

Nicole Immig

**Popular Journals, images of/on refugees and story telling**

*"Over 3.000 refugees, mainly old people, women and children, have been queuing in the port for over twenty days waiting to be evacuated. They have no food or shelter. They are afflicted by all kinds of infectious diseases, and even the healthiest among them are helpless in the face of the cold wind and storms."*<sup>1</sup> Similar reports as the one by a known Serbian Illustrated Journal dating from January 1916 describing the desperate situation of Serbian refugees in Albania after the retreat of the Serbian Army appeared numerous in European and Balkan newspapers of the period. Starting with the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913, followed by World War One and the Turkish-Greek War from 1919 to 1922 finally resulting in the Lausanne Treaty, the region experienced intense fighting and extreme violence and massive population displacements on a probably unknown scale. From 1912 to 1923 civilian refugees and forced migrations had thus emerged as a frequently occurring topic of the press-coverage on the Balkans. What has been usually neglected in research so far is the fact that many of these refugees have been women. Figures of female refugees are difficult to discover, at least when searching for them in the various stories and reports published in the Illustrated Journals of the time. It is however most obvious - especially from the visual material published in the various journals - that female migrants not only constituted a large part of the refugees, but also that these women often fell victim to violent attacks and all sorts of harassment including physical injuries, rape, torture and murder etc. and hence experienced violence inflicted on them in the course of their flight.

When Emily asked me to participate in this workshop I wasn't quite sure whether, and if yes, how I could possibly contribute to this workshop. In my latest research I focus on visual material and representations of World War One in various Balkan Illustrated Journals and thus on what Susan Sonntag has termed our "camera-mediated knowledge of war". Women, however have so far not been much in the focus of my research, although gendered representations of War do play a role. Crime and the idea of what is to be considered as such in a period of war and massive military, political and social conflict is something which I bear in mind when thinking about violence related to war as well as forced migration and

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<sup>1</sup> Cited after Veliki rat Srbije (Serbia's Great War) (Belgrade, 1924-37) Vol. XIV, p. 112.

displacement. But I never thought if this is reflected in my material. And what about story-telling? Here I could definitely adapt to what this workshop seems to be about. The material I base my research on and I work mostly with is full of stories. And there is more to that: The medium of the Popular Illustrated Journal is designed in its format, layout, content and design and hence in its most important goals to attract its audience by telling (interesting) stories. As a new media format, appearing in the press market in the Balkans not as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it offered its readerships (which were yet to be built) something different than a newspaper could, which supplied its audience with pure (and often boring) information. A popular Illustrated journal however offered a window into a world of interesting news, fascinating curiosities, bulletins, reports, statements, comments, rumors and updates, not to forget the visual insights into whatever topic the Journal managed to cover. It was thus characterized through a variety of different forms of information or rather through its successful preparation and editing of the information. All journals built upon the curiosity of its readers towards a world which was constantly changing and at the same time offering fresh and often first-hand information by new forms of technology and publication standards.

The arrangement of the journal's content somehow reflected the diversity of its readers and their interests. Contrary to weekly or daily newspapers the journal's audiences consisted not only of (educated) men, but also of women, children, whole families, people who were able to read and could afford to pay for the journal. Or, since many journals were laid out in clubs, associations and coffeehouses, articles were read out loud in the public, while images published in these journals were often pinned on the walls of the respective location. And the readership counted on the periodical publication of this new media format. It expected the journal to convey news and information regularly and often in small bits and pieces. It counted on the periodicity of the journal. Since many reports, stories, novels were split into several parts "to be continued", a regular either weekly or – in most cases – monthly publication was utterly expected by its audiences. The arrangement and layout inside the journal counted on the fact that certain columns were placed at the same page and that the reader could easily skip the pages, he or she was rather not interested to read. Thus a journal often developed a story on a certain topic fully through its periodicity rather than on conveying it in one issue.

The topic and thus the story on refugees in the Balkans hence developed with and through time (and the regular periodical reporting on this thematic topic either textually or visually) and remained a steady topic in these journals. Thinking about what I have stated at the beginning of this text, namely that particularly in the visual coverage of “Refugees” as a dominant thematic issue of these journals women - and thus their suffering in the course or as a consequence of forced displacement - stand out, and in preparation of this workshop I looked again through parts of my material. What is the overall story these Journals tell us about women as refugees (and eventually as victims of a crime)? What do the photographs and images, the accompanying captions and hence the dialogue between text and visual, the small and large stories tell us about the relation of women and violence? Do these images and texts accuse and search for whom to blame? Do they engage into a discourse of victims and perpetrators and thus contribute to the discussion, if the suffering of women in war with all its consequences has to be discussed and considered as a crime?

Let me share with you some examples, which could help us to think about these questions.

Many images representing forced migrations and displacement in my research are - not surprisingly - related to “one’s own refugees” or those who were considered as “co-national” refugees. And in most of them women and their suffering are in the core of the image. The Bulgarian Journal *Ilyustratsiya Svetlina* (Illustration Light), a well-know popular Illustrated Journal published in Sofia from 1891 to 1934, is a characteristic example of how journals presented their own refugees in the respective period. The issue of October 1913 has reserved a whole page for this topic. Seven photographs are arranged orderly on one page, the one above is framed by two small graphic columns functioning as ornamental tools. Six of the seven photographs show large groups of mostly women and children, closely grouped together in an outside background. The women are dressed in traditional peasant clothes, most of them wearing head-scarfs, while a large number of children, most of them girls, sit in front of them. They all stare in the direction of the camera waiting to be captured by the lens of the camera, similar to images arranged in studios or in the open, which reflect the visual stylistic conventions of photography at the time. The image could have represented female inhabitants of any village grouped for any occasion in order to be photographed by a photographer touring Bulgaria. While some of them are wearing wretched clothes, others do not and nothing else points to them being refugees. The reader however clearly understands by the captions below the pictures that these images display refugees from various regions

the Bulgarian Army had to evacuate during the Second Balkan War in 1913. Additionally the seventh image, positioned at the bottom of the page, contributes and probably mainly directs such a reading. The image depicts a small girl sitting next to her mother in front of a low-slung white tent. In the background we see the contours of other tents on a rather hilly ground. Not sure what to expect, they both look right into the camera, which catches them as two female individuals, far from home, without shelter and unprotected.

Picturing individual fates as done in this photograph did however not determine the visual language employed in most of the images of refugees in *Balkan Journals*. Rather, what characterized such representations of refugees was the massive groupings of many refugees, again, mostly female and accompanied by numerous children. Similarly the Greek journals *Ellas* and *Eikonografimenos Parnassos* (Illustrated Parnass), published from 1908 to the 1920s in Athens, both presented groups of Greek refugees of Thrace and Asia Minor after their arrival in Greece in 1914. The images resemble largely the iconography of the photographs in *Ilyustratsiya Svetlina*, although originating from different national backgrounds. Several images, displayed on a panorama double page, called the "Pinacothèque" in the middle of the journal *Parnassos*, clearly focus on large groups of female refugees, accompanied by a number of children. The women are dressed all in black and have gathered for the camera in an outside yard to be photographed. Men are absent or disappear in the large mass of the refugees. The two large pictures frame a number of smaller images, which show again smaller refugees camping in front of a church. Another image of refugees is published on the cover of *Ellas*. The camera focuses on a large group of women with head-scarfs and a small number of children, dressed in traditional clothes. They are sitting on the ground, eating and stare into the photographer's camera, while the background remains unrecognizable. The background does not allow us to recognize the setting, but the open fire makes clear that the picture must have been taken in the outside. At the same page is a photograph, which also depicts refugees, this time elderly men and women, standing close together. While the men are upstanding in the back, the women sit in front holding small children. Men however were rarely displayed on images of refugees, mostly women and children are depicted in the pictures and often described as "Refugees victims" which suffered while fleeing "carrying along nothing more than their children to save them of the Barbarian". Portraying refugees as victims had been long established in the visual discourses of many of the journals, which had frequently published photographs of

Bulgarian or Greek refugees within the frame of the Macedonian question, while images depicting refugees often use(d) a gendered visual language by focusing on female and children as unprotected and defenseless victims.

Looking through the journals and the visual material, what struck me was the fact that the story on women refugees perceived eventually as a crime can only be fully understood when read in communication with other visual stories told in the same journals. With regards to forced migrations photographs – and in lack of images depicting the violence itself - often depicted the perpetrators of induced violence and forced migrations. An example from a Greek Journal *Ellas* from June 1914 clearly depicted the “Turks” as the main perpetrator causing fear and displacement. Using their front-page as a powerful selling device, the Journal presented two men, portrayed as “men-shaped monsters in photographs” functioning as evidence of something which had already happened and was described in textual accounts included in the journal. The text often employed a language of binaries and particularly stressed the fact that it were such primitive Turks and Bulgarians, who inflicted violence against civilized Greek and often female victims and thus were guilty of a crime even in war times. But what about the inflicted violence and its depiction through images since we know that it is in this period that images of atrocities and violence developed into powerful tools of political agendas and were widely used to influence public opinion?

The attribution of epistemical evidence to photographs has been discussed in relation to other regions or other periods of military conflict particularly when related to events of massive violence as massacres and genocides Images of atrocities which often linked violence to displacement however seem not to have been circulated widely – at least not in the public press. From the many Black and White Books as well as from the existing war chronicles we know that people also documented atrocities. My research suggests that Illustrated Journals had rather limited access or – at least until the end of World War One – rather refrained from publishing such images of violence and cruelty, because of moral and ethical considerations. However, several examples all depicting female refugees and victims of male enemy violence support the idea that visual material – if available - contributed to the making of refugees as victims and hence developed a story, which contributed immensely to the support of a national narrative of war by exactly combining on the one hand personal fates (of female victims) with visual evidence (proofing what was seen as injustice). The images are usually published as a series of three or four photographs

arranged carefully next to each other on one page or integrated or surrounded by a text. The photographs depict different women dressed in rural traditional clothes, often ragged. Each woman is showing physical wounds on arms, legs, face etc., often uncovering only one a small part of flesh. Most of these women stand or sit, depending on the part of the body the camera focuses on. Sometimes the face of the woman is not shown at all, other examples intent to focus not only on the wound but rather prefer to portray the whole person. The captions to these photographs read the ethnic origin of the victim as well as the perpetrator, often mentioning a “violent tradition” and/or pointing to the injustice done to these women by the enemies of the Greek/Bulgarian/Serbian nation, sometimes even asking for the legal condemnation of these acts.

It is certain, that already before the Balkan Wars many Illustrated Journals agitated as strong advocats of political goals in the service of the respective nation. The examples of female refugees discussed in this paper tried to show that Illustrated Journals also functioned as medium to develop and to tell an overarching story which could then help to consolidate, unite and mobilize a nation in conflict. By using the potential of the format of the journal, its media logics, the arrangement of the content consisting of textual and visual accounts and the potential of images as a powerful evidence Illustrated Journals probably also managed to offer discursive spaces for its readers to make sense of war.