Figures of Crisis:
The delineation of (un)deserving refugees in the German media

Abstract: This paper examines how borders are discursively reproduced in representations of the 'refugee crisis' in the German media. Based on an extensive content and discourse analysis of German press representations in 2015 and 2016, we argue that the discourse of crisis obscures the reasons for migration and instead shifts the focus to the advantages and disadvantages that refugees are assumed to bring to their host country. More specifically, we contend that press discourses construct a figure of the (un)deserving refugee around three key themes: economic productivity, state security and gender relations. In doing so, we illustrate how the framing of some lives as more or less deserving of protection than others directly mirrors and extends the humanitarian securitization of borders into public discourse.

Keywords: *borders, discourse, humanitarian securitization, figures, Germany, refugee crisis*

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Introduction

At the height of the 'refugee crisis' in June of 2015, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel (2015) publicly appealed to the empathy of the nation. Referring to the right to asylum enshrined in Germany's constitution, she talked about 'situations and fears that refugees have to face, under which we would probably simply collapse' and argued that German citizens needed to contribute to a 'national effort to solve the national task [that the refugee crisis poses]'.[ii] Defining this 'national task', Merkel said it was about establishing 'who has a high chance of staying' just as much as it was about declaring 'who has nearly no chance of remaining with us'. Merkel's statement points to the conditional logics that inform current German border and asylum politics in which some lives are seen as worthy of protection while others are rendered obsolete and disposable (Hess et al., 2017). The statement is productive in its slippage between legal and broader public debates. While the speech was primarily a legal discussion of asylum law and procedure, it also played into wider debates

about integration and national belonging that seek to define who deserves to be part of the nation.

Merkel's speech is exemplary of a larger discourse on the 'refugee crisis' with which this paper is concerned. From summer 2015, representations of migration proliferated in the German media. As the most populous and economically dominant EU member state, Germany occupies a key position within current European border regimes. As a result of its admission of more than one million refugees in 2015 (Bundesministerium des Inneren, 2016), it has often been heralded as a bastion of humanitarianism and has been celebrated for pioneering a new form of *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture). At the same time, Germany has seen the rise of right-wing movements, arson attacks on asylum centres on an almost daily basis and the implementation of securitization policies, such as expedited deportation processes and the restriction of family reunification (Hess et al., 2017). As such, Germany constitutes a crucial site for exploring the role media representations play in shaping humanitarian and securitizing interpretations of the 'refugee crisis'. While a number of scholars have started to explore the broader evolution and political dimensions of the German media's coverage of migration after 2015 (Friese, 2017; Holmes and Casteñada, 2016; Vollmer and Karakayali, 2017), here we aim to understand in more detail how humanitarian and securitizing logics play out and intersect in dominant press representations of the 'refugee crisis'.

To do this, we conducted our study over two phases. First, we drew on the insights of an extensive content analysis of European newspapers in 2015, in which we found that representations of refugees in the German media are split between empathy-invoking and threatening representations alongside humanitarian or securitizing narratives. This split, however, cannot be understood simply as a division within the public sphere in which two antithetical discourses clash with each other. Instead, we need to see these discourses as linked and mutually reinforcing through a logic of deservingness that, rather than considering the reasons for migration, focuses on the advantages and disadvantages that refugees are assumed to bring to the host country. To explore this further, we subsequently conducted a discourse analysis and investigated how this logic of deservingness plays out. Drawing on Imogen Tyler's 'figurative methodology' (2008, 2013) — which seeks to explore the often stereotyped and distorted ways in which particular social types or groups come to be represented in media discourse — we explored how the figure of the refugee shifts between frames of deservingness and undeservingness that are constructed in relation to ideal constructions of the German nation.

Based on this two-phase analysis, we suggest that the figure of the (un)deserving refugee in the press media is primarily constructed around three key themes: the economy, state security and gender relations. As such, we highlight the central role that discourses of neoliberal economic productivity and national security and narratives about gender and sexuality play in framing some lives as more worthy of protection than others. In this process, asylum shifts from being a legal right to a question of deservingness that asks refugees to demonstrate their worth to the German nation. We contend that this discourse of deservingness — in which the humanitarian logics of protection and the securitizing rhetoric of deterrence mutually reinforce each other — directly mirrors and extends the humanitarian securitization of European borders (Vaughan-Williams, 2015) into public discourse. Consequently, this paper offers not only an extensive illustration of how discourses of the 'refugee crisis' reinscribe shifting borders through which social exclusion, violence and death are legitimized, but it also points to the conditionality that underlies current humanitarian responses within European border regimes.

Context

The present study draws from critical migration scholarship, which aims to unravel the logics of European border regimes in the face of the 'refugee crisis' and points to the interplay of humanitarianism and securitization. Securitization is commonly defined as the 'sustained strategic practice aimed at convincing a target audience to accept [...] the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it' (Balzacq, 2005: 173). Humanitarianism emerges as 'the administration of human collectivities in the name of a higher moral principle which sees the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering as the highest value of action' (Fassin, 2007: 151). While securitization and humanitarianism have traditionally been positioned as opposite rationalities, more recent scholarship has pointed to how they often work as mutually reinforcing modes of governmentality. Walters (2011), for instance, discusses the emergence of a 'humanitarian border' in Europe and points out how the efforts of international organisations, NGOs and local initiatives often play into and sustain the practices of securitizing state actors. It is possible to observe, also in our case, how humanitarian efforts do not necessarily impede but often go hand in hand with securitizing logics, with the consequence being that the protection of some lives remains contingent on the deterrence of others. Drawing on Vaughan-Williams (2015), we refer to this process as humanitarian securitization.

The concept of humanitarian securitization does not delegitimise any form of humanitarian action; rather, it helps us conceptualise a particular mode of governance (observed already in Merkel's speech quoted above) on which current border regimes in Europe appear to rely. Whereas most studies have focused on how humanitarian securitization plays out in material practices at physical borders (e.g. Duffield, 2011; Vaughan-Williams, 2015), we are concerned with how it might similarly operate in the public sphere. As the New Keywords Collective (2016) suggests, borders do not end at the physical frontiers of Europe but extend into a range of discursive arenas. De Genova (2013), for example, has shown how the 'border spectacle' renders refugee illegality visible and makes deportation a constant possibility, while Dines, Montagna and Ruggiero (2014: 442) discuss how the framing of Lampedusa as a 'strategic Mediterranean border' extends the border regime into the refugees' productive position within the European host society. From this perspective, the 'humanitarian border' reaches into public discourse, where it legitimises who is seen as a citizen (or even a subject) and who becomes relegated to spheres of non-intelligibility. We thus argue that in the current political situation it is essential to pay close attention to how borders of national belonging are drawn in the public framing (Butler, 2009) of the refugee crisis.

As El-Tayeb (2016) reminds us, however, current discourses on migration and asylum do not develop in a vacuum but need to be understood in relation to longer discussions around migration, race and nationality in Germany. Before entering our study in greater depth, we want to briefly sketch the particular German conceptualisations of citizenship and belonging from which the current discussion of the 'refugee crisis' has emerged. Germany has long been reluctant to move away from ethnocentric definitions of the nation that base citizenship on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, i.e. the granting of citizenship according to one's bloodline. This principle dates back to the German colonial Empire and the nationality laws of 1913 and was taken to its extreme during the Third Reich that saw the establishment of the Nuremberg Laws. After the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949, the Nuremberg laws were abolished, and the *jus sanguinis* regulations were reinstated. The racialised framing of citizenship as a community of blood therefore did not disappear but was simply reworked (El-Tayeb, 2016). Germany continued to vigorously define itself as a 'non-immigration country' and citizenship remained an ethnic and racial category in which 'native' white Germans were socially and legally differentiated from all *Ausländer* (foreigners). This found its expression in policies such as the guest worker initiative of the 1960s and 1970s that expected these workers to eventually return to their home countries (Kaya, 2013).

The citizenship and naturalisation laws in Germany changed slightly only at the end of the 1990s, when the possibility for children born in Germany to non-German parents to claim formal citizenship was initiated (Howard, 2008). Despite legal changes, the narrative of the German people as an ethnically homogenous population persevered. While clinging to a 'colourblind' ideology that hinged on 'the firm conviction that [Germany] would be free from structural racism' (El-Tayeb, 2016: 7), racialized constructions of citizenship continued to operate under the guise of 'cultural difference'. This can be seen, for instance, in current moral panics around the 'Islamification' of Europe (Rommelspacher, 2002) or in the framing of the Turkish-German community as an ethnocultural counterfoil to the construction of a 'truly' German identity (Mandel, 2008). This process mirrors and extends colonial tropes of Western superiority vis-a-vis not-yet enlightened Others who need to give up differences and assimilate or be kept out of the national frame (Castro Varela and Mecheril, 2016). The legal effects of this process are reflected in current naturalisation laws that require citizenship tests but can also be observed in the heightened restrictions on asylum. Following the racially motivated attacks on asylum centres in cities like Rostock, Mölln and Solingen in the 1990s, the comparatively open post-war asylum laws were tightened. Moreover, since the entry into force of the Dublin Convention in 1997 legal responsibility has been transferred to the first EU country of arrival, while asylum claims by people from officially declared 'safe countries of origin' have been rendered increasingly futile (Howard, 2008).

It is within this general context that the current public debate of the 'refugee crisis' needs to be understood. With the arrival of more than one million people in 2015, discussions around difference and national identity in Germany have come to the fore with new force. Within this context, Merkel's credo of '*Wir schaffen das!*' (We can do it!) has often been understood as a discursive signifier that Germany's historic uneasiness towards migration and transnational plurality would now be under critical review. At first sight, the discourse around the 'refugee crisis' seems to have created a change in the public imaginary to finally acknowledge that 'Germany is a country of immigration' (Merkel, 2015). It thus appears that the conditions and rhetoric of crisis have led to a more open-minded revision of what it means to be German. As we will demonstrate in our study of the German press coverage of the 'refugee crisis', however, this potential opening of the citizenship debate actually put new emphasis on questions of national identity and redraws (even narrower) borders of belonging that make the supposed *Willkommenskultur* dependent on whether or not the incoming people embody 'something enriching' (Merkel, 2015) for their host country.

The Study

Content analysis

To understand how the media discourse of the 'refugee crisis' plays out in more detail, we first draw on a content analysis of the German press coverage between July and November 2015 that was conducted in the context of a wider research project that examined the press coverage of the 'refugee crisis' in eight European countries.[iii] Based on the insights of the content analysis, we then conducted a discourse analysis of how refugees were represented in a broader sample of press representations from 2015 to 2016.

The initial project consisted in a systematic analysis of the press in eight European countries: Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Serbia and the United Kingdom; as well as two Arabic-language European newspapers. The project focused on three key events that received major international media coverage and were identified as corresponding to the 'height of the refugee crisis': Hungary erecting a physical barrier along its border with Serbia (July), the drowning of Alan Kurdi in the Mediterranean (September) and the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks (November). The sample consisted of articles in two key broadsheet papers per country, representing left- and right-leaning editorial stances. Refugee-related articles were systematically sampled across ten days after the event, which resulted in a total of 1200 articles from the sample of 20 newspapers, including 120 articles in the German press (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017).

For the German sample, we examined 60 articles published in the progressive liberal *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)* and 60 articles published in the more conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*). We focused on broadsheets because of their importance in framing news events (Entman, 1993), and because of their role as a resource for officials and stakeholders (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017). This is also why we chose prominent news stories, often headlining the front pages over editorials or write-in comments. In the press coverage, we looked at how the causes of the 'refugee crisis' and its consequences for the host country were represented. Specifically, we examined whether increasing migration to Germany was framed negatively or positively, the sorts of narratives (e.g. economic, geopolitical, moral) used in discussions and whether humanitarian or securitizing actions were being solicited. Moreover, we considered whether and how refugees were represented according to individual characteristics, such as gender, age or profession.

What emerged from the analysis of the German sample was that the press based its call for action mainly on the effects that migrants were assumed to pose for the host country, and largely disregarded the reasons for their arrival. More than 76% of the 120 sampled articles called for defensive measures (closing borders, sending refugees back, increasing the army and police presence, etc.), while more than 85% mentioned humanitarian measures (providing shelter, opening borders, donating money, etc.) as a response to the migration. Significantly, both statistics were the highest across the European sample (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017), with the narrative of a humanitarian call for action often paired with the rhetoric of protecting the country from undesired arrivals. This not only speaks to the central position that Germany occupies in debates about border politics in Europe and the strong sense of agency that infuses discussions in Germany itself but also shows how the logic of humanitarian securitization has translated into public discourse. The reasons behind the migration were mostly unmentioned, with fewer than 43% of the sampled articles describing the underlying causes for refugees' situations. The effects on the host country, on the other hand, were named in more than 72% of the articles (67.5% of these articles noted negative consequences and 42% highlighted positive aspects). With few historical or sociopolitical reasons discussed to explain the plight of refugees, the evaluation of political action was shifted away from structural considerations and onto the refugees themselves.

This is further emphasised by the dehumanising ways in which refugees were represented in the German press. The sampled articles almost never mentioned names (6.7%) or other characteristics of refugees, such as their age (18.5%) or professions (5%). Moreover, there was a general lack of more complex reports about people's motives and their personal stories, and so incoming refugees tended to be framed either as a threatening mass that needed to be deterred or as poor faceless victims in need of pity and charitable action. Overall, the content analysis suggested that the discourse of crisis obscured historical and political reasons for migration and displacement. Instead, questions of asylum were mainly framed in terms of the advantages and disadvantages that refugees were assumed to bring to the host country. The discourse of crisis was shifted onto the body of the refugee, rather than set in relation to ongoing geopolitical conflicts like the war in Syria and other violent conflicts and economic deprivation in the wider Middle East and North Africa region (in which Germany and the EU have often played a central role).

The content analysis further indicated that the debate about whether refugees deserved asylum or needed to be deterred was largely developed around three key themes: the economy, state security and gender relations. First, economic narratives were salient in the

German press sample. Both positive and, in particular, negative consequences of refugees' arrivals were predominantly framed in economic terms. Second, reporting on the 'refugee crisis' often focused on issues of national security. The coverage of negative geopolitical consequences mentioned for Germany grew from July to September and spiked in November. This demonstrates a strong correlation between the November Paris attacks and the changing representations of refugees: shifting between 'ecstatic humanitarianism' and heightened 'securitization' (see also Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016). Third, a crucial criterion structuring the German debate was that of gender. In our sample, refugees were predominantly represented as male and often constructed as dominant and threatening, while women crossing borders and arriving at the shores were not only rare but were mostly represented without a voice or as passive victims in need of saving.

Discourse analysis

Following these observations, we set about exploring in greater depth the ways in which humanitarian and securitization discourses interrelate in the representation of refugees. To do this, we extended the sample of Germany's two leading broadsheets (*SZ* and *FAZ*) to include on- and offline articles in two other newspapers (the centre-right *Die Welt* and the left-wing *Die Tageszeitung* (also known as *taz*)) and three major weekly magazines (*Der Spiegel*, *Focus* and *Die Zeit)* from across the political spectrum.[iv] This allowed us to observe that the points established in the content analysis were not specific to the first two broadsheets, but were part of a larger discursive formation.[v] Rather than focusing merely on news reports, we also included interviews and opinion pieces in which the discursive criteria through which refugees were constructed became more tangible. Moreover, we extended the time frame of our analysis into 2016 in order to include the coverage of the New Year's Eve events of Cologne and the terror attacks of Würzburg and Ansbach[vi] which crucially influenced German media debate around the 'refugee crisis'. Particular attention was paid to prominent politicians and other public personalities from across the political landscape who crucially influenced the debate.

In accordance with the content analysis, we found that negative and positive representations existed in the same discursive frames so that this was not the case of a straightforward clash between humanitarian discourses that framed refugees as an enrichment to German society and securitizing discourses that constructed refugees as threats. Instead, we found that these discourses were linked through a logic of deservingness that created a

shifting figure of the 'good'/'bad' refugee which crucially determined the type of action demanded. For the analysis, we drew on Tyler's 'figurative methodology' (2008, 2013). Tyler uses the concept of figure 'to describe the ways in which at different historical and cultural moments specific "social types" become overdetermined and are publicly imagined (are figured) in excessive, distorted, and caricatured ways' (2008: 18). These figures become intelligible through the repetition of already established assumptions about particular groups of people in public discourse. Tyler, for instance, discusses how the figure of the 'chav' emerges out of long-established practices of 'class making' in the UK and demonstrates how this 'revolting' figure comes to legitimize the destruction of the welfare state (Tyler 2013: 10). While she develops her theory in the context of UK austerity politics, she asserts that 'the emergence of [...] figures is always expressive of an underlying social crisis' (2008: 18). Thus, her methodology can also be useful for understanding the 'refugee crisis' in which larger socio-political crises are similarly displaced onto the figure of the refugee.

We followed Tyler's approach by similarly 'zoom[ing] in on appearances of a figure within specific media and contexts, whilst also insisting that it is through the repetition of a figure across different media that specific figures acquire accreted form and accrue affective value in ways that have significant social and political impact' (2008: 19). During our systematic study of the newspapers, we focused on exemplary articles that allowed us to show the ambivalent and often contradictory ways in which the figure of the refugee is constructed. In contrast to Tyler's analysis of 'revolting subjects' in UK austerity discourse, however, our analysis suggests that, in the German context, refugees are not constructed as purely 'revolting', but simultaneously as threatening and victimised, burdensome and enriching. This coincides with the work of other scholars who have shown how migrants' access to citizenship rights and the welfare state in countries like Germany is increasingly based on individuals having to prove their deservingness (e.g. Chauvin and Garces-Mascarenas, 2014; Holmes and Casteñada, 2016). Building upon these insights, our analysis indicates how in the German debate of the 'refugee crisis', the logic of deservingness extends to the construction of asylum itself leading to the creation of the shifting figure of (un)deserving refugee. The following discussion is divided into the three key themes that emerged from our content analysis and around which the (un)deserving refugee is primarily constructed: the economy, state security and gender relations.

Analysis

Economy

In early 2015, images of capsized boats and people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea dominated the newspapers under analysis: 'Boat-crossings to Europe become more dangerous' (*Der Spiegel*, 11 January 2015), 'Hundreds of refugees drowned or froze to death' (*Die Zeit*, 11 February 2015), 'Up to 400 people drowned' (*FAZ*, 15 April 2015). Simultaneously, the same newspapers warned of a dawning crisis in the German economy. Based on a study of the national development bank KfW, *Der Spiegel* (23 March 2015), for instance, expressed 'worry about the business location Germany'. It was argued that the country's low demographic growth seriously 'threatened the competitiveness of the German medium industrial sector', the country's economic backbone, and that this would 'also reduce overall economic growth'. Despite Germany's self-portrayal of economic prosperity based on solid growth rates, a budgetary balance and low unemployment, *Die Welt* similarly warned that skilled labour would become even more scarce by 2030, thus jeopardising the country's position as Europe's economic motor (e.g. *Die Welt*, 24 August 2015). The simultaneous reports about the 'refugee crisis' and Germany's economic problems led to a dehumanizing juxtaposition between two crisis discourses that directly entangled a rhetoric of humanitarian concern with that of economic calculations.

As such, Germany's humanitarian response to incoming refugees was based on an economic classification of useful versus useless bodies according to their potential utility for sustaining the national economy. Citing a survey by the Ifo-Institute, a *FAZ* article (20 September 2015), for instance, maintains that many refugees 'are not qualified for the job market' and would hence create extensive costs. This line of argument not only reinforces hierarchies between Western European and non-Western educational systems but is also based on a racialised trope of migrant communities as under-qualified, lazy and costly for the state. Productivity is framed in culturally essentialist terms whereby refugees need to testify against their 'backwardness' in order to deserve inclusion in the German nation. The needs of refugees are set against the state's expenditure on accommodation and care services: 'Who should pay for this? Communities and municipalities complain over rising expenses for refugees' (*Die Zeit*, 24 August 2015); 'refugees cost the state 2,5 billion Euros more than anticipated' (*FAZ*, 28 October 2016); and 'federal states expect to pay 20 billion euros this year for asylum seekers, much more than planned' (*Die Welt*, 16 December 2016). In representing refugees as an excessive financial burden, the costs for hosting and integrating

refugees are pitched against other public financial responsibilities, thus insinuating that they would be at the direct expense of other social welfare programmes.

In sharp contrast, other commentators in the sampled newspapers underlined that incoming refugees constituted much-needed labour. It is explained that 'the expensive fear of the stranger' is not only exaggerated but that 'Germany actually could not do without migration' (*Der Spiegel*, 28 March 2016). Celebrating 'Germany's new skilled workers', various observers argue that the sharp increase in migration to Germany could balance the country's looming economic stagnation, demographic decline and labour shortage (*Die Zeit*, 15 June 2015) and have suggested that 'in ten years we may have to thank Chancellor Merkel' because 'the European welfare states can only mitigate their ageing problem when they capitalise on migration' (*Focus*, 27 October 2015). On World Refugee Day 2015, Andrea Nahles (Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of the Social Democratic Party (SPD)) and Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Foreign Minister (SPD)) even more explicitly tied Germany's economic future to the fate of people seeking asylum in Europe. In an opinion article in the *FAZ* (20 June 2015), they called for a more humanitarian response to the current refugee 'crisis' based on the acknowledgement that refugees would strengthen the economy: 'We have to utilise the capabilities of such people — for their, but also for our futures. The reason is that in Germany we face enormous challenges in securing skilled personnel'. These comments bring to mind the demand for foreign labour to advance the national economic project, which had been dominant policy between the 1960s and 1980s. Extending the former guest-worker logic of 'work without workers', the pursuit of the national economic interest is now reframed as a humanitarian issue, and thus recasts employment as a charitable action towards people in need of protection rather than a self-interested means of maximizing profits.

Humanitarian action is further made conditional upon refugees' educational attainments. To be convertible into economic capital, these have to correlate with Germany's labour market structure based on the model of small and medium enterprises. For instance, an article in *Die Welt* (2 May 2016) aimed to counter the idea of 'uneducated refugees' by challenging the 'many rumours surrounding Syrian migrants'. Citing a study by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, the article notes that especially '[i]n Syria, there are skilled apprenticeship schemes. Many refugees therefore already bring with them qualifications that can be put to use in Germany'. The somewhat patronising argument about the (surprisingly) skilled Syrian refugee is often presented as a liberal challenge to the discursive distinction between the 'diligent' host population and the 'burdensome' migrant. However, the

identification of refugees as an embodied economic opportunity does not do away with the discursive borders between the German in-group and the refugee 'other', but only redirects and redraws them. By making a humanitarian response to the 'refugee crisis' dependent on a person's contribution to the economy, the extent to which refugees deserve to be provided with shelter is measured in terms of their potential to mitigate the country's economic crisis. Attention is shifted from the perspectives and histories of migrants towards the market-specific requirements of the host society. People who do not appear to possess the requested educational attainment or skill sets are in turn marked as economic burdens and hence risk their status as legitimate refugees.

State security

The discourse of the 'refugee crisis' is also closely bound up with the question of state security. This connection often relies on essentialist constructions of religion and ethnicity, and many of the articles analysed appear to conflate migration, Islam and terrorism. The attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice and Berlin as well as the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach in July 2016 not only amplified longstanding debates about radical Islam but have also constructed terror as an inherent risk and material consequence of the European 'refugee crisis'. If in October 2015, the *SZ* (14 October 2015) continued to refer to the 'fairy-tale of the undercover terrorist', highlighting that so far not a single allegation against arriving refugees had proven valid, a headline two months later – 'Refuge and terror are siblings' (10 December 2015) – signalled a drastic shift. Crystallised in the figure of the extremist in disguise, Islamist terror was increasingly framed during this period as a direct consequence of the recent large-scale migration to Germany: 'Secret plan of terror-refugees' (*Focus*, 19.02.2015), 'IS masks fighters as refugees' (*FAZ*, 13.11.2016), 'IS trains fighters for asylum process' (*SZ*, 13.11.2016). At the same time, a range of public voices published counter-statements that identified the incoming refugees as victims of exactly such terror. According to *Die Zeit* 'Refugees are victims rather than perpetrators' (22 November 2015), SZ ran the title 'the Syrian War hits civilians the hardest – why Syrians flee to Europe' explains the *SZ* (3 September 2015), while *Die Welt* explained that 'the number of those prepared for terror among the many refugees is dwindling', adding that there would be 'no alternative to [Germany's] refugee policies' (21 December 2016). Evidently, then, two opposing yet interdependent figures of refugees are established: the potential terrorist and the victim of terror.

The majority of articles, however, construct refugees as threats. Bavarian interior minister Joachim Hermann (Christian Social Union (CSU)) told *Die Welt* (4 November 2016) that 'political Islam is one of the most dangerous ideologies […] It is not just a question of terror attacks, but also the totalitarian ideology of unifying state and religious powers'. As a consequence, Germany needed to exert 'control over who comes into our country'. In such statements, refugees are equated with people of Muslim faith who are constructed as inherently suspect and, therefore, calls are made for surveillance and control. As Ambalavaner Sivanandan postulates, this logic of suspicion converges 'the war on asylum and the "war on terror"' leading to the idea of a 'nation under siege', which generates a form of 'racism that cannot tell a settler from an immigrant, an immigrant from an asylum seeker, an asylum seeker from a Muslim, a Muslim from a terrorist' (2006: 48). Consequently, the threat of terror is not evaluated in relation to extremism but is equated with Islam itself, which is depicted as backward and innately violent. Headlines such as 'Arab refugees import "culture of violence"' (*Focus,* 9 May 2016), 'Islamists threaten Christians in refugee homes' (*Die Welt,* 27 September 2015) or 'Hate and Islam: Terror has something to do with the religion' (*FAZ,* 1 July 2016) have not only deepened the discursive link between terror and Islam but also of Islam, migration and violence in general. This discourse reinforces orientalist depictions of Islam as repressive, brutal and barbaric and the negation of rational Western secularism and democracy (Said, 1997).

Mirroring the above, Edmund Stoiber, former minister-president of Bavaria and chairman of the CSU, demanded that 'refugees have to adapt to the German Leitkultur' in order to integrate themselves and successfully claim asylum (*Die Welt*, 12 September 2015). In his opinion, values ranging from secularism to Germany's collective memory would 'perhaps have to be explained longer to an Arab Muslim than to a German' insinuating that an Arab Muslim could not be German. However, a *FAZ* article (1 September 2015) interjects that most 'Muslims feel closely connected to state and society', which is emphasised by a quote from Merkel who underlines Germany's good relationship 'with the vast majority of Muslims' in the country. In an opinion piece for *Die Welt* (2 October 2016), finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union (CDU)) similarly declared that he did not want 'well-integrated' Muslims living in Germany to feel excluded, but instead sought to promote a 'German Islam'; especially important as Germany now had 'to deal with people from very different cultural areas than before'. Schäuble's comments aimed to paint a more differentiated image of Muslim communities in Germany and to contest the essentialised view of Islam as innately irreconcilable with Germany's idealised self-perception. In doing so,

however, he drew a line between assimilable Muslims and those not or not yet integrated into the imagined national way of life. Consistent with Mahmood Mamdani's (2005) notion of 'cultural talk', religious identity and practice are turned into political classifications, which differentiate 'good pro-Western Muslims' from 'bad anti-Western Muslims': 'Good Islam, evil Islam' as the title of an *SZ* article (2 March 2016) put it.

This differentiation between the figure of the undeserving radical Muslim refugee and the deserving assimilable refugee has gained further public momentum after a suspected Syrian terrorist was captured by three fellow asylum seekers in Chemnitz in 2016. 'A medal for the heroes' is a headline of a *taz* article (11 October 2016), which described the story of the arrest as 'extraordinary' because the Syrians' actions 'did not fit the stereotypical image of refugees'. Saxony's minister-president Stanislaw Tillich (CDU) congratulated the 'courageous and responsible Syrian fellow citizens' (cited in *Die Zeit*, 10 October 2016), while André Hahn from the socialist-left party Die Linke called for them to be granted asylum (*Focus*, 11 October 2016). Although rightly welcoming the act itself, such comments also imply that there is indeed something outstanding about refugees who condemn and resist Islamist terror or any other form of violence. Welcoming these Syrian men as 'citizens' in contrast to many other refugees who are similarly seeking legal recognition makes the moral condition of their asylum claim ever more pronounced.

The deservingness of the refugee figure who is fleeing war and destitution is thereby contrasted with the undeservingness of the incoming 'other' who seeks to exploit and destabilise the country. This is not to say that acts of violence might indeed justify a legal or moral intervention. However, by putting refugees under collective suspicion of terror and political destabilisation, the always-already 'Muslim' and 'violent' refugee is constantly figured on the edge of illegality. The evaluation of the refugee's deservingness thus swings between orientalist figurations of violent Islam and an idealised image of citizenship that needs to be earned, which justifies humanitarian imperatives of protection, recognition and asylum for some and securitization, deportation and control for others.

Gender relations

The last dimension of the discourse of crisis concerns gender relations and sexual violence which have sparked the most volatile debates around the threat that refugees are assumed to pose to the fabric of German society. The most prominent example of this logic can be observed in the heated response to events on New Year's Eve in Cologne, in which the

allegations of sexual abuse conducted by groups of men of Middle Eastern and North African origin dominated public debates over the following weeks (see Hark and Villa, 2016). CDU vice-chancellor Volker Bouffier famously declared that 'Cologne changed everything' and called for a U-turn in Merkel's border politics (*Die Welt*, 9 January 2016). He was supported by public figures such as prominent feminist Alice Schwarzer, who stated that the events were the 'product of false tolerance' (*Focus*, 5 January 2016), and the head of Die Linke, Sarah Wagenknecht, who argued that 'who misuses their right to hospitality loses their right to hospitality' (*Der Spiegel*, 12 January 2016). At the same time, numerous voices in the public realm tried to point out that sexual violence was a structural 'global problem' and not specific to migrant communities (*taz*, 10 January 2016). The more dominant humanitarian response, however, was to highlight Germany's responsibility in helping refugee women and children similarly suffering from this form of violence, and in doing so reinforced rather than challenged the racialised framing of the debate.

The anxiety about male migration after the New Year's Eve events was most clearly expressed on the front pages of *Focus* (9 January 2016) and *SZ* (9 January 2016), which depicted, respectively, a naked white woman covered in black handprints and a black arm reaching into the crotch of a white female silhouette. Under the image of the silhouette, the *SZ* title reads 'many young Muslims cannot face the other sex in a relaxed way. For them, it is always a highly sexualized situation'. Within these representations, migration, race and religion are again conflated and sexism is shifted from a structural problem to an essential characteristic located in the figure of the refugee other. Misogyny and sexual violence become framed as the result of a 'toxic mixture of North African-Arab culture and religion' (*FAZ*, 11 January 2016) or the 'import [of] an archaic image of women' (*Die Welt*, 1 February 2016). The moral panic around Cologne thus connects directly with ideas of scholars like Jasbir Puar (2007) and Sara Farris (2017) who suggest that a progressive attitude towards questions of gender and sexuality has become a crucial marker through which the division between supposedly advanced Western democracies and other geopolitical locations are made. These representations not only embed complex structural issues into a simple 'clash of civilization' thesis but also extend long-established colonial tropes that frame black and Arab men as hyper-sexualised and misogynist (Dietze, 2017). A range of articles, however, tried to counter these representations and aimed to deconstruct this collective demonization. Several news outlets published interviews with North African and Middle Eastern refugees about the allegations and their perspective on gender politics. Reported statements such as 'I have been here for a year and have never done anything' (*SZ*, 2 February 2016) place the interviewees

into the position of having to distance themselves from allegations in order to continue to be seen as citizens worthy of protection and rights – and thereby implicitly reaffirming them.

While men are often positioned as 'bad' refugees who are only able to acquire respectability by manifesting their innocence, 'good' refugees seem to mainly emerge in the figures of women and children. After Cologne, a range of newspapers cited with relief that 'more women and children are coming to Europe' (*SZ*, 4 February 2016). The 'figure of the child' (Castañeda, 2002) specifically operates as the ultimate symbol of innocence and helplessness evoking compassion and pity — probably best exemplified in the image of Alan Kurdi, whose dead body was photographed washed up on a Turkish beach in September 2015. More than any other image, it was this picture that drove humanitarian calls for a 'discussion about asylum to be given a sincere chance' (*SZ*, 3 September 2015). In the wake of Cologne, children were not only singled out as victims of the 'tragedy' of the refugee crisis (*FAZ*, 3 September 2015) but also of 'child abuse' occurring in asylum centres (*Der Spiegel*, 4 October 2015). In these depictions, the figure of the child was positioned in direct opposition to perpetrators of sexual violence and coincided with demands for more protection from the state. In other examples, however, children were not simply represented as victims but also as potential perpetrators. According to an article in SZ entitled 'We need to take sexual abuse seriously', the *SZ* (7 December 2016), in order to ensure that 'traumatized children' would not grow up to commit sexual abuse, 'psychotherapy should be compulsory for all underage refugees'. Such statements indicate how the framing of the child as the archetypal victim is highly unstable as it is always haunted by its potential undoing in the future and is put under general suspicion of turning from victim to perpetrator.

A similar logic pertains to the representation of female refugees. In articles such as 'It's not just after Cologne that women lock their doors' (*SZ*, 20 February 2016), a range of newspapers covered incidents about sexual violence and abuse in asylum centres. Others reported about how 'threatened with debt and voodoo: human traffickers force refugees into prostitution' (*Der Spiegel*, 16 April 2015). Women are represented here as voiceless victims whose problems stem from their surrounding communities rather than the situations of war they are fleeing or the European border regimes that have placed them in such precarious positions. In this context, women are often framed as the creators of their presumably oppressive situation. For instance, in an article entitled 'Be angry with Muslim women' (14 January 2016), *Die Welt* argues that Muslim women, as mothers, pass the 'Islamist values' to their sons that are framed as the driving force for misogyny and sexual violence. In merging discourses of religion, gender and migration, women are portrayed as the carriers of culture

and as such made responsible for the reproduction of social problems. Such arguments have a long history in Germany, where debates around the headscarf, for instance, have treated Muslim women simultaneously as victims (of presumably patriarchal cultural practices) and as threats (as the spreaders of these same practices) (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2014). In order to continue to be the subject of empathetic engagement, female refugees hence need to be seen as either passive, voiceless victims or as willing to renounce their social ties, religion and communities. Like their male counterparts, then, women are asked to reconfirm the self-image of German society free of sexual abuse and gender inequality, which further reinforces the cruel double-bind between assimilation and othering, between 'good' and 'bad' refugees.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown how the German discourse of the 'refugee crisis' shifts attention from the geopolitical context and reasons for migration and displacement to the benefits and burdens that refugees are presumed to pose to the host country. As El-Tayeb (2017) suggests, the term 'refugee crisis' implies 'less the plight of millions trying to leave military and economic warzones than the inconvenience their arrival is causing [Germany and] the European Union'. In other words, in the press's coverage of the 'refugee crisis', the source of the crisis was projected onto migration itself rather than being seen to be located in the war in Syria or in the violent conflicts and economic deprivation in the Middle East or North Africa. Asylum therefore shifts from being a legal right to being framed in terms of deservingness whereby refugees need to show that they are worthy of becoming part of the German nation. Within this process, deservingness operates as a mode of bordering, which is reinstated through and within the discourse of crisis, and Germany continues to be framed as a racially and ethnically homogenous entity that erects clear boundaries of belonging.

More specifically, we have argued that this logic of deservingness operates through a 'figure of crisis'– the shifting figure of the (un)deserving refugee which is primarily constructed in debates about the economy, state security and gender relations. In these debates, people are framed as, respectively, the costly/useful, the destabilising/assimilable and the misogynist/victimised refugee. Within this logic, refugees continue to be defined as racialized 'others' who have to prove that they are worthy of protection and, as such, always find themselves on the cusp of deterrence and deportability. Apparent counterdiscourses that try to present the arrival of refugees as a positive phenomenon are already implicated within the dominant discourse and end up feeding into the same dehumanizing logic of

deservingness. While there are of course representations that do not neatly fit into this logic, our analysis shows how even in the context of Germany's presumably welcoming politics of asylum, humanitarian responses are contingent upon the exclusion of the undeserving and threatening.

Our analysis therefore develops the study of humanitarian securitization within the context of the European 'refugee crisis'. It suggests that we need to look beyond material practices at the physical boundaries of Europe and to focus on the ways in which European borders are reproduced and sustained through public debate. It compels us to think more critically about how a discourse of crisis that tends to erase the historical and geopolitical context of its genesis might be framed otherwise and urges us to reflect how the 'good'/'bad' binary through which much of the current debate operates might best be challenged. While we have illustrated that most humanitarian accounts easily fuel the same logic of deservingness, alternative discourses need to start from the perspective of refugees themselves and acknowledge that the socioeconomic and political developments in the Middle East and North Africa are intimately linked to Europe's colonial pasts and current global power relations (Bhambra, 2017). Starting from these linkages can potentially open up new possibilities to reframe the discourse on the 'refugee crisis' beyond anxious evaluations of migration in general, and the figure of the refugee in particular, and towards more substantial forms of transnational solidarity.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Myria Georgiou, Mike Savage and Howard Taylor for review and help in editing. The Migration and the Media project, 2015-2017, was co-led by Lilie Chouliaraki, Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski (all from Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science). Thank you to Ellen Helsper and our colleagues and coders without whom the project would not be possible: Zuzana Brezinová, Leah Selig Chauhan, Antonios Dimitriadis, Joelle Eid, Lisa Elkhoury, Poliana Geha, Shreya Goenka, Safaa Halahla, Róbert Hegedűs, Gyorgyi Horvath, Seema Huneidi, Rosanna Hutchings, Leticia Ishibashi-Poppenwimmer, Götz Kadow, Kaylah Kleczka, Afroditi Koulaxi, Jan Krotký, Ana Lomtadze, Tze Ming Mok, Rita Nemeth, Sadichchha Pokharel, Corinne Schweizer, Karim Shukr, Ema Stastna, Tijana Stolic, Sanja Vico, Pauline Vidal and Felicity Ward.

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[i] The authors appear in alphabetical order as all three authors contributed to this paper in equal parts. Whereas Kristina Kolbe and Billy Holzberg were mainly responsible for the discourse analysis, Rafal Zaborowski mainly conducted the content analysis.

[ii] All citations of German references, media and public statements were translated by the authors.

[iii] The Migration and the Media project (2015-2017) was coordinated by Prof. Lilie Chouliaraki, Dr Myria Georgiou and Dr Rafal Zaborowski and funded by the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

[iv] *Die Welt* is a centre-right newspaper with the third highest national circulation among the non-tabloid daily press after SZ and FAZ, while *taz* is a smaller left-wing daily. Weeklies were included as they indicate longer discursive trends.
[v] As this is a study of overarching discourses during the period, we only refer to the newspaper and date but not to the individual author.
[vi] On 18 July 2016, four people were attacked by a man with a hatchet on a train near Würzburg and six days later 15 people were injured in a suicide bombing in Ansbach. On both occasions the perpetrators were asylum seekers.

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