

Wild Animals

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In addition to being part of the forest's **weaponized landscape** and potentially physically dangerous for people on the move, wild animals have also been occasional elements of the pejorative public repertoire of expressions related to **irregularized migration** in recent years. Within this repertoire they hold various positions in relation to people on the move, primarily as elements of comparisons, but also as other linguistic figures. Animalistic comparisons and metaphors are common in migration discourse, not only illegal migration, and they, as well as similar metaphors and other linguistic expressions, are the subject of a focused study by corpus linguistics, critical discourse analyses and related research (cf., e.g., Mujagić and Berberović 2019; Santa Ana 2002), which in different media contexts identify explicit or implicit connections between migrants and animalistic or some other elements such as natural forces, with predominantly negative connotations. In the Croatian media, we can note, related specifically to wild animals: an ironic comparison of living conditions in migrant camps and improvised bear dwellings, and a mocking comparison of the physical abilities of humans and bears; the formulaic practice in which people on the move, indirectly and in an apparently value-neutral way, are presented as hunting game; relating people on the move to wolves, badgers and wild boars, the use of verbs such as *ravaging* and *ravening* (*pustošiti* and *harati*), which express destructive action; a comparison of temporary and harmless traces, such as footprints in the mud, left in nature by wild animals for whom "these forests" *are home*, and, in contrast, traces harmful to nature – discarded clothes, cans and beverage cartons – left behind by "uninvited strangers"; and finally statements that portray the dangers posed by animals to local people as minor when compared to the dangers posed by people on the move.

The latter issue, in terms of discourse related to wild animals that emphasizes the danger of people on the move (cf. **Letter from a Hiker**), is connected to a photograph of three young men posing next to the carcass of a bear, taken, it seems, somewhere in Croatia and published on social networks. The photo is interpreted so that the wild animal is seen as a victim, with the aim, as it can be inferred, of emphasizing the danger posed to local people, and not only wild animals, by migrants. Although, according to experts, it is "much more likely" that the people in the photo "came across the bear carcass in the forest, rather than that they killed the bear themselves", some so-called fringe websites presented them as bear-killers and used the photograph posted to social media in order to paint the migrants passing through Croatia as "armed and extremely dangerous". Migrants who move in groups through the **forests** of Gorski Kotar, "rob hikers" and "passers-by" and are all "armed, with melee weapons or firearms", are also brought up in the context of the already mentioned explicit comparison of the dangers posed by animals and by people on the move.

The direct or indirect comparisons between migrants and wild animals do not occur, as one would assume, only on so-called fringe websites and similar internet pages, but in other media as well, in a seemingly more subtle way, under the guise of neutral reporting on events or columnist commentary. Thus, for example, an animalistic analogy, this time relating to snakes, which on the one hand devalues people on the move, as well as those who stand in solidarity with them, and on the other hand portrays them as extremely dangerous, was used in a text from 2018 in one of the most prominent national media and which elicited a wide response, published under the title "Petting Vipers and Inviting Migrants". Utilizing this and similar uses of language that dehumanize people on the move in various ways, including animalistic or naturalistic metaphors, comparisons or allusions (cf. e.g. Esses et al. 2013) (cf. **Candy; Switch It up a Little, My Friend**), different actors, to varying degrees, participate in the production of verbal violence and anti-migrant discourses, which then serve as a preparation and a kind of social justification for the exclusion of undesirables and extra-verbal, i.e. physical and other violence against them (cf. e.g. Baider and Kopytowska 2017) (cf. **pushback**).

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Literature

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