

Protest and visibility in times of democratisation: A visual framing analysis of the 2010 Belgrade Pride Parade's television coverage

This paper considers the 2010 Pride Parade in Belgrade as a key mediated moment through which to explore struggles for visibility between distinct actors during a period of democratisation in Serbia. At the heart of this study are concerns around the contested spaces of the city and how such conflicts for public spaces are represented in the media. Through a visual framing analysis of the television coverage of the Pride parade and the protests which sought to disrupt the event, we explore how expressions of identity and nationhood are visually constructed and how the news framing choices effectively marginalised the Pride parade and re-enacted physical and spatial barriers/divisions in the city space. Whilst we draw upon previous research focused on Pride parades and on the mediation of protest (Johnson 2012; Johnston and Waitt, 2015), this study contributes new insights due to both the distinctly non-celebratory coverage of the parade, and the illiberal motives of the protesters who violently oppose the event and its organisers. In these ways, the case study does not conform to the expectations of much of the existing research in this area – where Pride offers a spectacular carnival of colour for tourists to gaze upon; or where protesters resorting to violence is understood as a desperate tactic to 'counter the symbolic violence of elites' (Cammaerts 2013, 545).

Four distinct 'camps' are portrayed in the coverage: the LGBT community, the counter-protesters, the police, and politicians. However, the four national news programmes we analyse (RTS, Prva TV, TVB92 and Pink TV) are also political actors in the mediation of the resulting clashes. In particular, we examine the representational, interactive and compositional meaning potentials of televisual images (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006; Iedema 2001), to understand the relationship between news media framing and the ways in which the different actors involved in the Pride Parade are both 'seen' and 'pictured' in public. In particular we find Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-tiered model of visual framing productive for identifying dominant stylistic and symbolic features in the coverage, especially the degree to which protagonists are successful in claiming their right to be seen on the streets of Belgrade.

We approach the television news coverage of Belgrade Pride and the protests as offering a distinctive window into a 'public discourse of images' (Deluca and Peeples 2002: p133), where groups of protagonists utilise visual images to express a sense of identity, grievance or resistance. In shifting attention to the potentials for political agency and citizenship in this mediated 'discourse of images', including the possibility of mis-communications and manifold interpretations, the paper offers an alternative perspective to the traditional emphasis on dialogue and voice in democratic theory.