



EWI Fellowship Research Programme

**THE VISIBILITY OF WOMEN THEOLOGIANS IN
CROATIAN MEDIA DURING THE 2020 PANDEMIC**

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Abstract

Contemporary media in the social context, on the one hand, represent places of discussion, of expression of different attitudes and creation of opposing opinions and, on the other hand, they are platforms for creating a diverse array of content available to dispersed users, regardless of the users' individual interests and/or requirements. During the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic, the media have proven to be a necessary convergent platform for the transmission of important and valuable information on the virus and the COVID-19 disease to the public, a place of encounter, dialogue, but also of numerous controversies.

The context of social circumstances as manifested on the example of the global coronavirus pandemic is used to illustrate the significance of the media by providing answers to the following questions: are women (theologians) marginalised and partly stereotypically presented by the media, or do media (workers) themselves participate in the creation of certain social norms through direct or indirect suggestion? This empirical study focuses on media reports/press articles in the first six months of 2020 from: the Catholic weekly Glas Koncila (Voice of the Council), the content posted on the official website of the Catholic Press Agency (Croat. Informativna katolička agencija, IKA), reports within the religious programme of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT and convergent content published in online versions of Croatia's most popular daily newspapers: Jutarnji list (The Morning Paper) and Večernji list (The Evening Paper).

A quantitative content analysis was conducted to establish visibility i.e. to show how much space is given in the media analysed to women theologians and believers (as discussion partners) during the pandemic, with particular regard to their contributions on topics related to the coronavirus and to the specific issues addressed in this context, including whether and in what way content on issues of peace, interreligious dialogue and human rights advocacy received (the deserved) media attention.

Keywords: *contemporary media, reporting, women theologians, women, the coronavirus pandemic*

Introduction

The paper primarily addresses the question how visible women theologians, their work and words are in the Croatian media, including who speaks on behalf of religious communities in media reports, and how much. In particular, the empirical study focuses on media reports¹/press articles² that were broadcast i.e. published in the first six months of 2020, during the outbreak and rapid proliferation of the coronavirus pandemic³, including articles in the most popular and influential Catholic weekly *Glas Koncila*, and content posted on the official website of the Catholic Press Agency (IKA), as two media owned by the Catholic Church, a fact that is indirectly reflected in their editorial policies, content selection, as well as in their methods and reporting styles. The paper also presents an analysis of content broadcast in TV and radio shows within the religious programme of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT⁴, which have an ecumenical and interreligious note, as well as of the content published in online versions⁵ of Croatia's most popular daily newspapers: *Jutarnji list* (The Morning Paper) and *Večernji list* (The Evening Paper).

Reporting through the prism of the pandemic

The wave of outbreak, proliferation, impact and the consequences of the pandemic recognised so far, which, according to certain findings, was first recorded back in November 2019 and intensified globally as of January 2020⁶, has, among other things, raised numerous

¹ The unit of audio-visual content analysis is content broadcast in TV and radio shows within the religious programme of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT as well as content published on the online platforms *jutarnji.hr* and *vecernji.tv*.

² The term 'press article' is an approximate translation of the Croatian *napis*, which the *Croatian Encyclopaedic Dictionary* defines as a "newspaper text that falls under no binding notions of style, length or topic" (Jojić et al., 2003:791), so it is used here as a general term referring to the text itself and all the associated graphics i.e. visual features (titles, headings, captions, frames, photographs and infographics).

³ Herein: the pandemic

⁴ *Duhovne misli* (Spiritual Thoughts), *Susret u dijalogu* (Encounter in Dialogue), *Mali Radio Vjeronauk* (Little Radio Catechism), *Riječ i Život* (The Word and Life), *Ekumenizam i religija* (Ecumenism and Religion), *Mir i dobro* (Peace and Good), *Pozitivno* (Positive), *te Zajedno u duhu* (Together in Spirit).

⁵ The assumption is that during the coronavirus pandemic, media content was more accessible virtually than buying print editions of newspapers.

⁶ Georgiou, Aristos: "It's Been Exactly One Year Since the First Case of COVID Was Found in China", *Newsweek*, 17 November 2020.

The first media report on the topic in Croatia was recorded on the web portal *vecernji.hr*, on 14. January 2020.

issues within the public discourse and stirred up as many controversies – shaped by different theories and perspectives – and has globally united, but at the same time divided the public on a number of decisions and issues, many of which remain unanswered and/or unresolved at the point of writing this paper. Furthermore, public criticism was also targeted at questioning (international) political views and common solutions concerning the guidelines and decisions aimed at the global containment of the virus. Accordingly, many countries were also forced to adopt a number of ‘internal recommendations and guidelines’ regarding the rapid spread and transmission of the virus among the population and the crisis that ensued as a result.

Consequently, many spheres of social and political activity have been affected by the pandemic. On the one hand, more intensive and somewhat different public communication and treatment of public relations with citizens by the authorities and responsible stakeholders has been observed, as well as a certain change in style of media reporting and, at the same time, special treatment of certain actors, i.e. users⁷ in the media space. According to the results of the conducted study, religious communities have in this context, on the other hand, turned out to be quite an unattractive participant in the (secular) media discourse, including the debate and coordination on certain controversial issues and implicit decisions that touched on (the protection of) human rights. Moreover, the media have played a significant role in the way they framed the pandemic, by creating and pushing a terminology that explicitly presented the virus as *mysterious*, *lethal* and *deadly*, ignoring the recommendations of experts and professional associations⁸ who pointed out that any ‘emotional tinge’, ideological overtones or value-laden media messages create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among the public. Given the movement restrictions and the consequent difficulties in the production and circulation of print

⁷ The terms ‘citizen, actor and user’ are herein used to refer to both genders (male and female), and to both grammatical numbers (singular and plural). Thus, the words ‘citizen, actor and user’ should be read as saying female and male citizen/citizens, female and male actor/actors and female and male user/users, which applies equally to all other terms used in this paper.

⁸ Reporting on the coronavirus should be done accurately, responsibly and carefully; only accurate and verified sources should be used, while any sensationalist language or vague terminology that could fuel panic or fear should be avoided, as media coverage reflects and affects the public fear from the pandemic (Electronic Media Council, Croatian Journalists’ Association, 27 February 2020). Similarly, journalists are required to be precise in reporting, to use verified sources, challenge myths, respect privacy, use understandable terms, not to discriminate against people who have coronavirus, to avoid sensationalism in reporting, encourage readers/listeners/viewers to stay healthy by avoiding ways to get infected (UNICEF, 2020); to promote and strengthen the right to information (UNESCO, 2020).

editions of (daily) newspapers, online versions of newspapers and social media⁹ have served as a platform for the rapid (but also uncontrolled) dissemination of (false) information and (fake) news, resulting in manipulations by and of the media (Jurčić, 2017) that have become and remain a prominent controversy. In this regard, insufficient/unverified/inaccurate information which they presented concerning, among other things, the consequences of COVID-19, and the context and reasons for introducing certain measures, may also have given rise to prejudices against the people affected by the disease, but also against those responsible for such decisions, resulting in stigma and blame regarding the transmission and further spread of the virus.

At the level of the European Union, such a string of events merely highlighted the problem of “dysfunctional and fragmented” Union policies in relation to political decisions, which in turn deeply impacted the overall situation in the Republic of Croatia¹⁰, especially the (sometimes sharp) public debate associated with a number of social, political and religious implications, and the media coverage of other topics. The discord in attitudes and public statements resulted in a partial division of society on the issue of health care and at the same time in increased advocacy of universal rights, (interfaith) dialogue and peace issues, especially concerning the visibility of religious communities and other prominent individuals in addressing the potential issues of deteriorating economic circumstances and/or different forms of discrimination, not only based on membership of a particular social group, but also particularly in cases of disease.

Women theologians as media subject(s) and media actors

In view of the above, it is extremely important to observe and define the role and responsibility of the media in the process of presentation of certain subjects or, in the context of this paper, of women theologians, as it is clear that the media play a central role in informing the public on the pandemic, which in this study served as a contextual framework for the presentation of the position and visibility of women theologians and religious scholars. In this

⁹ Social media are defined as (Van Dijck, 2013: 4) a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Although they were originally created as applications, José van Dijck (2013: 7) notes that they have undergone a transformation into self-communication platforms which, rather than being finished products, are dynamic objects that are adjusted in response to their users’ needs and their owners’ objectives, but also in reaction to competing platforms and the larger technological and economic infrastructure through which they develop.

¹⁰ Herein: Croatia

context it is worth noting that in 2015 Pope Francis, speaking about the role of women in the Church and society in general, noted that “the time has come for women no longer to feel as guests, but as full participants in the various occasions of social and ecclesiastical life”. This paper addresses the same issue in the context of the social situation in Croatia, as manifested on the example of the pandemic, by examining, for the purposes of illustration, the situation in the media through the following questions: are women theologians marginalised in the media, i.e., have the media been (un)biased and (un)professional in this regard, and has the media space devoted to women been in line with the regulations stipulated by the Code of Honour of the Croatian Journalists’ Association? Further to the statement of the head of the Catholic Church, and given the significant role that contemporary media¹¹ play in the social context, not merely as sources of information, but rather as (contemporary) places of discussion, of expression of different attitudes and creation of opposing opinions, and at the same time as platforms for creating a diverse array of content available to dispersed users regardless of their individual interests, the media are viewed in this paper as a mirror of society (Mataušić, 2001:361-379) that simultaneously reflects and affects both social and political currents, i.e. as the main sources of information on the political and public sphere and one of the factors influencing the formation of individual identities (Pavličková, Nyre and Jurišić, 2014:231). The image of those affected by the coronavirus in media discourse is mostly based on labelling them as *different others*, while the decisions on the adoption of measures and guidelines are seen as *acts of judgement* (Wright, 2002:64-65) reducing the possibility of the actors (the affected i.e. diseased) to appear in media reports on their own behalf, as well as limiting the opportunities for media appearances of those advocating equal human rights, including women theologians. In reporting on the pandemic, the media – which, among other things, shape the public opinion and influence political decisions on all levels – have contributed to an atmosphere of polarisation in society (Zambonini, 2009). In this regard, this empirical study seeks to demonstrate the consistencies and controversies in reporting on the research subject based on a quantitative analysis of published content.

Starting from the assumption that religious communities and, in turn, theological approaches are often marginalised in secular media reports, and partly even marked by political connotations (Bulović, 2004:172), and that the voices of women believers, especially those

¹¹ Within the context of this paper, the term contemporary media refers to “mass media, mobile phones and other contemporary digital technology tools” (Teurlings, 2010).

educated in the field of theology, are not heard enough in the Croatian press, and in religious journals in particular, this paper, inter alia, aims to examine the visibility of women theologians in Croatian media, including their advocacy of human rights, interfaith dialogue and social peacebuilding during the coronavirus pandemic in the first six-month period of 2020. Finally, the results of the study will also be observed in the context of social responsibility and credibility of the media, both of which imply a dimension of mutual trust (Bauer, 2007:30).

The visibility of religious communities and women theologians in the media

According to the last census in 2011, believers make up the majority of the Croatian population. Most of them (86.28 %) declare themselves as members of the Catholic Church, 4.44 % state to be members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, while 1.47 % are Muslim believers (Central Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, 2013:114). The Catholic Church, as numerous studies and reviews show, has for many years been the institution most trusted by citizens in Croatia¹² (Čuvalo, 2010), which allows us to conclude that both female and male theologians should be granted access to secular and religious media alike, in order to address the social reality from an interdisciplinary standpoint.

Equally, expanding the media space would clearly affect the replication of biases, contradictions, prejudices and social stereotypes regarding gender ideology¹³, gender roles¹⁴, gender stereotypes¹⁵ and the position enjoyed by women in contemporary society, including, in particular, what Anne Louise Eriksson addresses through the theory of feminist politics on the purpose of women in theology (Eriksson, 2016, as cited in: Jutta et al., 2016). Women are thus, stereotypically, (still) assigned the role of mothers and housewives, while men are

¹² *Compare*, according to research on the image of the journalists' profession and trust in the media among Croatian citizens, a generally low level of trust in the media has been expressed (Črpić and Mataušić, 1998). Accordingly, journalism was placed at the end of the list of most respected professions (Kanižaj and Skoko, 2010, Digital News Report, 2017; 2018).

¹³ Danijela Rupčić, member of the Council for Family and Life of the Croatian Bishops' Conference, states that by its very definition the term gender ideology partly negates biological determinants as the sole basis for determining the sexual identity of human beings (Croatian Bishops' Conference, "Male and Female He Created Them", 15th October 2014).

¹⁴ The concept of gender refers to social, cultural and historical differences between women and men and includes the different social roles, identities and expectations for women and men in society (Kamenov and Galić, 2011: 11).

¹⁵ Women are traditionally expected to be primarily mothers and housewives, while men as heads of the family are responsible to provide for the family financially (Fotak, 2015:26).

“predetermined” to rule the public sphere in the broader sense¹⁶. Gender stereotypes often develop by observing the distribution of women and men in occupations within the public sphere. A common way such observations occur is through the selection of experts or sources appearing in media content and/or space, which may influence gender roles and content choices (Armstrong and Nelson, 2005:820).

As will be demonstrated below, the results of our empirical study showed that, in the midst of the pandemic, religious topics, issues and views, which should appropriately be addressed and discussed by women theologians, have in the media been personally framed¹⁷ through the role of Alemka Markotić, director of the University Hospital for Infectious Diseases “Dr. Fran Mihaljević” and practicing believer, whose public appearances (for the most part in secular media) often touched on issues of faith and the purpose and importance of Catholic teachings in the lives of individuals.

It should be noted that although such selective media visibility of women is therefore considered to be a form of modern discrimination (Hermes, 2012), the representation of women in the media is, nonetheless, still mainly reduced to their participation in trivial activities and alternative roles (Višnjić, Miroslavljević 2008:251), with their right to public appearances dosed and timed, while more objective and relevant forms of media reporting, such as those focusing on information and education, mostly remain reserved for men (Leinert Novosel, 2018; Wood, 2011). Despite the fact that the Declaration of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which has since 1954 been proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists, calls for awareness “of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media” and for utmost avoidance of discrimination based on sex, race and/or religion, the findings of a study conducted in 2017 show that precisely such framing has been a common practice in Croatia’s most read daily newspapers *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list*, where women tend to be featured in the context of so-called *light (female) topics*, representing them almost exclusively through motherhood, family and the household sphere, emphasising their physical bodies and appearance, defining them as members of the weaker sex, and all the while insisting on the

¹⁶ “Perceptions, experiences and attitudes on gender-based discrimination in the Republic of Croatia” (Gender Equality Office, Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2009).

¹⁷ From an academic standpoint, journalists’ news and information selection is often explained through the study of the gatekeeping function, the theory of newsworthiness (i.e. news value theory), journalistic bias and the framing theory approach.

division between female and male labour i.e. (household) duties (Majstorović and Vilović, 2017).

Gender equality is hence one of the values and objectives promoted by the European Union, which is fundamental to the modern legal order and modern democracy and continues to represent a vital element for the transformation of society “that would ensure the revitalisation of democracy and enrich the society in all walks of life” (Leinert Novosel, 1999:234).

In this regard, offering (a broader) media space to women believers, and those educated in the field of theology in particular, would mean expanding the dimension of openness and equality in media discourse, which numerous church documents have so far encouraged (Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women, 1995; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002:10; Vrhovski Peran, 2013:256-257).

Such reflections were also supported by the conclusions of the academic symposium on *Religious Topics in the Croatian Media Space*¹⁸. Representatives of religious communities (the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, the Beth Israel Jewish community and the Baptist Church) pointed out that theologians, and especially women theologians, are underrepresented in the Croatian media and that media reporting has generally lost in quality and analytic approach, focusing on fast news and sensationalist and trivial content. According to Peter Dahlgren, the delicate balance between public responsibility and private profit has over the past few decades been steadily tipping in favour of the latter. Faced with the harsh market imperatives that increasingly ‘bulldoze’ over journalistic values and quality content, the media environment and journalism continue to drift further from the traditional ideals of the profession (2010: 5).

On the one hand, institutional and technological changes have directly influenced structural changes within the profession, and have, ultimately, indirectly led to the dependence on the increasing industry of advertisers and owners. On the other hand, the rapid development of digital and communication technology has also affected the media content itself; journalists are working harder than ever before, meeting shorter deadlines and formatting content for several media platforms simultaneously, while the “rapid popularisation of news is ultimately resulting

¹⁸ Held on 4 May 2017 in the organisation of the Communication Sciences Department of the Catholic University of Croatia in Zagreb.

in tabloidization” (Car, 2009: 146) and increasing sensationalism of news content. If it wishes to survive within the (contemporary) economic and technological order and remain a socially relevant segment of society, today’s journalism must be able to convey a large amount of information extremely quickly and efficiently. On that note, we may pose the question what kinds of (new) information these are? – that form the basis of an entire epoch in the neologism of “the Information Age, an extension of sorts to the Industrial” (Luhmann, 1995: 42), and represent the backbone of what Manuel Castells calls ‘the network society’, in which “networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture” (Castells, 2000: 493).

In this regard, Pablo Boczkowski examines the transformation of information through the influence of technology and the numerous changes it has brought to the daily practice of journalism, causing a tendency for “mimicry” i.e. copying content, and as such, altering the very the essence of relations between equivalent media and their competition, and allowing “materiality to set the parameters for journalistic practice” (Boczkowski, as cited in: Zelizer, 2009: 56-67). Similarly, according to some authors, it is digital technology that has blurred the line between journalists and other media workers. “Newsroom managers need to think of ways to embrace this shift without losing their commitment to quality news products” (Sagan, 1997, as cited in: Pavlik, 2001: 129).

In this sense, the trivialisation of public discourse is also closely linked to the partial ghettoization of religious topics, which are reserved exclusively for specialised TV/radio shows and feature segments, and the problem of promoting stereotypes about religious communities and women theologians, who are generally not given equal media treatment and space in daily newspapers. According to Dragan Radić, PhD, a deacon of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a common problem of miscommunication between (secular) media, religious communities and theologians lies in the fact that “the media mostly address religious officials on questions which the religious community is not invited to answer”, asking (women) theologians to take a stand on such matters. They are asked to comment on political, historical and economic problems and events, while it is the mission of the church to talk about the gospel. Journalists who address the Serbian Orthodox Church on such matters are often not familiar with this community, so all information ends up being reduced to rituals, tradition and customs (IKA news, 19/2017: 7-8).

The attitude of the majority Catholic Church towards the media is based on the belief that contemporary media are “marvellous instruments and gifts of God that can be used for good and for evil” (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2000: 18). The chief aims of social communication and of all the means it uses should be “the unity and advancement of men living in society” (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002: 2), while the role of religious media, according to church documents, is to break through prejudice and economic, political and cultural barriers among people and nations (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 2002: 2). Therefore, the content analysed in our study also includes articles and online reports from two media owned by the Catholic Church, which is indirectly reflected in their editorial policies, content selection, as well as in their methods and reporting styles.

Over the past three years, the activities of religious communities and the voices of women theologians in the field of human rights, interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding in the Croatian secular media have been particularly focused on issues of reception and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and on the protection of the poor and disenfranchised members of society (Peran and Raguž, 2017). Thus, some religious organisations distinguished themselves in humanitarian work during the so-called migrant crisis which affected Southeast Europe, most notably Caritas, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) – which was awarded a special prize by the European Parliament for their work and commitment to the refugee cause – as well as the Baptist Refugee Service and the Islamic Community in Croatia (Croatian Caritas, 2017). This is why a part of our empirical study is dedicated to establishing the link between the activities of religious communities and the visibility of women theologians in discussions on the pandemic, as it is essential to systematically analyse and examine how gender (in)equality issues are constructed and addressed at the social level, i.e. to gain insight into the intensity of the role played by modern media and media reporting in achieving equal gender representation of women and men theologians, and the ways in which this role is fulfilled.

The issue of the Christian response to the pandemic was addressed by the head of the Catholic Church on several occasions, especially in video messages and at prayer events¹⁹,

¹⁹ See “I u tišini naših gradova odjeknut će Evandjelje Uskrsa (In the silence of our cities, the Easter Gospel will resound)” IKA, <https://ika.hkm.hr/novosti/papa-izolirani-smo-ali-pomozimo-jedni-drugima-kreativnom-ljubavlju/> (IKA, 3 April 2020).

when he called for “creativity of unity” and “creativity of love”. Speaking on these occasions, the Pope encouraged and emphasised the idea of caring for those affected by the disease, of protecting their human dignity, and of relieving medical workers of any pressures.

According to the Pope, socially responsible media should be the voice of all members of society and provide timely access to information, to all those who depend in part on such information, i.e. to those who recreate media content. Finally, journalism ethics and the ethics of responsibility, which will be discussed in the following part of the paper, should be the starting point of all professional media reporting in accordance with the Code of Honour of the Croatian Journalists’ Association²⁰.

Ethical and professional media reporting standards

The ethics of responsibility as part of (applied) journalism and/or media ethics make an extremely important part of the journalists’ profession, their daily activities and responsibility towards the public and published content, but ultimately towards themselves as well. Steven J. A. Ward (2011: 54-55) states that only such responsible conduct enables the fulfilment of the relevant ethical principles of journalism. This further indicates the need for responsible action of journalists towards the public, which involves exercising self-regulation and restraining their own freedom according to the consequences of their reporting for others. This, in turn, leads us to presume that responsible media workers are those who attempt to minimise harm to consumers of media content in their work, by taking responsibility for their own actions. Therefore, as Melita Poler Kovačić notes, journalism ethics primarily requires media workers to show respect for every human being (1998), which in this particular case includes respect for the right to privacy of individuals affected by the disease, for equal visibility of women theologians as compared to their fellow experts from other fields, as well as for their right to freely address the issues of protection of rights and peace. Such conduct of journalists is based

²⁰ Article 15: “Special care, caution and responsibility are required when reporting on suicides, accidents, personal tragedies, illnesses, deaths and acts of violence. A journalist should avoid interviewing and showing people who are directly or indirectly affected by these events, except in the case of exceptional public interest. In this case, a journalist is required to respect the honour, reputation and dignity of the persons on whom he/she is reporting.” (“Croatian Journalists’ Code of Honour”, *Croatian Journalists’ Association*, <https://www.hnd.hr/dokumenti>, 27 November 2009).

on the ethical principles and professional standards of journalism which include: “true, accurate, fair, impartial and balanced reporting” (Malović, 2005:18) and an objective and ethical approach, regardless of the individual aspects of communicators and media content (Kunczik and Zipfel, 2006:144). It is therefore that Ward notes that although democracy requires free media which provide diverse and accessible channels for public communication on various topics (2011:107), ethical postulates must not be ignored and/or set aside in the everyday work of journalists.

Content tabloidisation and the sensationalist approach²¹ to information processing have primarily contributed to the continuous decline of professional and ethical standards in journalism but have also cast doubt on the credibility and trustworthiness of journalistic sources, journalists and the media alike. And it is precisely through sensationalism – by disproportionate and exaggerated media coverage of certain content²² – in addition to personalised²³ framing of news, that the attention of the audience is attracted and ‘competitors – users’ are faced with a new task – to offer even more of trivial content, in order to keep the ‘tension’ high and maintain the audience’s interest. There are, however, opposite views, such as the one held by Gans, who recognises the simplification of both presentation and content as a certain kind of advantage in “electronic democracy”. He points out that simplification is both a skill and a science that requires the ability to make decisions and discern between relevant and less relevant information as these engage the audience’s emotions and empathy, which again make for so-called “good journalism”, especially in circumstances where the Internet has made news content available to a broader, globally dispersed audience, demanding journalists to be able to explain events in as simple and unified a manner as possible, making their contexts universally understandable (2009, as cited in: Zelizer, 2009: 25 and 48).

Furthermore, although objectivity is necessary, it is quite difficult to achieve²⁴, so impartiality imposed itself as a constructive solution and one of the essential cornerstones of

²¹ By relying on shock and awe tactics, it aims to elicit powerful emotions and empathy from the audience (Kitch, 2009; as cited in: Zelizer, 2009: 30), which has especially been observed in reporting on the pandemic.

²² (Jergović and Raguž, 2014: 44)

²³ By focusing on the “ordinary man” who is personally affected by news events, news are personalised, thus making it easier for readers/viewers/listeners to identify with them (Tuchman, as cited in: Kitch, 2009; as cited in: Zelizer, 2009: 39), and such a personalised view of the world is much more contextualised, textured and multidimensional (Pavlik, 2001: 22-40).

²⁴ Numerous authors, however, point out that objectivity should nevertheless be aspired (Cf. Bagdikian, 1971; Hall, 1982; Jensen, 1992; Tillinghast, 1984).

contemporary journalism, which demands journalists to keep a neutral point of view, favouring none of the (opposing) sides (Malović, 2005: 42) and providing equal media treatment to all the actors involved. This, however, implies that, when it comes to forms of media reporting²⁵ that are not intended to provide commentary, the journalists' personal attitudes must not be reflected in their reporting. Along these lines, Ward argues that news objectivity, as an element of impartiality, is "a narrow form of epistemological objectivity that required a strictly neutral reporting of 'just the facts'" (2011: 128). If we were to translate this into the context of public communication on the pandemic, we could interpret objective reporting on the pandemic as such including nothing but facts – and excluding any expression of personal attitudes and opinions by journalists or authors of media reports/articles. William Rivers points out that objectivity in the conditions of contemporary global distribution of news is more frequent and reciprocal to the increasing expansion of media workers' professional skills and their respect for the principles of social responsibility (1988). Balance, in turn, represents a professional requirement of journalism for "representation of all parties in a conflict or event being reported on". Stjepan Malović therefore points out that "a journalist must report on an event in such a way as to give all parties an opportunity to say what happened and why" (2005: 37-38). Finally, it is only the presentation of multiple views on the same issue that can imply a journalist's impartiality and attempt at objectivity (Raguž, 2011: 198), which will also be addressed through the interpretation of the content analysis findings, in accordance with the guidelines of professional associations regarding the standards of reporting in circumstances of the rapid proliferation of the pandemic presented above.

Given the subject matter of the study, the phase of operationalisation shall with particular regard also focus on the questions whether media workers adhered to some of the ethical standards of journalism previously mentioned (impartiality, objectivity, balance) in order to contribute to the openness and diversity of public dialogue within the democratic system that, in the context of visibility of women theologians in the media, applied the practices of professional equality and zero media discrimination, or whether journalists and editors ignored

²⁵ Media workers express themselves in different ways, through media genres or forms that can be divided into two general categories. In relation to the type of media practice, a distinction is made between media forms based on monologue and such based on dialogue, whereas in the modern age mixed-genre or cross-genre forms are the most common.

the professional and ethical approach in favour of unprofessional reporting and of providing limited or no space to women theologians?

Research methodology

Research objectives, hypotheses and methods

The context of the social situation in Croatia, as manifested on the example of the global coronavirus pandemic, shall be used to examine and illustrate the significance of the media, by providing answers to the following questions: are women (theologians) marginalised and partly stereotypically presented by the media, or do media (workers) themselves participate in the creation of certain social norms through (in)direct suggestion? Based on the research questions raised, the objective of the study is to determine the visibility i.e. space given in the media analysed to women theologians and believers (as discussion partners) during the pandemic in the first six months of 2020, with particular regard to their contributions on topics related to the coronavirus and to the specific issues addressed in this context.

In line with the objectives and research questions set forth, four research hypotheses shall be examined:

1. in reporting on the research subject, the media analysed violated at least one of the fundamental principles of journalism: objectivity (integrity), balance and/or impartiality
2. there is a significant difference in media representation of women theologians as compared to their male counterparts in the media analysed
3. women theologians were not given (any) media space in the secular media during the coronavirus pandemic
4. in their articles and online reports, the Catholic media achieve the visibility of women theologians in their advocacy of human rights, interfaith dialogue and peace in Croatian media discourse.

In order to confirm or refute the hypotheses set forth above, a quantitative content analysis has been conducted, which due to its specificities represents an appropriate method in social

research, allowing the characteristics of textual and/or visual material (of a large number of texts) to be expressed in quantitative values, which then indicate the total proportion (i.e. share) of the characteristics observed in a sample selected from a particular population (Lamza-Posavec, 2006: 152). Similarly, the method quantifies various verbal or nonverbal messages, according to their content and formal characteristics, comparing the content based on differences within the text, and in accordance with the rules predefined by researchers (Zvonarević, 1981:148). Furthermore, Ole R. Holsti points out that the use of quantitative content analysis also enables drawing conclusions based on systematic and objective characteristics of the media message analysed (1969: 14; as cited in Jergović and Raguž, 2014: 39), thus giving an additional advantage through “its potential to identify developments over long time periods” (Wimmer and Dominick, 2010: 161).

A longitudinal study of media content offers insight into cultural transformations: “the emergence of certain topics, their evolution into more professional scholarly discussions, their dismissal in favour of other topics and debates, the emergence of new participants in defining and discussing particular problems, and the disappearance of some others, and may [ultimately]²⁶ represent a way to examine how certain issues are constructed and addressed at the social level” (Elezović, 2012: 63). Therefore, in order to establish the thematic frequency in the period from January to June 2020, the level and frequency of visibility of women theologians in media discourse and the selection of content on issues of peace, interfaith dialogue and human rights advocacy during the pandemic, it is necessary to empirically and quantitatively demonstrate the role and importance of women theologians in society, in order to be able to draw relevant conclusions on the indicator.

Sampling

The sample consists of a total of 854 media pieces analysed, that were published/broadcast in the first six months of 2020. The unit of analysis were all media reports²⁷/press articles²⁸ that were broadcast/published at the time of the rapid proliferation of

²⁶ Text in square brackets added by the author.

²⁷ The unit of audio-visual content analysis was content broadcast in TV and radio shows within the religious programme of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT.

²⁸ The term ‘press article’ is an approximate translation of the Croatian *napis*, which the *Croatian Encyclopaedic Dictionary* defines as a “newspaper text that falls under no binding notions of style, length or topic” (Jojić et al.,

the coronavirus pandemic. The analysis, on the one hand, included the content of online versions of Croatia's most popular daily newspapers: *Jutarnji list* with 366 and *Večernji list* with 355 articles. On the other hand, the study also covered 40 articles (news reports) posted on the official website of the Catholic Press Agency (IKA), i.e. 27 related columns from the most read and influential Catholic weekly *Glas Koncila*. The latter were written by outside authors who are regular columnists for the paper, Đurđica Ivanišević Lieb, psychologist Lovorka Brajković and Nikolina Mesić, who covers topics in the field of culture and education. The analysis also included content broadcast within the religious programme of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT, more specifically the content of six episodes of the radio show *Duhovne misli* (Spiritual Thoughts), nine episodes of the radio show *Susret u dijalogu* (Encounter in Dialogue) and two episodes of the show *Mali Radio Vjeronauk* (Little Radio Catechism). Furthermore, six episodes of the TV show *Riječ i Život* (The Word and Life) were analysed, as well as one show from the *Ekumenizam i religija* (Ecumenism and Religion) cycle, 15 episodes of the longest-running religious TV programme *Mir i dobro* (Peace and Good), 11 episodes of the show *Pozitivno* (Positive) and 12 special feature episodes of the show *Zajedno u duhu* (Together in Spirit).

Given the criteria listed below (in the section on the empirical analysis process), nonprobability purposive sampling was employed and, with respect to the time frame, a cross-sectional study was conducted, as it involved observing the phenomenon (the visibility of women theologians in the media) at a certain point in time. The results of such studies provide insight into the characteristics of the phenomenon or process of interest at the time of research (Milas, 2009: 507).

The empirical analysis process

For the purpose of analysing the empirical material included in the sample, an analytical matrix was developed containing 26 classification categories, divided into five units. The content of the media pieces was analysed based on the following categories: 1) descriptive characteristics of media pieces, 2) professional reporting criteria, 3) objectivity, 4) balance, 5) presence of women (theologians) in the media content.

2003:791), so it is used here as a general term referring to the text itself and all the associated graphics i.e. visual features (titles, headings, captions, frames, photographs and infographics).

It should be noted that although the researcher defined certain research criteria during the conceptualisation stage, with particular regard to the concept ‘*woman theologian/women theologians*’ and related variations on the topic, in the process of concept operationalisation she nevertheless expanded the criteria to include the concept ‘*woman/women*’, as the previous findings (especially those referring to articles in online versions of daily newspapers) showed a low quantitative yield. Therefore, in the interpretation of the findings, the results of content analysis from secular media will be presented separately from the findings concerning the content from the media owned by the Catholic Church, i.e. the radio and TV programme of the Croatian public broadcaster. The remaining research criteria were: type of media appearance of the persons, topics and activities related to the research subject, names and surnames of actors (women (theologians)) or a clear reference that they are included in the content concerned, photograph, statements and additional concepts: church, religious communities, interfaith dialogue, peace and human rights.

Time frame

The analysis covered media content published in the media of reference in the period from 1 January to 30 June 2020. Since the period of the rapid proliferation of the coronavirus pandemic was taken as the contextual framework for the study, the study focused on the period from January 2020, as the first pandemic report in Croatia was recorded on the *večernji.hr* portal on 14 January 2020 and setting a common single date when individual media began following the topic would be quite arbitrary.

Research results

Media visibility of women theologians in online versions of daily newspapers

The visibility of women in each of the media analysed was not the same during the six-month period covered by the analysis. The results show that the most media space was given to women by the *Jutarnji list*²⁹ portal (366), compared to *večernji.hr*³⁰ which had 355 articles.

²⁹ In some places herein referred to in the abbreviated form: JL.

³⁰ In some places herein referred to in the abbreviated form: VL.

However, although such findings indicate openness towards a less selective nature of media representation i.e. visibility of women, the results are nevertheless disheartening, as no space at all was given to women theologians in the articles analysed³¹. At the same time, the media representatives in question went about meeting the requirement for professional balance on issues of peace, religion and human rights, by personally framing them through the role of doctor Alemka Markotić, who was given media space and an opportunity to speak in 24 online articles of *Večernji list*³² and in 31 articles published by the *jutarnji.hr* portal. It should be noted that the doctor was interviewed by the media in question as many as nine times (four times for the *večernji.tv* online platform and once in written form, and four times for the *jutarnji.hr* portal). The popularity she enjoyed in the eye of the public was by all means largely contributed to by journalists, who “used” her position by portraying her as a heroine, often justifying their choice of topic and subject of interest (i.e. main actor) with headlines such as the one published on 26 March: “This will break your heart: A girl from Murter draws a banknote with the face of Alemka Markotić”.

Unlike media workers from the Styria publishing house, who were mostly impartial³³ (in 76% of the articles) in presenting facts about the Catholic Church and instructions regarding the holding of religious services, the Hanza Media portal explicitly mocked Catholic values³⁴ in a fourth of the published articles, contrary to the principles of journalistic reporting. The number of media reports and articles involving women intensified over time, with the highest number published in April (91JL, 79VL) and May (62JL, 51VL), and most of them relating to the current pandemic³⁵. Such a trend in reporting indicates, on the one hand, a growing media

³¹ Similarly, no space was given to male theologians other than in articles (56 JL, 67 VL) relating to restrictions on religious ceremonies in the context of the Covid-19 containment measures, in which priests, bishops and the Catholic church were mentioned, but were not the main subjects of the articles.

³² Some of the articles and online reports in which the actor concerned touches on her religious experience and her advocacy for following the teachings of the Catholic Church in everyday practice: “Životna ispovijest Alemke Markotić (The life story of Alemka Markotić)” (VL, 31 May 2020); “Alemka Markotić: Nikad nisam bila u partiji, a protiv političkog angažmana nemam ništa (Alemka Markotić: I was never a member of the (Communist) Party, but I have nothing against political engagement)” (VL, 22 May 2020); “Markotić: Ovakvu situaciju nismo imali od 15. stoljeća (We haven’t had a situation like this since the 15th century)” (VL, 26 March 2020); “Alemka Markotić: Možda smo na pragu cjepiva za koronavirus ‘Optimistični smo, prvi rezultati američke tvrtke su odlični’ (Alemka Markotić: We may be on the verge of a vaccine for the coronavirus ‘We are optimistic, the first results of the American company are excellent’” (JL, 20 May 2020).

³³ “Dva svećenika i tri časne sestre iz Međugorja zaraženi koronavirusom (Two priests and three religious sisters from Medjugorje infected by coronavirus)” (VL, 30 March 2020).

³⁴ “Koronavirus se ukazao u Međugorju (The apparition of coronavirus in Medjugorje)” (JL, 31 March 2020).

³⁵ Some of the articles involving women did not directly refer to persons affected by the coronavirus or trivial content: “Epidemiologinja: Dolazak stranaca nas dovodi do toga da budemo još oprezniji ([Female] epidemiologist: the arrival

interest in the context-related topic, since as many as 57% of the cases involved women who were experts in a given field (unlike the findings presented earlier, which indicate that women are generally given media space through trivial content), but on the other hand shows an apparent lack of continuity and analytic approach in reporting on a socially significant and controversial topic, i.e., a disregard for theological contributions and reflection, which would not exclude women theologians from the media platform.

Media visibility of women theologians on the website of the Catholic Press Agency (IKA) and the online version of the Glas Koncila weekly

The researcher's initial assumption was that, in the period analysed, a greater and more frequent media representation of women theologians would be recorded in the media owned by the Catholic Church and on public broadcasting platforms, which the study confirmed. In their selection of valuable and relevant content³⁶, the editorial boards of Catholic media granted women theologians almost an equal media status as their male counterparts, including them even in topics that were directly related to the everyday life of people during the pandemic, but also before the coronavirus outbreak.

The Catholic Press Agency, specifically, published 40 news stories in the period from 1 January to 30 June 2020 explicitly mentioning women theologians. Thus, the Catholic Press Agency did not marginalise the importance and role of these women scholars in Croatian society, but rather enabled them to publicly present, and even indirectly popularise their scholarly discipline, through a wide range of different topics. Some of the topics women theologians addressed at the time, other than just to comment on the pandemic, the coronavirus and its impact in the broader sense, included forgiveness³⁷, family-centred

of foreign tourists is making us even more cautious" (VL, 16 May 2020); "Šefica ECDC-a: Europa se mora pripremiti za drugi val epidemije (The leading woman of ECDC: Europe must prepare for the second wave of the epidemic)" (VL, 22 May 2020); "Povjerenica Helena Dalli: Koronavirus zbog obiteljskog nasilja tijekom izolacije predstavlja nesrazmjerni rizik za žene (Commissioner Helena Dalli: Due to family violence during lockdown the coronavirus represents a disproportionate risk for women)" (JL, 21 April 2020)

³⁶ The basic criteria of content selection according to the news selection theory.

³⁷ Theologian Silva Vrdoljak spoke about forgiveness and healing – Dubrovnik: Seminar nove evangelizacije "Opraštanjem u slobodu" (New evangelisation seminar "Through forgiveness to freedom"), (IKA, 24 February 2020).

catechetical encounters³⁸, communication in families with and without children³⁹, domestic violence and the rising domestic violence rates during the pandemic⁴⁰, culture⁴¹, empathy, communication, the relationship between religion and culture⁴², presentation of a bilingual German-Croatian collection of theological papers⁴³ and the mosaic YouTube channel *Vjernički forum* (Believers' Forum), launched by Catholic laity from Subotica as a new medium for evangelisation in Croatian⁴⁴. The remaining articles include the mention of Ružica Pšihistal, PhD, president of the Association of Catholic Intellectuals, on 3 March 2020, and on 12 February 2020, during the Week of Marriage in the Dubrovnik Diocese, the mention of two women theologians who spoke about faith in the family and about family and religion.

The Catholic weekly *Glas Koncila* has for years been working with several prominent women experts, who are regular columnists for the paper. One of them is Đurđica Ivanišević Lieb, who writes weekly columns in the section “Zapažanja (Observations)”. During the period analysed, she published 20 columns on various topics (such as: Christmas after Christmas, demography, the condition of children's homes, artificial intelligence, communism, comparison of life in Croatia and England, criticism of Rijeka as the European capital of culture, migration issues, spreading fear of the pandemic, comment on public appearances by doctor Alemka

³⁸ Theologian Suzana Matošević, counsellor from the Marriage and Family Counselling Centre in Slavonski Brod, designed materials for family-centred catechetical encounters in Đakovo (IKA, 30 March 2020).

³⁹ Đakovo: Sanda Dobrovoljski Smoljo, PhD., theologian, psychologist and psychotherapist from the Counselling Centre of the Archdiocese of Vrbosna (Sarajevo) held a webinar on communication in families with and without children - Prvi „Obiteljski četvrtak“ putem Zoom aplikacije (The first “Family Thursday” via the Zoom app) (IKA, 29 May 2020).

⁴⁰ Family counselling – victims of domestic violence - Suzana Matošević, theologian and counsellor at the Marriage and Family Counselling Centre in Slavonski Brod, Elizabeta Matuzović, theologian and university specialist in Supervision in Psychosocial work from the Marriage and Family Counselling Centre in Osijek, and psychologist Ivana Stvorić from the Counselling Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence in Slavonski Brod (IKA, 29 April 2020).

⁴¹ Ana Marčinko presented the Christian face of culture in Dubrovnik (IKA, 6 March 2020).

⁴² A symposium of the faculty of Theology in Rijeka was held, with four more female participants in addition to the Head of Theology, Prof. Veronika Nela Gašpar, Ph.D. (IKA, 13 March 2020)

⁴³ The bilingual German-Croatian collection of papers “Vielfältige Heimat(en): Kommunikativ-theologische Perspektiven / Raznolike domovine: Komunikativno-teološki pogledi (Manifold homelands: communication and theological perspectives)” edited by Jadranka Garmaz, Marie Juen and Annemarie Hochrainer is the 21st collection of papers from the “Communications Theology” series (IKA, 29 May 2020).

⁴⁴ In addition to the male journalist Vedran Jegić, female theologian Nela Skenderović is mentioned (IKA, 20 April 2020).

Markotić and academician Igor Rudan⁴⁵, on the Holy Corona⁴⁶ and the various negative impacts of the pandemic⁴⁷).

A regular columnist for *Prilika* (Opportunity), the monthly special of the *Glas Koncila*, is also psychologist Lovorka Brajković from the Faculty of Croatian Studies, who published four texts during the period analysed: on the upbringing of children, on retirement, on the children and contemporary media, and on the vast array of emotions resulting from people's experiences.

Nikolina Mesić, a regular columnist on topics in the field of culture and education, published three texts in the period from January to March 2020, on the usage and norms of the Croatian language.

During the period analysed, media space in the weekly was also given to: Slavica Šnur, screenwriter and director of the film on children killed in the homeland war "Otkrnuti: Njihovi krikovi zovu nas da čujemo njihove roditelje, braću i sestre (Broken off: Their screams are calling us to hear their parents, brothers and sisters)", on 25 June 2020 in the form of an interview, full professor Tatjana Buklijaš from Auckland University, on 30 April 2020 in the article under the title: "U krizi treba vidjeti mogućnost boljega početka (Seeing a new beginning in a time of crisis)" and on 12 March 2020, Dr. Tanja Pavelin: "O revizijama osuda iz doba Jugoslavije Političke presude iz komunizma još čekaju reviziju (On the revisions of the Yugoslav-era convictions, the political judgments of communism are still awaiting revision)".

⁴⁵ "NEPOTREBNO ŠIRENJE STRAHA O KORONAVIRUSU: Sasvim nove mogućnosti u suzbijanju pandemija (UNNECESSARY SPREADING OF CORONAVIRUS FEARS: Completely new possibilities in combating pandemics)" (Glas Koncila, 10 March 2020).

⁴⁶ "OD KORONAVIRUSA DO IZOLACIJE VELIKANA Povijest se ne može skriti (FROM CORONAVIRUS TO ISOLATION OF THE GREATS History cannot be hidden)" (Glas Koncila, 24 March 2020).

⁴⁷ "UZ ŠIRENJE KORONAVIRUSA Pandemije donose enormne poremećaje (ALONG WITH THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS Pandemics bringing enormous disruptions)" (Glas Koncila, 7 April 2020); "SNALAŽENJE U ŽIVOTU U OKOLNOSTIMA PANDEMIJE Svijetli momenti u tami pandemije (COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC Bright moments in the darkness of the pandemic)" (Glas Koncila, 5 May 2020); "TEŠKOĆE U POVRATKU U »NORMALU« Svaki je drugi bez uštedevine (DIFFICULTIES IN RETURNING TO 'NORMAL' Every second person without savings)" (Glas Koncila, 26 May 2020); "PANDEMIJA SE OSJETI I U NOVČANIKU Hrana je sve skuplja (THE PANDEMIC WEIGHING HEAVY ON THE WALLET Food getting more expensive by the day)" (Glas Koncila, 2 June 2020).

Media visibility of women theologians in radio and TV shows of the Croatian public broadcaster HRT

Pursuant to the Croatian Radio-Television Act⁴⁸ and the Electronic Media Act⁴⁹, the Croatian Radio-Television (HRT), as the national public service broadcaster, is required to provide adequate space (visibility) to religious and faith communities, their topics and experts who must be given equal opportunity to participate in public dialogue and to contribute to ecumenism in society, but also to achieving equality between men and women in media discourse. In this regard, in the first six months of 2020, the scope of programmes broadcast by the public broadcasting service was slightly reduced as compared to previous periods, precisely due to the emergency situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

In this context, the analysis included three radio programmes of the Croatian Radio with an ecumenical and interfaith note.

In January 2020, four women theologians participated in the radio show *Duhovne misli* (Spiritual Thoughts): a religious sister, a Catholic lay believer, and two women of Jewish denomination. The topics addressed were light, listening, remembering the Holocaust and order or disorder.

In February 2020, space was given to five women: three Catholic religious sisters – addressing the topics of encounter, St. Luke, blessed are you; a Protestant theologian – forgiving yourself; a Catholic lay believer – keeping away from evil.

In March 2020, five women were given the opportunity to speak publicly: a Jewish theologian – time; three Catholic religious sisters – resurrection, authenticity, hope bringers; a lay believer – Pope Francis and women.

⁴⁸ Article 7, paragraph 1: “HRT shall be obliged to (...) respect and encourage the pluralism of political, religious, world-view and other ideas, as well as make possible for the public to be acquainted with such ideas (...); impartially treat the political, economic, social, religious (...) and other issues, providing for the equal confrontation of standpoints of different sources.”

Article 9, paragraph 2: “In implementing paragraph 1 of this Article HRT shall in particular: (...) produce, co-produce and broadcast programmes aimed at achieving the equality of women and men; (...) produce, co-produce and broadcast programmes in the field of religious culture and promote mutual understanding among different religions and religious communities (...).” (Official Gazette, 94/18).

⁴⁹ Article 9: “The activity of providing audio-visual and radio programmes shall be in the interest of the Republic of Croatia when programmes relate to: (...) achieving gender equality, (...).” (Official Gazette, 136/13).

In April 2020, six women appeared in the broadcasts – three Catholic religious sisters, a lay believer and two Jewish lay women. The topics of their reflections were Christian and Jewish holidays.

In May 2020⁵⁰, four women experts participated in the programme: a Protestant theologian – gifts of the Holy Spirit; two Catholic religious sisters – modesty or arrogance, thinking good thoughts; a Jewish theologian – modesty in Judaism.

In June 2020, the radio show in question had as many as eight guest appearances by women – a Catholic theologian who appeared three times, to speak about the issues of empathy and authenticity. On the feast of Corpus Christi, two Jewish women theologians appeared as guests and testified to the breadth of Judaism by addressing issues of the Jewish faith; a Protestant theologian spoke about hope, and two Catholic religious sisters discussed the topics of life as schooling and of progress in love.

The second radio show broadcast within the Croatian Radio programme was *Mali radio vjeronauk* (Little Radio Catechism), with Antica Nada Čepulić, a professor of Latin and Greek, appearing on 23 February 2020 to speak about St. Jerome.

On 1 March 2020, the show hosted Sonja Tomić, a Catholic theologian and writer.

Susret u dijalogu (Encounter in Dialogue) is the third radio show that regularly runs within the public broadcaster's religious programme. During the period covered by the analysis, an ethnologist, Assist. Prof. Mirela Hrovatin, PhD, appeared on 6 January 2020 to speak on the topic of folk customs associated with Epiphany. On 20 January, Assist. Prof. Ana Begić, PhD, course professor in Moral Theology at the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb, addressed the issue of human trafficking.

The show *Trag vjere* (The Trail of Faith), broadcast on 24 January 2020, hosted the Secretary General of the Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors, sister Marjolein Bruinen.

The first show in February to host a woman (expert) was broadcast on 10 February, and addressed "Stepinčevo", a Croatian religious holiday dedicated to St. Aloysius Stepinac, with political analyst and author of documentaries Višnja Starešina speaking on the topic. On 13

⁵⁰ Most of the broadcasts in May were re-runs of shows previously aired.

February, the topics of Religious Forum and the Week of Marriage were discussed by national coordinators of the Week of Marriage from the Focus association, Danijel and Katarina Wurzburg.

Marija Selak, head of the Ignatian Spiritual Renewal project, appeared as guest on the show on 24 February 2020 and talked about youth and Lent on behalf of the Palma Student Catholic Centre.

The first show in the following month, on 2 March 2020, commented on the topics of fasting, school of emotions and fear of coronavirus, which were addressed by theologian Antonia Čosić.

On 9 March 2020, Anđela Jeličić Krajcar, a Catholic theologian and media associate, spoke about the seven-year reign of Pope Francis.

During the same period, the public broadcaster's TV programme included the shows: *Mir i dobro* (Peace and Good; four in January, four in February, three in March, four in June); *Pozitivno* (Positive; four in January, two in March and five in February); *Zajedno u duhu* (Together in Spirit; four in January, five in February and three in March); *Riječ i život* (The Word and Life; two in January and three in March) and *Ekumenizam i religija* (Ecumenism and Religion; one in each month analysed).

In view of the research subject, the content discussed in the last two shows, where women appeared as guest experts, and were not just casually mentioned as in the remaining TV broadcasts, will be presented below.

Riječ i život – a weekly half-hour show within HTV's religious programme, produced by Neno Kužina: the show broadcast on 17 January 2020 addressed Christianity in modern conditions: to what extent has the gospel been implemented in modern declarations, resolutions and laws? Love is facing oneself and God. On what foundations must we build this love towards our fellow men, especially those suffering and in need? In what direction is Europe going, once the cradle of Christian foundations? What are the fruits of the Theological-Pastoral Week and to what extent are its guidelines followed in pastoral ministry? Guests on the show were Ines Grbić and Nikola Kuzmičić, actively engaged lay believers, and the answers to the questions discussed were offered by Prof. Tonči Matulić, PhD, from the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb.

On 24 January 2020, the topic was ‘Parents as educators’: Parents are the first educators. Apart from their love for the gift of life, what else can help them? In what other ways can we support and supplement education, by parents and by institutions? When it comes to the Day of Life celebrated by the Church on the first Sunday in February, family and dignity of both parents and children are central. How can we protect it morally and materially? Should the Church make an additional step forward in helping parents? To what extent does Reverend Matija Pavlaković, rector of the Inter-Diocesan Seminary in Zagreb, recognise the formative influence of parents in his seminarians and other students? The guest on the show was Prof. Aleksandra Korać Graovac, PhD, from the Department of Family Law at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb.

On 7 February 2020, the topic was ‘I shall give you rest’: Does the World Day of the Sick, which the Church observes on 11 February, the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, stand for promoting or combating diseases and relieving human suffering? How interested are volunteers in getting involved in the suffering of others? Should spirituality in palliative care be enhanced? To what extent is this recognised by the hierarchical Church? Does modern theology offer enough teaching on the sick and the weak in its programmes? What is the testimony of Mons. Ferdo Vražić, a priest from Karlovac, on this matter? The guest on the show was Blaženka Erer Matić, president of the La Verna volunteer organisation.

On 6 March 2020, the topic was ‘What are you reading?’: How often are students and other people eager for new insights advised to go to the library? How to attract a reader to a book and make books more attractive for readers? How long does it take to digitise book archives and collections to make books more accessible to the public? How to present and popularise church-owned book collections? What do last year’s book reading statistics show? How necessary are libraries for socialising? The answers to these and other questions are revealed in an interview with the director of the National and University Library in Zagreb, Prof. Ivanka Stričević, PhD.

On 13 March 2020, the show addressed the topic of ‘Great sacrifice in a small cross’. During the Lent season, the Church places emphasis on penance and calls for lasting conversion. How well do we understand the needs of our fellow men? To what end was the association “Veterans Assisting Veterans” established? How to include homeland war victims in prayer? Are the doors open for pastoral volunteer work to our Homeland War Veterans? How

to connect sacrifice, truth, and the past with the institutions of Church and State? What kind of religious and social image of Vukovar is revealed by Zrinka Perić and Danijel Gurov? The guest on the show was Željko Miškulin, a Croatian Homeland War veteran.

Ekumenizam i religija is a show produced by Antonija Hrvatin Roth and on 31 January 2020 it addressed the issue of religious rights and freedoms in Croatia. How often are they violated and to what extent? Which religious communities are the most endangered in the world today? Present and speaking on this matter were Željko Mraz, president of the Association for Religious Freedom, and the winners of an award for the promotion of religious freedoms, husband and wife Anna and Otto Raffai.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by the results of the empirical study, I conclude that women theologians were not attractive participants in secular media reports during the coronavirus pandemic in the first six months of 2020, but rather content creators marginalised by the media. Although the quantitative findings indicate openness towards a less selective media representation i.e. visibility of women, the results are nevertheless disheartening, as almost none of the articles or convergent content published in the online versions of Croatia's most popular daily newspapers *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list* included women theologians as scholars, experts and equal discussion partners, or as sources of information. At the same time, the secular media included in the analysis attempted to meet the requirement for professional balance regarding the issues of peace, religion and human rights by personally framing them through the role of doctor Alemka Markotić, who was in this context presented as a “national heroine”.

Furthermore, neither women theologians nor their male counterparts were given any space in secular media, other than through content referring to the implementation of containment measures and to guidelines concerning the holding of religious services. Therefore, the initial hypothesis that women theologians were not given (any) media space in the secular media during the coronavirus pandemic was confirmed, while the study partly confirmed the hypothesis on the significant difference in media representation of women theologians as compared to their male counterparts.

The Code of Honour of the Croatian Journalists' Association lays down the obligation of media workers for impartial, balanced, objective and accurate reporting, and the same elements are pointed out in the global guidelines of professional associations on reporting during the pandemic. The findings also showed that media workers were biased in their selection of content and at the same time unprofessional in devoting space to women theologians and to women scholars from other fields of study alike. As their presentation of media content may have influenced public opinion, it is no exaggeration to state that through such actions they called into question their own credibility and trustworthiness. Consequently, this also confirms the specific hypothesis on the violation of fundamental principles of journalism in reporting, as ethical controversies were present not only through the explicit tendency to marginalise women theologians, but also through an unprofessional approach which departed from and disregarded

quality discussions, analytical comments and/or interviews with selected female and male experts.

At the same time, the Catholic media (print media in particular) used the contextual framework of the coronavirus pandemic as a kind of platform for a new evangelisation and for broadening perspectives in dialogue with women theologians, practicing believers and experts from different fields of study. In the Catholic media and in public service religious broadcasts, the issues of the pandemic, including all the events that ensued in response to the pandemic at the global level, were recognised within a broader perspective and addressed in relation to issues of peace, interfaith dialogue and advocacy of human rights, often by associating them with other sensitive social and political issues, such as those of domestic violence, the status of refugees and migrants, and the significant rise in mental health problems as a result of the current situation. Consequently, during the first six months of 2020, the pandemic was associated with theology as a scholarly discipline in the Catholic media discourse, i.e. women believers educated in the field of theology were given media space and an opportunity to speak, each in their own field and from their own perspective, on the various aspects of interfaith dialogue, issues of peace and human rights advocacy.

Finally, the distribution of results presented and the different media approaches of secular and Catholic media indicate the need for further reflection on the issue and perspectives of understanding the importance of integrating media literacy education into school curricula and of publicly questioning the effectiveness of implementation of existing legal regulatory frameworks in the media culture context in the conditions of the modern multimedia environment.

The longitudinal cross-sectional study of media content that was conducted certainly represents a contribution that offers insight into sociological transformations in the development of future scholarly discussions aimed at deconstructing and addressing the issues of society-wide gender inequality (including possible comments and reflections on earlier periods), and of the evidently marginalised visibility of certain scholarly disciplines in the media. This, in turn, opens up the possibility for further studies (including those in the field of communication sciences) on gender (in)equality and the media status of theologically educated women believers. In conclusion, I wish to emphasise the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation, especially between theological faculties and academic institutions educating future

journalists, with the aim of increasing both media literacy and theological/ecclesiastical literacy and of creating a space for joint action and opportunities for cooperation in society.

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