

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES AND WOMEN AS SYMBOLS

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In my research I was focusing on the media representation of refugees, with a special focus on refugee women. I compared refugee's representation of the Yugoslav war in the 1990s, the 2015 refugee crisis and people fleeing because of the ongoing Russian-ukrainian war in 2022.

The topic is relevant and important since the media representation has an influence in Hungary on everything, because most of the topics what are happening in our country is deeply involved with politics, and the current government uses the(ir) media to overtalk any other narrative then its own.

I had some difficulties however, partly because of the media situation in Hungary, when collecting materials from the 21st century. I couldn't get access to the official public television's archive and also, I didn't have the resources to access the commercial channels. My decision was to turn to the most obvious source: the internet. During my 8 weeks at OSA I was systematically reviewing various sources and of course, also doing the same in the Archive.

CRISES

1990s

I was looking through the archive map and I was collecting videos and articles mentioning refugee, migrant, crisis, etc. key words.

I found that in the 90s refugees were taken for granted, accepted, there was no objectification (maybe sometimes when they were writing about rape camps it sounded like "suffering porn"), but otherwise it was clear and natural that refugees are people with whom one can and should empathise. It was also not a question if these people have a place and shelter in Hungary.

However, it was clear that in this setting, women can only be portrayed as victims – victims of the war, and they became the symbol of the Yugoslav war's brutality, they were the innocent people who got hurt, and they were symbolizing the countries, the peace, the innocent living human which are all getting destroyed. Rape was a main topic, in my opinion, through rape the media was trying to portray the brutality of the war. Also, their aim was to show the suffering. Biljana Kasic said that "in these wartime days, a lot of women have typical roles:

motoring, nursing, serving the military industry, expressing the stereotype that the nature of womanhood is to heal men's wounds" and this quote was the core of my analysis.

2015

The refugee crisis in 2015 in Hungary was a deeply weaponised topic in politics, and it is still until today. The media empire of the government was representing these people as the enemy, and the influence of this portraying was more serious than we thought of it in 2015. If we want to understand the Hungarian political situation, it's important to analyse this topic.

Even the media outlets who didn't support the government, were confused by their audience and their readers' expectation in representation. I think the readers of theirs were very divided: one part wanted to understand the situation from an exclusively human rights point of view, but the other part was scared and even though they didn't support the government's narrative, they agreed with closed borders and the whole immigrant-interpretation.

The representation part is clearly biased: in 2015 the media (government-supporting or not) basically didn't show women on their reports, only men. Even if they showed women, they were portrayed as different people from European, they were highlighting their clothes and their oppressed roles in a Muslim culture.

So their presentation was steeped in racism, but the people in Budapest (mostly in Budapest) had a different group, and therefore a lot of reaction has arrived, there were activism (protests, flash mobs, etc.), there were articles and of course, a lot of tension.

It is important to emphasise that the government called these people migrants, not refugees.

Also, they were showing and framing the refugees as they would be only aggressors, and – long before Covid-19 – they were represented as some kind of health threat (the Police were wearing masks and gloves, for example).

2022

I am talking about an ongoing war, and an ongoing representation, but in my research I narrowed myself to examine only the 2022 materials.

I found that they are showing mostly women, who are fair and blue-eyed mothers, being scared and hugging their children. They are shown as strong (because they were able to flee) but passive. Rape is not a topic, there were hardly any mentioning of rapes – even though when there is a war, there are rapes as weapon. Women in 2022 can only be victims, but there has to be some differentiation, since a lot of women were fleeing from Transcarpathia and they are a lot of times roma people. Since the Hungarian people has racist attitudes towards the Roma

population, they had to resolve this contradiction: roma families from Transcarpathia are “not real” refugees (just like the refugee vs. migrant narrative in 2015).

However, Hungary’s role is again the protective and shelter-providing country, but its attitude always changing a little bit. When in the government’s narrative Russia is bad, then the Ukrainian mothers are represented as victims, but when Russia is not even that bad, they change the narrative to a dry, “objective” representation, and they emphasis is on Hungary and how great is the government, how much we help.

There is also an interesting difference compared to the two previous crises: Hungary is not wishing to identify with the West as part of the European politics, so the power dynamics is politically unstable also because of this.

If we taking seriously the current government’s conservative picture of women, now the state should provide the “father’s role” since most of the refugees are single mothers, however it is a question if the government is slowly backing out of state provided support for refugees.

PRESIDENTS

1990

Also, I wanted to give context for my research, therefore I analysed what the Hungarian president had said in 1990, 2015 and 2022. What the presidents said really shows what the government thinks about the topic.

In 1990, Árpád Göncz was the president of Hungary. He said ““Hungary's absorption capacity and resources are finite, therefore President Árpád Göncz called for more effective foreign support in the refugee crisis in his speech at the Red Cross headquarters on Friday. Göncz said that the refugee crisis cannot be a police matter, and that results cannot be achieved by deporting asylum seekers, but by addressing the root causes of the problems. Árpád Göncz praised the social activities of the charity. "Only civilised giving can help, handouts are humiliating for both the receiver and the giver." (Magyar Nemzet, 1993. 05. 03. - The world has not left you alone). This really shows that the politics was emphasising with the victims of the war, and that he was sensitive and his thinking was focusing on the humanitarian issues.

2015

János Áder is the president, coming from the governing party. He says “Political refugees can come, economic migrants cannot” and he declares with this the (real or not real) difference between different people who are coming from the Middle-East. It was a very clear differentiation but in reality, it made it easy to understand and put a stamp on people because it had vague definition of these two categories.

2022

Katalin Novák is the president, and she says some things but it can happen that what the government does is not align with each other. Novák talks about peace which is the usual narrative of the government. She declared that “peace is the most important goal”.

REFLECTIONS

In my understanding, in the 90s the narrative connected to the crisis was about Hungary vs. the West, since the underlying understanding was that if people are fleeing from the East and they find shelter in Hungary, then Hungary is clearly the part of the West and not Eastern Europe. In 2015 the narrative centered around that there is a conflict of interest between Hungary and the European Union, because they are welcoming refugees but Hungary is “thinking rationally”. In 2022 it is mostly about Hungary vs. Russia, and how their relationship changing or how it gets interpreted.

The homeland-narrative, as I call it, is based on this quote: “Carpathian Basin belongs to those who will fill it” (Azé a Kárpát-medence, aki teleszüli)

In 1990 men and women were fleeing the war, but women are portrayed mostly with their children but the brutality of the war was out of question, so this was actually a totally understandable decision.

In 2015, they were doing the opposite: men were fleeing their country where there was (or still is) a war and they left their families.

In 2022 women are fleeing to save their children, men are staying at home to save their country, this really aligns with the Hungarian conservative picture of women.

Also, it is important to highlight the narrative about good muslims and bad muslims: in the 90s they were good muslims, but in 2015 they were bad muslims. There is a difference in media representation of the European and Middle-Eastern muslims, as well. It's important the

clarify that “bad muslim” means a terrorist in the media. I’m confident to say that in Hungary the government’s attitude towards the war is deeply effects on the representation of refugees.

It is also clear, that women can only be victims in every aspect. Even if we talk about the obvious (being a victim of a war, being a victim of rape) or we recognise the narrative of Middle-Eastern women who are going to be portrayed as victims of their oppressing male family members, culture, religion.

OUTSIDE OF REPRESENTATION

The government’s narrative on the war, in my opinion, desensitised the people, even though crises are happening simultaniously. We can’t see the bigger picture because it is fragmented by the constant – online – transmission, we only read the details sometimes, short bullet points from a day, but this way it doesn’t add up to something that can be analysed and interpreted. Therefore, it is much more stressful to keep up and to put all these information bits together, because the constant coverage makes it seem as if we are constantly in the loop (so we are a part of it, because it happens live), so after a while people just switch the news off, they stop watching, they want to get out of it. Compared it with the 90s when there were maybe 1 or 2 major articles, which gave the opportunity to make a comprehensive interpretation of what was happening, and it was easier and more comfortable to see the big picture.

FUTURE

My research is not a full one, since the problems with the access, however what I could find I analysed. I still think this is an ongoing research, so my plans contains an article and also an exhibition.

QUOTES

Magyar Hírlap, 29th of August, 1991. Emília Papp

“Among other things, the meeting was told that there are currently 3206 Yugoslav citizens seeking asylum in Hungary. However, the number of those who are actually residing in the country is estimated to be much higher, at around 12,000. ()

Subotica, December 1991 - In Yugoslavia, everyone can only lose. Excerpts from a lecture by György Kondrád in Freetown (Népszabadság, 14 Dec 1991) Pilcz Nándor

"Yugoslavia would be a good place for the introduction of dual citizenship, as there are numerous minorities living there. The West could also be freed from a great danger, the flood of refugees."

- *Új magyarország*, 6th of September, 1993.

"Apocalypse in Bosnia

Some 10,000 Muslim refugees have already crowded into Jablanica, where they fled Croatian persecution in western Herzegovina, UN officials have said. The refugees are in a terrible state, begging for food on the streets, most of them beaten up. Their food is almost unaffordable..."

SOURCES

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES AND WOMEN AS SYMBOLS Emma Krasznahorkai

In my research, I focused on the media representation of refugees, with a special focus on refugee women. I compared the representation of refugees during the Yugoslav war in the 1990s, the 2015 refugee crisis, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022.

The topic is relevant and important because media representation has a significant influence in Hungary, where most of the issues are deeply intertwined with politics, and the current government uses the media to promote its own narrative and silence other perspectives. However, I encountered difficulties in collecting materials from the 21st century due to the media situation in Hungary. I was unable to access the official public television's archive, and I lacked resources to access commercial channels. As a result, I had to rely on the internet (outside of the OSA Archive, of course) as the most accessible source during my 8 weeks at OSA, where I systematically reviewed various sources, including the Archive.

CRISES

1990s

I searched the archive map and collected videos and articles that mentioned refugees, migrants, crises, and other related keywords from the 1990s. I found that refugees were generally accepted and taken for granted during this time, without much objectification (although sometimes the media portrayed refugee camps as "suffering porn" when writing about rape camps). It was clear and natural that refugees were people who deserved empathy and that they had a place and shelter in Hungary.

However, in this setting, women were often portrayed as victims of the war, becoming symbols of the brutality of the Yugoslav war. They were depicted as innocent people who were hurt and represented the countries, the peace, and the innocent civilians being destroyed. Rape was a common topic in the media, and it was used to portray the brutality of the war. The media aimed to show the suffering of women. Biljana Kasic stated that " in these wartime days, a lot of women have typical roles: motoring, nursing, serving the military industry, expressing the stereotype that the nature of womanhood is to heal men's wounds," and this quote formed the core of my analysis.

2015

The refugee crisis in 2015 in Hungary was a highly politicized topic, and it remains so today. The government's media empire portrayed these people as enemies, and the impact of this portrayal was more significant than we realized in 2015. To understand the Hungarian political situation, it is important to analyze this topic.

Even media outlets that did not support the government were often confused by their audience's and readers' expectations in terms of representation. It seemed that their readers were divided: some wanted to understand the situation solely from a human rights perspective, while others were fearful and, although not supporting the government's narrative, agreed with closed borders and anti-immigrant interpretations.

The representation of refugees in the media in 2015 was clearly biased. Women were rarely shown in reports, and when they were, they were often portrayed as being different from Europeans, with a focus on their clothing and their oppressed roles in Muslim culture. The presentation of refugees was steeped in racism. However, in Budapest (and other places), there were other groups of people, and as a result, there were various reactions, including activism such as protests and flash mobs, as well as articles – but always a lot of tension.

It is important to note that the government referred to these people as migrants, not refugees. Additionally, refugees were often portrayed as aggressors, and even before Covid-19, they were represented as a health threat (evidenced by police wearing masks and gloves, for example).

2022

I am referring to an ongoing war and ongoing representation, but in my research, I have narrowed my focus to examining only the materials from 2022. I found that these materials predominantly depict fair and blue-eyed mothers who are scared and hugging their children. They are portrayed as strong (because they were able to flee), but passive. Rape is not a topic that is mentioned much, despite the fact that rape is often used as a weapon during times of war. Women in 2022 are only portrayed as victims, but there needs to be differentiation, as many women were fleeing from Transcarpathia, and they are often Roma people. Since the Hungarian people hold racist attitudes towards the Roma population, the narrative has to reconcile this contradiction: Roma families from Transcarpathia are considered "not real" refugees (similar to the refugee vs. migrant narrative in 2015).

However, Hungary's role is portrayed as that of a protective and shelter-providing country, but its attitude changes slightly depending on the government's narrative towards Russia. When Russia is bad, Ukrainian mothers are depicted as victims. But when Russia is not portrayed that bad, the narrative shifts to a dry, "objective" representation, with an emphasis on Hungary and how great the government is for providing help.

There is also an interesting difference compared to the two previous crises: Hungary does not wish to identify with the West as part of its European politics, and this creates political instability in the power dynamics.

If we take the current government's conservative view of women seriously, the state should now provide the "father's role," since most of the refugees are single mothers. However, it is questionable if the government is slowly withdrawing its support for state-provided assistance to refugees.

PRESIDENTS

1990

In order to provide context for my research, I also analyzed what the Hungarian president said in 1990, 2015, and 2022. In 1990, Árpád Göncz was the president of Hungary. He stated, "Hungary's absorption capacity and resources are finite, therefore President Árpád Göncz called for more effective foreign support in the refugee crisis in his speech at the Red Cross headquarters on Friday. Göncz said that the refugee crisis cannot be a police matter, and that results cannot be achieved by deporting asylum seekers, but by addressing the root causes of the problems. Árpád Göncz praised the social activities of the charity. 'Only civilized giving can help;

handouts are humiliating for both the receiver and the giver." (Magyar Nemzet, 1993. 05. 03. - The world has not left you alone). This shows that the politics of the time emphasized with the victims of the war, and that Göncz was sensitive to humanitarian issues.

2015 János Áder was the president, coming from the governing party. He said, "Political refugees can come, economic migrants cannot," thereby drawing a (real or perceived) distinction between different people coming from the Middle-East. This clear differentiation, however, made it easy to categorize and label people due to the vague definitions of these two categories.

2022 Katalin Novák is the current president, and while she makes certain statements, the actions of the government may not always align with her words. Novák speaks about peace, which is the usual narrative of the government. She declared that "peace is the most important goal."

REFLECTIONS

In my understanding, in the 90s, the narrative connected to the crisis was about Hungary vs. the West, as the underlying understanding was that if people were fleeing from the East and finding shelter in Hungary, then Hungary was clearly a part of the West and not Eastern Europe. In 2015, the narrative centered around the conflict of interest between Hungary and the European Union, as Hungary wasn't welcoming refugees and portrayed themselves as "thinking rationally." In 2022, it is mostly about Hungary vs. Russia and how their relationship is changing or being interpreted.

The homeland-narrative, as I call it, is based on this quote: "Carpathian Basin belongs to those who will fill it" (Azé a Kárpát-medence, aki teleszüli). In 1990, men and women were fleeing the war, but women were mostly portrayed with their children, and the brutality of the war was not questioned, so this was actually a completely understandable decision. In 2015, they were doing the opposite: men were fleeing their country where there was (or still is) a war and they left their families behind. In 2022, women are fleeing to save their children, while men are staying at home to save their country, which aligns with the Hungarian conservative picture of women.

It is also important to highlight the narrative about "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims": in the 90s, they were portrayed as "good Muslims," but in 2015, they were portrayed as "bad Muslims." There is also a difference in media representation of European and Middle Eastern Muslims. It's important to clarify that "bad Muslim" means a terrorist in the media. I am confident in saying that in Hungary, the government's attitude towards the war deeply affects the representation of refugees.

Furthermore, it is clear that women are portrayed as victims in every aspect. Whether we talk about the obvious, such as being a victim of war or being a victim of rape, or recognizing the narrative of Middle Eastern women who are portrayed as victims of their oppressive male family members, culture, and religion.

OUTSIDE OF REPRESENTATION

The government's narrative on the war, in my opinion, has desensitized the people, even though crises are happening simultaneously. We can't see the bigger picture because it is fragmented by the constant online transmission. We only read details sometimes, short bullet points from a day, but this way it doesn't add up to something that can be analyzed and interpreted. Therefore, it is much more stressful to keep up and put all these information bits together, because the constant coverage makes it seem as if we are constantly in the loop (so we are a part of it, because it happens live). After a while, people just switch the news off, they stop watching, they want to get out of it. Compare that with the 90s when there were maybe one or two major articles, which gave the opportunity to make a comprehensive interpretation of what was happening, and it was easier and more comfortable to see the big picture.

FUTURE

My research is not complete, as I encountered problems with access. However, I have analyzed what I could find. I still believe that this is an ongoing research, so my plans include an article and an exhibition.

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