

# *FIGHTING THE VIRUS, 'HUNTING THE WITCHES' – MORALIZING WITHIN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSES DURING THE CORONA PANDEMIC IN CROATIA*

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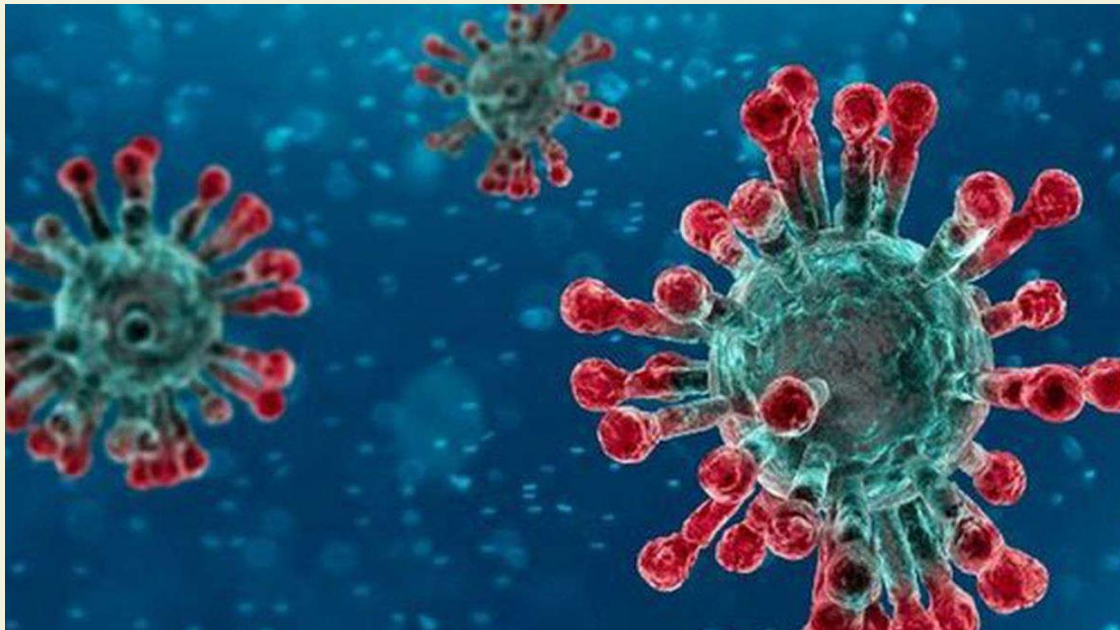
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# Introductory Remarks

- ❑ Coronavirus pandemic – recently, one the most significant events at the global scale
- ❑ Remarkable effects on all social subsystems
- ❑ Implied vibrant moral communication



# The aims of the paper

- ❑ Examine some specific features of moral communication around the 'corona pandemic' in Croatia
- ❑ Theoretical framework – **Luhmann's** (1996) specific conceiving of moral communication as the distinction between esteem and dis-esteem that produces binary codes
- ❑ The attempt to detect morally connotated binary codes in a public space

# Methodological Approach 1

- ❑ Primarily empirical analysis
- ❑ Combining Luhmann's conceiving of moral communication with the critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, Meyer, 2001; Wodak, Chilton, 2005; Wooffitt, 2005; Weiss, Wodak, 2007)
- ❑ The objective is to grasp moral codes emerged out of corona pandemic environment as discursive elements that reflect positions and practices of particular social actors!!!

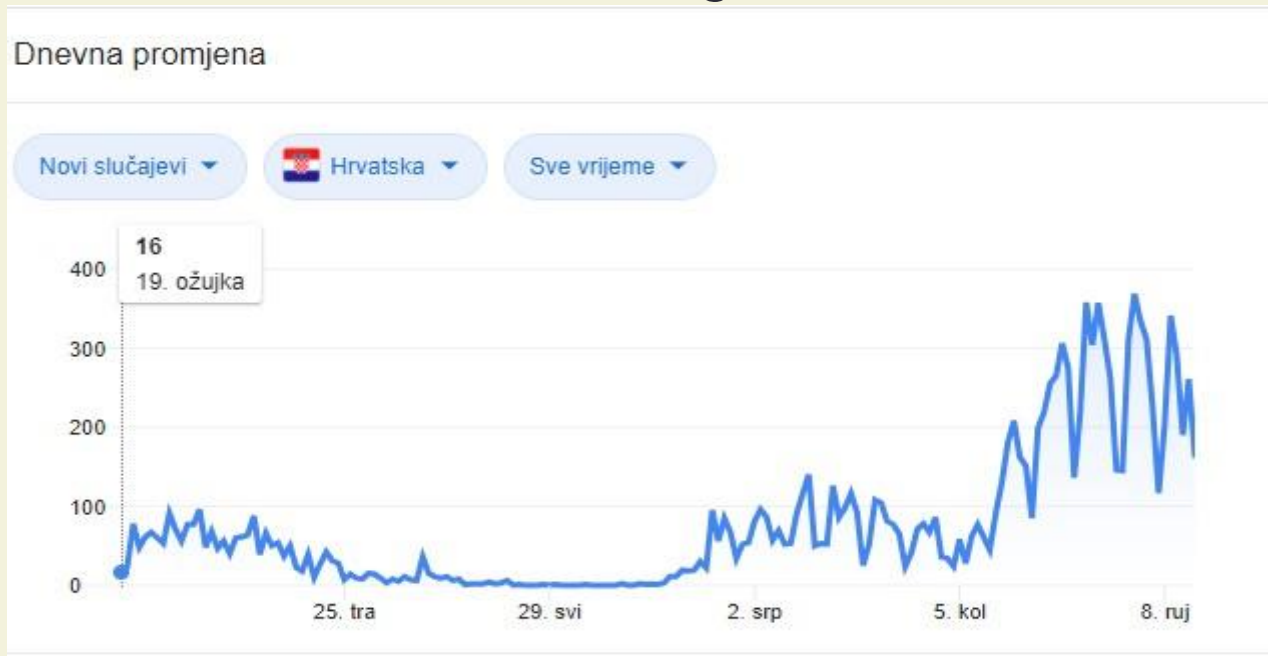


# Methodological Approach 2

## ❑ The sources of analysed content:

- Public announcements, articles, interviews...
- web-site of 'National Civil Protection Authority of the Republic of Croatia'
- Two largest daily newspapers:
  - *Jutarnji list* (inclined towards 'leftist position')
  - *Večernji list* (inclined towards 'rightist position')
- Web-portals
  - '*Indeks.hr*' (inclined towards 'leftist position')
  - '*Dnevno.hr*' (inclined towards 'rightist position')
  - '*Net.hr*' (politically situated around central position)

- ❑ Temporal dimension of changes of semantics and moral discourses over different stages of the pandemic
- ❑ Distinguishing 5 diverse stages:
  1. *Pre-pandemic stage*
  2. *'Peak' of the pandemic*
  3. *End of lock-down / pre-polls period*
  4. *Wide opening*
  5. *The 'second' wave and coming of uncertain autumn*



# 1. *Pre-pandemic stage*

- ❑ Until February 25, 2020
- ❑ Reporting about spread of the disease at the global scale
- ❑ Focused interested on the Italian case
- ❑ Preparations for arrival of the virus
- ❑ Absence of moral categorizations



## 2. 'Peak' of the pandemic

(February 25 – May 05)

- ❑ February 25 – the first 'covid-19' case confirmed in Croatia
- ❑ All first cases claimed to be imported from abroad: *alpine skiing vacations, tourist visits from abroad, temporarily employed workers, even residents from cities who moved into their weekend houses...* („bad guys” 😞)
- ❑ Neglecting the local transmission



## 2. 'Peak' of the pandemic (February 25 – May 05)

- ❑ Initiation of the strict lock-down measures
- ❑ The remarkably relevant role of the 'National Civil Protection Authority of the Republic of Croatia (NCPAOTROC)' board members... ...medical staff, members of the civil protection service, employees in the supply chains or truck drivers... („good guys” 😊)



## 2. *'Peak' of the pandemic*

*(February 25 – May 05)*

- ❑ Emergence of a intensive **moral communication**
- ❑ **Moral disqualification** and **stigmatization** of people in imposed self-isolation or people in coerced quarantine
- ❑ Extracted moral codes:

**'bio-terroristic/heroic'**

**'egoistic/empathic'**

**'non-responsible/responsible'**



## 2. *'Peak' of the pandemic*

*(February 25 – May 05)*

- ❑ **Denunciation** of neighbours
- ❑ **Moral disrespect**, accusations and even **threats** to infected and potentially contagious people
- ❑ Resemblance on the 'witch hunt'
- ❑ Breaking of the self-isolation:  
charges from 8.000,00 to 120.000,00 HRK
- ❑ More than 1500 registered cases of breaking the self-isolation (until May 9)



## 2. *'Peak' of the pandemic*

*(February 25 – May 05)*

- ❑ Amplification of the **heroic discourse** in the days (March 22) of earthquakes in Zagreb



## 2. 'Peak' of the pandemic

(February 25 – May 05)

- ❑ Invocation of 'war rhetoric', insisting of national homogenization

- ❑ "We are in war with virus, panics and socio-economic effects of this pandemic"

(Prime Minister A. Plenković, March 13)

- ❑ Total public marginalization of sceptical discourse (to some extent present mainly in extreme right wings media)



Dr. Gajski: „The number of ‘corona’ deaths incidence is exaggerated and represents manipulation” (March 30 in „Bujica” TV show)

- binary codes: trustworthy – manipulated  
true – false

## 2. *‘Peak’ of the pandemic*

*(February 25 – May 05)*

- ❑ This stage is marked by a **radicalized moral dispute**
- ❑ The „bad guys” are often discursively labelled as „**genius**”
- ❑ The key-actor is NCPAOTROC as ‘apolitical’ expert body
- ❑ The other actors are pushed in the back plane



### *3. End of lock-down / pre-polls period*

- ❑ The end of strict lock-down and gradual relaxations of measures
- ❑ An alternation at the discursive level: ‘(You) Stay Home!’ motto replaced with ‘(We) Stay Responsible!’



- ❑ A commence of pre-elections period

### *3. End of lock-down / pre-polls period*

- ❑ (Contentious) timing of parliamentary elections (set for July 5)
- ❑ Political instrumentalization of ‘NCPAOTROC’
- ❑ Inconsistency in applying measures (favouring Catholic church) – decrease of confidence

Procession „Under Cross”, Island of Hvar



### 3. End of lock-down / pre-polls period



#### Safe Croatia!

- motto of 'Croatian Democratic Union'
- Introduction of code **safe – unsafe**

- ❑ The political capitalization of handling pandemic strategies – the convincing triumph of HDZ/CDU



### *3. End of lock-down / pre-polls period*

- ❑ It becomes apparently clear that 'corona' is not just a medical issue
- ❑ The increase of sceptical voices (also of oppositional political parties – critique of lock-down)
- ❑ Stronger voice of entrepreneurs
- ❑ Severe inconsistencies:

<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/uzivo-stozer-objavljuje-nove-informacije-o-koronavirusu-u-hrvatskoj-1401319>

## 4. *Wide opening*

*(July 5 – August 17)*

- ❑ After the elections due to tourism, which is remarkably important economic branch, opening the borders
- ❑ Relatively successful tourist season, particularly at the northern coast
- ❑ ...however, spread of virus anew
- ❑ Wedding's parties and night parties of youngsters at a sea-side as hot-spots



„Slanica beach”, island of Murter, July 19

## 5. The 'second wave' and coming of *uncertain autumn* (after August 17...)

- ❑ Closing the borders, travelling suspensions and restrictions due to considerable rise of infections cases
  - ❑ However, lock-down is not an option anymore?!
  - ❑ Increase of **sceptical discourses**
  - ❑ 'Festival of freedom' – anti-corona protest held in Zagreb on September 5
- appeared codes:  
„idiots” – reasonable people  
manipulated – free people...



## 5. The 'second wave' and coming of *uncertain autumn* (after August 17...)

- ❑ Sceptical positions are mostly intertwined with extreme right-wing political actors
- ❑ September 14 – the meeting of the 'Constitutional Court' concerning the legitimacy of the particular 9 decisions (including the necessity of wearing masks) of 'NCPAOTROC' – the meeting behind the closed door



# To summarize 1:



- ❑ Covid-19 pandemic is heavily pervaded with moral communication
- ❑ Constant presence of **moral coding**
- ❑ Moralization does not comprise purpose in itself, but it always reflects a certain social background
- ❑ Moralization as the 'efficient tool' (manipulative instrument) within power games of diverse social actors
- ❑ The distinctive and remarkably **contentious form of communication (Luhmann has got right, indeed! :-))!**

## To summarize 2:



- ❑ The (open) question how moral coding reflects itself on the level of complexity of the social systems?
- ❑ The employment of 'moral codes' combined with critical discourse analysis approach represents a **pertinent analytical instrument** to unfold what is happening in our social systems

# Short list of the mentioned references

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**Thank you! Hvala!**

*Comments, critical remarks, questions,  
and suggestions please?*

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