesirable” or “too many” only when these ants are seen to have invaded spaces where humans find their presence harmful, such as in their houses or on their plates. Otherwise, they are accepting ants, though perceiving them as a different and inferior species.

This comparison easily applies to the discourse of Croatian politicians since mid-September 2015, when the country became a participant of the so-called European refugee crisis. In their transit to other Western Europe countries, refugees got assistance by Croatian authorities in the form of temporary shelter, food and transportation. As most of the rhetoric presented in the media suggest, refugees anyway did not (and still do not) want to stay in Croatia.

Although the Balkan migration route is closed, Croatia is seeing an increase of arrivals of refugees. Many of them are sent back from Austria, Slovenia and other countries to Croatia and are now residing at the reception centre for asylum seekers in Zagreb.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the media discourse of Croatian politicians on the refugees and to compare it with the “real” refugees: their concrete and individual stories. The latter will be done by conducting qualitative interviews with the persons who were sent from Austria to Croatia and who are currently waiting for the asylum decision in the Zagreb’s reception centre, so-called Hotel Porin.

Confrontation of these two perspectives might allow us to get a more informed insight of how “imagined” refugees are used in rising populist rhetoric of political elites and which consequences such rhetoric and related policy actions have on lives of “real”, individual refugees.



Rahela Jurković is a PhD student of ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. The area of her doctoral research is integration of refugees into Croatian society. She has been involved in the research of refugees since early 2015. Her research work on the subject includes the following: in June 2015 at the SIEF (*Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore*) Congress in Zagreb she held a presentation entitled “All of a sudden, people of all races and customs started to emerge”; in April 2016, at the 14th International “Border Crossings” Student Conference held in Zagreb, she presented a paper entitled “Chase for hope and certainty within Croatian initiative “Taste of Home””; in June 2016, at a Conference on Migration held in Zagreb she held a presentation “Integration of refugees in Croatia: confronting the policies and the reality”; and in November 2016 she presented a paper “Citizenship *de jure* vs. Integration *de facto*”, written in a co-authorship with Marijeta Rajković Iveta, at the international Conference on Contemporary Migration Trends and Flows on the Territory of Southeast Europe, held at Zagreb’s Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Rahela also holds two MA degrees in European studies (one of them from the College of Europe); an MA degree in marketing and BSc. degree in history of art and French language and literature.

4. Media Representation of Migration in Illiberal Times: The Case of Hungary and Austria

Jenna Althoff, Central European University

Abstract:

This paper looks at the representation of asylum seekers/migrants in the main 6 news outlets in Austria and Hungary respectively over a specific period of time by employing a mixed-method approach in a two-step research design (King, Keohane, Verba 1994): In a first part, it will lay out how those seeking refuge in the two countries and/or crossing their territories in search of refuge elsewhere, are portrayed in the media and what recurring themes and frames are applied to them. This preliminary analysis is based on the coding of a total of 1,691 news items covering the broader topic of refugees, and specifically 407 news items, covering three impactful events of the fall of 2015, namely the “death van”, the “refugee march”, and the border closure between Serbia and Hungary and the ensuing clash at the Röske camp.

Building on these, in the second part, special emphasis is then placed on the way expert knowledge is (not) used/portrayed in the (media representation of) public discourse and how those politicians that are given voice in the media appear as “crisis managers” of these events of “insecurity” by employing a language of insecurity and fear, drawing particularly on the works of Boswell (2005) and Huysmans (2006). A special recoding of a selection of 459 of the total number of news items has been applied for this part of the analysis. In the final part, the findings of framing, (non-)use of expert knowledge and insecurity management by politicians will be discussed in a wider context of power relations between the state and the media, and comparing the two case countries. It hence seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on “securitization” of migration in politics and media by connecting particularly the Copenhagen School (and its attention to acts of speech) to structural observations on media-state relations in (il)liberal states.



Jenna Althoff joined the Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations at the Central European University in 2011. In her thesis she explores transnational migration governance networks. For the academic year 2016/2017 she is an honorary resident fellow with the Center for Media, Data and Society with a project on technical expertise and governance knowledge on migration and its representation in print and online media. Additionally, she is the student chair of CEU's Migration Research Group.