



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Aleksei Teplov

Title: "Migration, Trafficking, Gender: Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis of States Along the Balkan Route in the post-2015 Refugee Crisis Environment"

Programme/year: MISS/2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/second reader): Mgr. Kledian Myftari

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	27
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	32
<i>Total</i>		80	66
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	9
	Style	5	5
<i>Total</i>	Formal requirements	5	4
		20	18
TOTAL		100	84

Evaluation

Major criteria:

Research Questions and Definition of Objectives

This thesis sets out to explore the complex intersection among migration, trafficking, and gender along the Balkan route over the course of the post-2015 refugee crisis. This goal is overall commendable, inasmuch as the topic is, at once, timely and contentious. The author, moreover, adeptly frames their research within the broader context of securitization and media discourse, with the thesis foregrounding the need to examine how issues of gender are



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represented in media coverage. There is no question as to the importance of the topic, and it is clear that the author has given a great deal of thought to their choice of focus.

Nonetheless, although the research questions are pertinent and could lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of gender in the refugee crisis, the study is considerably broad and overextended. By examining media coverage from a gender perspective across multiple countries and periods, the thesis attempts to cover too much ground, and hence, each issue is treated rather superficially. Had the author been more focused, the study would likely have been more thorough and impactful. For instance, the author may have chosen to focus on a specific aspect of media coverage or to study fewer countries. Probably the selection of both a more limited number of countries and a specific aspect of coverage would have been the ideal approach.

The literature review engages with various fields that are relevant to the study. These include discourse analysis, gender studies, and migration studies. The review, thus, covers a wide range of sources. Nonetheless, it does not engage deeply with any specific body of literature, and for this reason, the critical assessment of existing research is limited. This weakness contributes to the overextension which defines the entire thesis. There is also a disjunction between the literature referred to and the original analysis made in the thesis. A more solid connection between the two would have contributed to greater depth and focus. Finally, the literature review fails to sufficiently cover diverse *national* studies on media coverage of the refugee crisis. This may have been a challenge due to the diverse languages at play. Nonetheless, it would have provided a richer context for understanding how the phenomenon has been addressed across diverse national contexts. Such an approach could have given the thesis a far greater role within the existing body of research on this issue. Its unique contribution would thus have been better highlighted.

Theoretical/conceptual framework

The theoretical framework upon which the thesis draws is clearly one of its strengths. It draws upon Foucault's post-structural ideas as well as upon feminist theory. In this respect, such a choice should have helped position the thesis on the liminal turf between political science and cultural studies, which would help increase both its readership and impact. This choice of mediations is well justified, given the focus on discourse and power relations promised by the research questions. These theoretical perspectives are especially apt for examining the construction and management of gender and migration narratives during the crisis. In this regard, it is clear that the author has given considerable thought in choosing the theoretical framework of the thesis. However, as in the case with the literature review, there is a disconnect between the theoretical concepts and the empirical analyses. There is a notable lack of explanation as to how these abstract ideas, as relevant as they may be, will be operationalized in the analysis. In other words, what are the observable explanations that indicate the correctness of the author's application of theory? What are we, as readers, to witness and learn if the theoretical propositions are correct?



Methodology, Analysis. Argument

The methodological section is the most problematic aspect of the thesis. The author proposes a critical discourse analysis using van Leuwen's discursive strategies. This may well be a possible choice of a methodology appropriate to the research questions. However, one must consider whether or not it was the best approach. Alternative methodological approaches, such as Framing Theory or Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), might have been more effective for analyzing media framing of gender, the perception of threats, and the "us vs. them" dynamic. These methodological approaches would have been very appropriate to the theoretical framework based on post-structuralism and feminism. Overall, there is a lack of detail as to how this methodology is implemented. There is no adequate explanation as to how the data was collected, coded, and analyzed. This disconnect between the theoretical framework chosen and the methodology actually used undermines the coherence of the research design.

The analysis section does indeed provide a wide-ranging examination of media coverage across the selected countries and periods, identifying important patterns in the representation of gender and migration. However, the depth and focus of the analysis are inconsistent. Some parts of the analysis are dense and difficult to follow, with an overwhelming amount of detail that can obscure the main arguments. It is, hence, difficult for the reader to discern the relationship between the analysis and the stated theoretical perspectives. The analysis occasionally deviates from the central focus on media discourse, venturing into broader discussions of government policies and public opinion. While these are relevant, they detract from the thesis's primary aim and create a somewhat disjointed narrative. Finally, the inclusion of sources such as BIRN, which were not originally outlined in the methodology, raises questions about the consistency of the analysis. In sum, the analysis sections of the thesis perpetuate the consistent lack of focus which began with the literature review.

The conclusion successfully summarizes the key findings and attempts to tie them back to the research questions. The author effectively highlights the persistence of gendered stereotypes and the limited progress in media representations of migrants over time, offering valuable recommendations for future research and policy, particularly in what concerns the need for more gender-sensitive approaches in media coverage and migration policies.

MINOR CRITERIA:

Sources – The sources are very well chosen and are appropriate for the topic and approach. Of course, were the thesis to have been more focused, the sources would logically have been balanced differently. Nonetheless, there are a solid number of peer-reviewed sources combined with other sources, which offers a solid literature basis upon which the thesis builds. A minor concern regarding the use of BIRN has been addressed under the Methodological discussion above.



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Style –The author makes solid and consistent use of their chosen citation style, APA.

Formal Requirements – There are grammatical errors, many involving the use of definite and indefinite articles, which are concepts that, indeed, take many years to master. The language register is problematic. While on the one hand, some statements are overly convoluted, others are extremely simplistic and sophomoric. At times, the obvious is overstated.

It is necessary to point out one statement that undermines the significance of the findings of the thesis. It reads, “The analysis of sources from Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia combined with the Balkan-wide newspaper, enabled this study to discover various discursive strategies to illustrate the migration experience for millions of English people.” The adverbial modifier, “for millions of English people” is misplaced and renders the sentence disturbingly ambivalent. The thesis does not deal with the migration of English people. If we assume that “English” refers to readers, the statement is still problematic. It suggests that the potential readers of the thesis are mainly British. Moreover, the notion of “millions of English people” implies that the thesis will be a best-seller. The sentence could have read, “The analysis of sources from Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, combined with a Balkan-wide newspaper, enabled this study to convey to English-speakers the migration experiences along the Balkan route.” This statement needs to be corrected to accurately reflect the content and scope of the study.

ASSESSMENT OF PLAGIARISM:

The author has cited meticulously, and there appears to be no evidence of plagiarism.

Overall evaluation:

Aleksei Teplov’s thesis addresses a critical and timely issue. The strengths of the thesis lie in its relevance, its robust theoretical framework, and its detailed analysis of media discourses. However, the thesis is weakened by methodological issues, an overly ambitious scope, and a lack of critical engagement with the literature. These deficiencies render the thesis extremely broad and lacking in depth and focus.

To improve the thesis, the author could have narrowed the focus, provided more detailed methodological explanations, and engaged more critically with the theoretical and empirical literature. Despite these shortcomings, the thesis offers valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of migration and trafficking in the context of the Balkan route and contributes meaningfully to ongoing debates in migration studies, gender studies, and discourse analysis.



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Suggested grade: B

Signature: *KLEDIAN MYFTARI*

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