

**AN 'ALAN KURDI' EFFECT? ANALYZING THE POLITICS OF OPENNESS IN
GERMANY DURING THE 2015-2016 REFUGEE 'CRISIS'**

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Abstract

In contrast to restrictionist trends against asylum seekers and refugees in the Global North, how do representations and perceptions of displaced people influence policy-making towards openness? Three objectives are formulated: i) to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that are (re)produced by political elites, constituents, and the media in contexts of relative openness; ii) to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers are driven towards openness; iii) to examine the mechanisms through which movements of openness may wither. This research tracks the (re)production of five representations and perceptions that are rarely jointly analyzed: deservingness, relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. The influence of these representations and perceptions on policy-making is assessed by testing two mechanisms that are rarely applied to contexts of relative openness. The top-down approach understands elites as constructing representations to legitimize their response. The bottom-up perspective conceives societal perceptions as affecting the political calculus of policy-makers. The German response to the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis’ is explored as a deviant case study for its relatively welcoming approach to the displaced during this period. Research is conducted through thematic analysis and process-tracing. Alternative hypothesized processes are considered.

In relation to Objective 1, findings indicate a predominance of deserving representations. Perceptions of relatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity are also captured. Perceptions of implicatedness were not significantly mobilized. In response to Objective 2, findings indicate both top-down and bottom-up influences. Chancellor Angela Merkel actively engaged in the politics of framing in order to legitimize her course of action. Elite discourses and policies are likely to have contributed to the (re)production of a relatively accepting environment towards the displaced. Societal representations and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may have likewise impacted Merkel’s discourses and policy decisions. Welcoming societal representations and perceptions are also likely to have facilitated policy-making in a constrained environment. Concerning Objective 3, findings foremost indicate bottom-up influences. The anticipation of negative societal representations and perceptions significantly affected policy-making. Further restrictions were implemented in response to the actual societal shift that followed the assaults in Cologne in January 2016. This project therefore sets the stage for a broader research agenda on the emergence and decline of movements of openness in the Global North, as a means of gaining new insight into how inclusiveness may be cultivated.

Résumé

Par opposition aux tendances restrictionnistes à l'encontre des demandeurs d'asile et des réfugiés au Nord, de quelle façon les représentations et perceptions à l'égard des personnes déplacées influencent-elles l'élaboration des politiques vers l'ouverture ? Trois objectifs sont formulés : i) identifier les représentations et perceptions clés à l'égard des déplacés (re)produites par les élites politiques, les électeurs, et les médias en contextes de relative ouverture ; ii) évaluer les mécanismes par lesquels les décideurs politiques sont portés vers l'ouverture ; iii) examiner les mécanismes par lesquels les mouvements d'ouverture peuvent s'affaiblir. Ce projet trace la (re)production de cinq représentations et perceptions rarement analysées de façon conjointe : le mérite, l'identification, l'implication, la régionalité, et la connexion à l'identité nationale. L'influence de ces représentations et perceptions sur l'élaboration des politiques est évaluée par l'examen de deux mécanismes rarement testés en contextes de relative ouverture. La perspective 'descendante' conçoit les élites comme les façonneurs des représentations dans un but de légitimation de leurs pratiques. L'approche 'ascendante' décrit les perceptions sociétales comme balises du calcul politique des décideurs. La réponse de l'Allemagne à la 'crise' des réfugiés de 2015-2016 est analysée comme cas d'étude déviant, considérant son approche relativement accueillante à l'égard des personnes déplacées au cours de cette période. L'analyse thématique et la reconstitution de processus sont utilisées comme méthodes de recherche. Des processus hypothétiques alternatifs sont considérés.

Relativement au premier objectif, les résultats indiquent une prédominance de représentations méritantes. Les perceptions d'identification, de régionalité, et de connexion à l'identité nationale sont également captées. Les perceptions d'implication ne furent pas mobilisées de façon significative. En réponse au deuxième objectif, les résultats indiquent des influences descendantes et ascendantes. La chancelière Angela Merkel fut activement engagée dans la production de représentations et perceptions dans un but de légitimation de sa conduite. Les discours et politiques des élites ont vraisemblablement contribué à la (re)production d'un environnement relativement accueillant envers les personnes déplacées. Les représentations et perceptions sociétales à l'égard des déplacés ont constitué une contrainte additionnelle vers l'ouverture, et ont possiblement également influencé les discours et politiques de Merkel. Ces représentations et perceptions sociétales accueillantes ont, de plus, vraisemblablement facilité l'élaboration des politiques dans un contexte de possibilités restreintes. Relativement au troisième

objectif, les résultats indiquent principalement des influences ascendantes. L'anticipation de représentations et perceptions sociétales négatives ont significativement affecté l'élaboration des politiques. Des mesures restrictives additionnelles furent instaurées en réponse au changement sociétal réel qui suivit les agressions de Cologne en janvier 2016. Ce projet de recherche permet donc de jeter les bases d'un agenda de recherche plus large portant sur l'émergence et le déclin des mouvements d'ouverture au Nord, afin de mieux comprendre les façons par lesquelles l'inclusion des personnes déplacées peut être favorisée.

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Acronyms

AfD	Alternative for Germany In German: Alternative für Deutschland
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees In German: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
BMFSFJ	Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth Affairs In German: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany In German: Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria In German: Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
EU	European Union
FDP	Free Democratic Party In German: Freie Demokratische Partei
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PEGIDA	European Patriots against the Islamisation of the West In German: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany In German: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Research puzzle

In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*. The document underlined the importance of ensuring “a people-centred, sensitive, humane, dignified, gender-responsive and prompt reception for all persons arriving in our countries,” and expressed a commitment to “combating xenophobia, racism and discrimination in our societies against refugees and migrants” (UNGA 2016). The *New York Declaration* paved the way for the *Global Compact on Refugees*, which was adopted by the General Assembly at the end of 2018. The latter document particularly aimed to “provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all United Nations Member States,” and insisted on the need to “foster a positive atmosphere” for resettlement (UNGA 2018).

However, the vision suggested in those documents does not reflect the current trends. In the Global North, states have increasingly relied on non-arrival measures to prevent asylum seekers from reaching national borders where they could seek and access such protection (see e.g. Hyndman and Mountz 2008; Mountz 2010). When these measures do not prevent the displaced from entering, further problems of responsibility-sharing arise.¹ These “persistent dysfunctionalities” further shift efforts towards external measures aimed at diverting refugee flows back to a Global South which is already receiving the vast majority of the displaced (Niemann and Zaun 2018, 3; 14). These measures also force the displaced to take dangerous routes to access safety (Gibney 2006; UNHCR 2017). According to several authors, such restrictionism is nurtured by negative representations of the displaced, which are generally discussed as threats to the physical, cultural and economic security of host societies (see e.g. Hammerstad 2014a; 2014b; Waever et al. 1993; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 2007).

The existing academic literature has thus focused on restrictionism against asylum seekers and refugees in the Global North, and the negative representations that are (re)produced in those contexts. In contrast, few scholars have taken the alternative approach of focusing on the rare, yet possible movements of openness towards refugees. A better understanding of these phenomena and the roles of representations and perceptions therein may open new insights into how

¹ For example, the 2015 refugee situation in Europe has shown an inability to fairly distribute the number of refugees among European Union states, thus leaving a small number of countries responding to the majority of arrivals (see e.g. Trauner 2016; Thielemann 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018; Zaun 2018).

inclusiveness and openness towards refugees may be cultivated in the Global North. Such a research agenda is also necessary in the aftermath of the so-called 2015 ‘refugee crisis.’² Indeed, several authors have suggested that the images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child found dead on Turkish shores after trying to reach Greece, triggered several Western governments into action (see e.g. de-Andrés et al. 2016; Bleiker 2018; Hutchison 2018).

This thesis thus seeks to address the following question: *how do representations and perceptions of displaced persons influence policy-making towards openness?* In responding to this question, my objectives are threefold: i) to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that are produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents, and the media in contexts of relative openness; ii) to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers are driven towards openness, as either the initiators or followers of the movement; iii) to examine the mechanisms through which movements of openness may wither. In order to do so, I will take a deductive approach by tracking the (re)production of five representations and perceptions which have been described in the literature as encouraging openness towards displaced groups: deservingness, relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. These various representations and perceptions are rarely put into interaction with one another, as will be undertaken in this thesis. I will also test two mechanisms through which representations may influence policy-making. The first follows a top-down approach and understands elites as constructing representations and from there legitimizing the response. The second aligns with a bottom-up perspective and conceives societal perceptions as affecting the political calculus of policy-makers. These mechanisms are generally used to describe restrictive responses to refugees, but are rarely tested in contexts of relative openness.

As a result, this thesis formulates three hypotheses. In relation to Objective 1, I hypothesize that openness towards displaced groups relies on the construction of the displaced as *deserving* of protection, and that such openness is further encouraged by perceptions of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. In connection to Objective 2, I hypothesize that policy-makers either rely on welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they respond to the

² I will use the term ‘crisis’ with inverted commas to refer to the common terminology that was used to designate the 2015-2016 refugee situation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that evoking the existence of a ‘crisis’ “engenders certain narrations and [...] enables and forecloses various kinds of questions” (Roitman 2013, 10). I will thus delve into those narrations and questions while maintaining a distance from the term ‘crisis.’

welcoming representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of electoral interest. The first pathway coincides with the top-down approach; the second with the bottom-up perspective. Likewise, in relation to Objective 3, I hypothesize that policy-makers either rely on negative representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they respond to the negative representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of consideration for their electoral costs. The first pathway coincides with the top-down approach; the second with the bottom-up perspective.

To address this research question, this project analyzes the response of Germany to the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis.’ This case could indeed be classified as ‘deviant’: while several countries closed their borders to the flows of asylum seekers arriving to Europe and refrained from providing opportunities for resettlement (Triandafyllidou 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018), Germany maintained a relatively welcoming approach to asylum seekers and received about a million asylum seekers within a year (Grote 2018, 15-16). Through thematic analysis and process-tracing, the evolution of elite, public, and media representations and perceptions of the displaced will be tracked and contextualized with the evolution of decision-making processes, policies, measures, and number of arrivals from 2011 to 2016. The analysis begins in 2011 in order to track the emergence of the refugee issue on the agenda, and ends in March 2016 with the decline in openness the country experienced. Alternative hypothesized processes will also be considered, particularly by assessing whether and how regional politics, the agency of the displaced, international norms, and domestic political opponents affected the decision-making processes and the discourses policy-makers chose to adopt.

In the remainder of this introduction, key definitions will be provided before presenting the main findings of this thesis. The structure of the following chapters will also be outlined.

Definitions of key terms

First, the concept of *refugee* requires clarification. According to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, a refugee refers to any person who, “owing to [a] well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality [or former habitual residence if without a nationality] and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” An *asylum seeker* is an individual who claims such status through domestic

refugee determination procedures (UNHCR 2019b). However, the term ‘refugee’ also constitutes a “moral category that infers people in need of safety who hold some position of social worth based upon their vulnerability” (Goodman et al. 2017, 106). I will thus follow van Selm’s (2001, 264) practice of using the word *refugee* without inverted commas to refer to “people recognized as refugees by states,” while the use of inverted commas (‘refugees’) will refer to “people who in everyday language would be called refugees, but who may not have been recognized formally as such.” In other circumstances, I will use the more generic term of ‘displaced persons.’

This thesis’ research question also distinguishes between *representations* and *perceptions* of the displaced. Holmes and Castaneda (2016, 13) define *representations* as “symbolic, social, political, and legal categories of inclusion and exclusion.” The concept thus primarily refers to depictions of the *outgroup*. However, the term ‘representations’ does not fully capture understandings of the *ingroup*, which have also been described as central for understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion (see Kirkwood 2017; Reicher et al. 2008). As Kirkwood (2017, 117) argues, “definitions of ‘us’ are at least as important as ‘our’ definitions of ‘them’ when it comes to feelings towards others.” I will thus use the more general term *perceptions* when referring to the perspectives of the hosts on their connections (or lack thereof) to a particular group of displaced persons.

Five types of representations and perceptions will be used throughout this thesis. Although they will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 2, it is helpful to introduce them now. I will thus refer to *deservingness* as a “conditional attribution enabling a moral demarcation [...] between people who are understood as worthy of the international community’s physical, economic, social, and health aid and those who are not” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 17). Such classification would essentially rely on the displaced’s perceived motives for fleeing, and would be further mediated by age and gender. Perceptions of *relatedness* pertain to the hosts’ sense of identification with the displaced. Relatedness could be based on individualized stories (Slovic et al. 2017; Boltanski 1999) or on the sharing of common ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or historical features (Gibney 1999; van Selm 2000b; El-Enany 2016). Perceptions of *implicatedness* involve the hosts’ perceived sense of involvement and/or responsibility in the plight of the displaced. Perceptions of *regionality* refer to the perceived geographical proximity of the displaced to the hosts. Lastly, national identity can be understood as a “sense of belonging to a nation” (Dauvergne 2005, 48), while the concept of nation can be defined as an “imagined political community” (Anderson 2006,

6) constructed through myths and symbols (Dauvergne 2005, 41-48). As a result, *connectedness to national identity* refers to the perceived connections between the hosts' nation and the plight of the displaced.

Finally, I will use the term *openness* to refer to positions, discourses and policies that legitimize and ease access to resettlement and asylum. Conversely, *restrictiveness* will refer to positions, discourses and policies that justify and restrain access to resettlement and asylum. Following these conceptions, I refer to *welcoming* representations and perceptions as those perceived to support openness, while I refer to *negative* representations and perceptions as those understood to encourage restrictiveness (or unresponsiveness) towards the displaced. Similarly, *movements of openness* will be understood as the processes and effects of legitimizing and easing access to resettlement and asylum. Movements may vary in their strength depending on the number of actors – among political elites, constituents, and the media - that contribute to it.³ I will use *movements of openness* and *movements of sympathy* interchangeably.

Main findings

In line with my first hypothesis, my results indicate that the movement of openness experienced by Germany during the 2015-2016 refugee 'crisis' predominantly relied on representations of the displaced as deserving. Such representations were mobilized across the public, the media, and political elites. Women and children were indeed commonly represented as deserving of protection, although the scope of deservingness generally spanned beyond age and gender categories to encompass the war-fleeing Syrian asylum seeker as its ultimate figure. Perceptions of relatedness and regionality were at times mobilized by Chancellor Angela Merkel in an attempt to build support for her course of action. These perceptions were also conveyed by the images of Alan Kurdi and partly explain the iconographical and iconological power of those photographs. Media and elite actors also relied upon understandings, myths and symbols of the German nation to justify the access of the displaced to protection within the polity. Nevertheless, media and elite actors did not significantly mobilize perceptions of implicatedness, and rather tended to obscure the political connections that linked Europeans to the displaced.

³ Movements of openness thus have the potential to include state and non-state actors. As such, I do not use the concept of 'movement' as it is generally discussed in social movement theory (see e.g. Klotz and Lynch 2015; Benford and Snow 2000). The few works discussing 'movements of openness' towards refugees usually refer to them as "outpourings" of sympathy (Gibney 2003; van Selm 2000a; 2001; 2014; Goodman et al. 2017).

In response to the second objective of this research, findings indicate both top-down and bottom-up influences. On the one hand, process-tracing evidence shows that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during 2015-2016. In a context where governing elites remained wary of the number of asylum seekers to come, the agency of the displaced and regional interests and constraints are likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel's welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. The Chancellor thus exerted leadership towards the displaced, although that leadership was significantly constrained. In turn, these elite narratives of deservingness are likely to have contributed to the (re)production of a relatively accepting environment towards the displaced throughout most of the period under study. In addition, by maintaining internal borders which were relatively accessible to the displaced, federal policy-makers provided opportunities for the media and civil society to demonstrate their support towards the displaced and strengthen the movement of sympathy. Such findings better align with the top-down approach.

On the other hand, decision-making evidence indicates that policy-makers – and most notably Merkel – sought to avoid images of violence at Germany's periphery considering the upsetting impact such images would have had on German society. These findings suggest that societal representations and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may have likewise impacted Merkel's discourses and policy decisions. The welcoming societal representations and perceptions of the displaced that were (re)produced in the months, weeks and days preceding the height of the 'crisis' in the fall of 2015 are also likely to have facilitated policy-making in an otherwise highly constrained environment. These findings better align with the bottom-up approach.

In relation to the third objective of this research, findings foremost indicate bottom-up influences. The persistent efforts by political elites throughout the period under study to curb the number of arrivals, combined with allusions to social acceptance, indeed suggest that the anticipation of negative societal representations and perceptions significantly affected policy-making. Following the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 and the actual shift in societal representations and perceptions, further restrictions were implemented. Evidence suggests that such restrictionism was influenced by the desire to control public contestation by appearing proactive in fighting crime. These findings better align with the bottom-up approach.

Meanwhile, several political elites, particularly within the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) and the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), voiced their concerns over the capacity of the country to cope with the number of arrivals. These elite considerations may also have had an effect on renewed restrictionism, and would better align with the top-down approach. Nevertheless, restrictive measures were put in place by policy-makers while maintaining a relatively welcoming discourse towards the displaced. In this context, policy-makers did not drive representations and perceptions towards restrictiveness.

The shift in public and media attitudes following the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 also corroborates the insights of the existing literature on the fragility of welcoming representations and perceptions. In the case of Germany, the assaults in Cologne were seemingly perpetrated by the very group that had been the object of assistance. Public and media responses to the assaults suggest that such events disrupted the perceived deservingness of the displaced. It is likely that the perceived virtue of the German nation upon which political elites and media actors had capitalized further fed perceptions of ingratitude and betrayal.

In relation to the alternative hypothesized processes tested in this project, process-tracing evidence indeed indicates that regional politics and the agency of the displaced significantly shaped policy-making processes towards openness, and are likely to have affected the discourses policy-makers chose to adopt. In contrast, domestic political opponents had a more limited impact on the sequence of events. The effects of elite pressures seem to have been most salient in the policy decision to suspend family reunification for individuals granted subsidiary protection. Likewise, decision-making evidence suggests that international norms did not significantly shape the sequence of events as more robust border controls were deemed legally possible.

This project thus suggests that both elites and societal actors may offer traction towards openness by (re)producing welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced. Future research is needed to deepen the types and mixes of representations and perceptions involved in these contexts, and to further assess the roles and effects of different actors in these processes. This project therefore sets the stage for a broader research agenda on the emergence and decline of movements of sympathy in the Global North.⁴

⁴ Although the scope of the present project is limited to the Global North, future research should assess the potential similarities and differences that affect refugee policy-making in the Global South. Developing countries have indeed varied across time and place in the level of openness of their responses to refugee situations (see e.g. Milner 2009), which indicates the need to better understand the factors that shape such responses and the roles of perceptions therein.

Chapter outline

This thesis will be organized as follows. The first part discusses the theoretical and methodological ideas that underpin my inquiry. As such, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on representations and perceptions of refugees and their roles on policy-making, and builds a theoretical framework for the subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 presents the research design that will be employed to conduct this research. The second part of this thesis presents the empirical findings. Chapter 4 contextualizes historical and legal developments in the areas of asylum and immigration in Germany until the early 2010s, and spans the emergence and growth of the refugee issue on the country's agenda from 2011 to September 3, 2015. Chapter 5 traces developments from September 4, 2015 to December 2015 as the country received an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers. Chapter 6 covers reactions to the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 and ends with the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, which also correlates with a significant decrease and stabilization of arrivals from then onwards. Chapter 7 constitutes the conclusion of this thesis, in which the key findings of the case study are tied back to the objectives of this research. The limitations and implications of those findings are also discussed.

Part I

Chapter 2 – The Politics of Openness: A Theoretical Framework

This thesis asks: how do representations and perceptions of displaced persons influence policy-making towards openness? The present chapter reviews the existing literature related to this question and builds a theoretical framework for the subsequent chapters. In line with Objective 1, I will first discuss the various ways in which displaced persons may be represented and perceived in the Global North, and the implications of those representations and perceptions for their inclusion or exclusion in the polity. Although an extensive literature has delved into these types of questions, few works assemble them in a comprehensive theoretical framework as will be undertaken below. Following this discussion and in line with Objective 2, I will present two main mechanisms through which representations and perceptions of the displaced are understood to influence policy-making. The first follows a top-down approach and understands elites as constructing representations and from there legitimizing the response. The second aligns with a bottom-up perspective and conceives societal perceptions as affecting the political calculus of policy-makers. As will be highlighted, few works test the application of those mechanisms to more welcoming responses to refugees. Lastly and in consideration of Objective 3, I will review the insights of the literature on the mechanisms through which movements of sympathy may wither. Again, partial findings will indicate the need for further research on those dynamics.

Representations and perceptions of the displaced

Feelings of threat are at the centre of discussions on representations and perceptions of the displaced. At the individual level of analysis, a major strand of literature seeks to determine how feelings of threat – stemming most notably from cultural, economic, or security concerns – can predict negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees, as well as feed support for restrictive policies (see Esses et al. 2017). These effects would be intensified by the real or imagined size of a group, as well as by a perceived lack of control over arrivals (Esses et al. 2017; Greenaway et al. 2014; Vollmer 2017; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). Feelings of threat are also the focus of securitization studies, which particularly seek to understand how refugees and asylum seekers have become “increasingly discussed in terms of their potential for being economically disruptive, culturally threatening, connected to trans-national crime, or belonging to international terrorist

networks” (Hammerstad 2014b, 61; see also Hammerstad 2014a; Waeber et al. 1993; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 2007).

In a context where refugees and asylum seekers are often associated with cultural, economic, and security concerns, how can those groups and individuals move beyond those negative representations and perceptions? The following section seeks to provide some insight into how such shifts may be possible. Four types of shifts will be reviewed: from undeservingness to deservingness; from differentness and dehumanization to relatedness; from dehistoricization and depoliticization to implicatedness; and from distance to regionality. National identity will then be discussed as a double-edged sword, which can nourish both negative *and* welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced. The last subsection will synthesize the discussion by assessing how representations and perceptions of deservingness, relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity may interact with one another.

From undeservingness to deservingness

As Holmes and Castaneda (2016, 17) explain, deservingness refers to a “conditional attribution enabling a moral demarcation [...] between people who are understood as worthy of the international community’s physical, economic, social, and health aid and those who are not.” As such, those perceived as *forcibly* displaced by political circumstances such as war and violence – ‘refugees’ in the popular meaning of the term – are usually framed as deserving, while those perceived as having made “a free and autonomous *choice* to cross borders” are often positioned as undeserving (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 17). In such cases, the displaced may be viewed as “economic opportunists,” as they would *voluntarily* have left “their home communities in search of a better life” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 17). Similarly, those waiting to be resettled are usually framed as deserving of protection, while those spontaneously crossing borders – asylum seekers – are often perceived as cheaters and queue jumpers, when they are not perceived as security threats (Hyndman and Giles 2016; McNevin 2014; Schuster 2003; Mares 2003; van Selm 2014; Hammerstad 2014b, 61). Again, the notion of opportunism is latent: asylum seekers “have not waited to be selected, but have taken their future into their own hands: they have arrived [...] uninvited and unsolicited” (Schuster 2003, 246). The term ‘refugee’ thus has moral connotations that other terms such as the ‘migrant’ or the ‘asylum seeker’ do not convey (see Goodman et al. 2017, 106-108; van Selm 2001, 252). By consequence and as van Selm (2001, 252) argues, “the

popular perception of the meaning of words such as ‘refugee’, ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘displaced person’ can make semantics a matter of life and death, or at the very least of dignified existence or the creation of an underclass.”

Asylum seekers and refugees would thus need to move beyond any appearance of opportunism in order to be deemed deserving of protection. Several authors have sought to understand how such a shift may be facilitated. According to Fassin, the increased suspicion towards asylum seekers in recent decades – as will be discussed below – has created a “shift of legitimacy [...] from protection entitlement to humanitarian obligation” (2013, 14-15; 2011, 148-149). Such humanitarianism would be primarily based upon “a compassionate attention to individual suffering” (Fassin 2005, 372; see also Fassin 2011; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Ticktin 2017, 581; 587). It would thus be in the name of the *suffering body* (or the suffering mind) that the individual would be legitimized into the polity (Fassin 2005, 372; 2011; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; see also Ticktin 2011). In a similar discussion, Ticktin (2011, 3) argues that “embedded in this politics of care and compassion is a belief in the universality of suffering; this means that suffering can be recognized wherever it is found, that it can be measured and understood, and that – crucially – a response to it is morally mandated.”⁵

Ticktin (2011; 2017) also stresses the importance of *innocence* in producing deservingness. As she argues, to be innocent is to occupy a “space of purity: sometimes this means to be without knowledge, sometimes to be without intention, sometimes to be free from desire, and sometimes free from guilt” (2017, 578). According to Ticktin (2017, 582), certain subjects are “better positioned to fit into the conceptual framework of innocence.” The author refers to children as the “archetypal figure of innocence,” insofar as they respect its parameters (Ticktin 2011, 580).⁶ Likewise, women would “more easily [be] understood as victims and as apolitical, and hence more easily interpellated into the role of moral purity” (Ticktin 2017, 582; see also Malkki 1996; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). In contrast, men would “rarely qualify as such” (Ticktin 2017, 582). Rather, they would often represent “the figure of the rational choice individual who [...]

⁵ Economic deservingness is rarely discussed in this literature. According to Dauvergne (2005, 6-7), humanitarian admission “does not serve the national need by ‘filling gaps’ in the economy – admitting people because of the value they bring ‘us’” (see also Wallace 2018, 211). Such arguments, however, most prominently appeared in the case of Germany in 2015-2016 and will be addressed in Part II.

⁶ For example, child soldiers and undocumented children crossing into the United States from Central America would be “expuls[ed] from innocence” (and from the ‘childhood’ lexicon altogether), the former by their involvement in war; the latter by their association with “gangs, drugs, and violence” (Ticktin 2017, 580).

tends to be seen as illegitimate – an economic migrant, who does not deserve protection” (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 120), when they are not instead associated with security concerns (see Rettberg and Gajjala 2015).

Deservingness may thus be achieved once the displaced are fully grounded in a rhetoric of suffering and innocence, for which certain groups and individuals would better align. Achieving such a shift would create a place of exception where the displaced can escape more usual cultural, economic, and security concerns, thus making them not only *acceptable* to the receiving societies (see Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 120), but also “people to whom there is an *ethical duty* to support” (Goodman et al. 2017, 106; emphasis added).

From differentness and dehumanization to relatedness

Perceptions may also vary in the level of *relatedness* hosts understand to have with the displaced. As suggested above, perceived differences between the ingroup and the outgroup may nourish perceptions of threat and further drive support for restrictiveness (see Esses et al. 2017, 83; Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 18; Waever et al. 1993; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 2007; Hammerstad 2014a; 2014b). Several authors also point to the ways in which refugees and asylum seekers may be *dehumanized*, that is, denied their “full humanness” (Esses et al. 2017, 87; see also Kirkwood 2017). Dehumanization processes could take several forms, such as the use of non-human categories to describe the displaced (e.g. ‘floods’ or ‘swarms’), or the attribution of inferior qualities to those groups, such as the lack of “civility, morality, self-control, refinement, and cognitive sophistication” (Esses et al. 2017, 88; Kirkwood 2017, 116). Dehumanization would then “render support unnecessary or inappropriate,” as well as “legitimise punitive, defensive or hostile responses” (Kirkwood 2017, 116; see also Esses et al. 2017, 87-91).

In contrast to the dehumanization literature, Kirkwood (2017, 116-117) argues that “there is little research or theory specifically on the process of humanisation,” which he defines as the “process (and effect) of portraying others in ways that encourage empathy and legitimise support.” In his study of UK parliamentary debates on the European refugee ‘crisis’ in 2015 and 2016, Kirkwood (2017) analyzes one particular form of humanization: referring to the displaced as ‘human beings.’ He concludes that the use of such terms generally involved presenting refugees as “being within ‘our’ moral community, as acting in ways that ‘we’ can understand, and belonging to a common group referred to as ‘fellow human beings’, thus justifying their support” (Kirkwood

2017, 122). The very humanity of the hosts was in turn “often presented as being at stake, with the implication that if we did not respond appropriately then we were not fulfilling our own obligations or meeting these virtues that were treated as being essential” (Kirkwood 2017, 119-120; see also Fassin 2005, 382).

Nonetheless, a perceived common humanity may not be sufficient in itself to drive openness. As Malkki (1996) highlights, representational practices usually depict refugees as “generalities of bodies” (Feldman 1994, in Malkki 1996, 388) with no names nor specific histories for their displacement. In so doing, “it becomes difficult to trace a connection between me/us – the consumers of images – and them – the sea of humanity [...]. Or, more precisely, it becomes difficult to trace a connection, a relationship, other than that of a bare, “mere,” common underlying humanity” (Malkki 1996, 388).⁷ Similarly, Gibney (1999, 30) argues that “most African refugees are enigmatic to Europeans. The lives they lead are perceived as alien – so different from their own that it is virtually impossible to imagine how they might be disrupted by displacement” (see also El-Enany 2016).

The literature particularly points to two ways in which relatedness between the hosts and the displaced may be enhanced. At the individual level of analysis, psychological research highlights the greater ability of individuals to empathize with (or relate to) *individuals* rather than groups, with the effect that iconic photographs of (innocent) suffering victims often drive more attention to the plight of a group than do reports of mass casualties (see Slovic et al. 2017). As such, Boltanski (1999, 12) argues that responsiveness to the larger group can be achieved by the generalization of the particular, in which “the sufferings made manifest and touching through the accumulation of details [...] merge into a unified representation.” Moreover, the sharing of common ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or historical features between the hosts and the displaced would lead to greater responsiveness (see Gibney 1999; van Selm 2001; Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 282; El-Enany 2016).⁸ According to Gibney (1999), such features particularly contributed to the “outpouring” of sympathy towards Kosovar refugees that emerged in the Global North in

⁷ Passivity and lack of agency would often be central to representations of deservingness (see Ticktin 2017; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; Holzberg et al. 2018). As argues Ticktin (2017, 579), “the concept of innocence has produced worthiness, but only insofar as it is also a space of freedom from desire, will, or agency.” I will return to this paradox in the synthesis section below.

⁸ Such features should not be understood as fixed, considering that understandings of the self and of the other may evolve (see Gibney 1999, 30). As argues Gibney (1999, 30), “the boundaries of relatedness are capable of revision and change.”

1999 (see Gibney 1999; 2003; van Selm 2000a; 2000b; 2001, 2014; Mares 2003).⁹ As Gibney (1999, 30) argues,

...Western audiences were then confronted to refugees to whom they could relate. Here were forced migrants who looked and dressed like them, who fled by car (even facing traffic jams on their trip to safety) and who, through the use of articulate and well-educated translators, could express their suffering in terms that resonated with Western audiences. What made the Kosovans popular refugees was the ability of Westerners to see themselves – and their families, friends and neighbours – in the Kosovans’ suffering. They were touched in a deeper way by their plight because they caught in these refugees an inkling of what it would actually be like to be a refugee.

Van Selm (2001, 261) further adds that several scenes reminisced the European public of the Second World War – their very own history.

As such, a second shift from negative representations and perceptions may be achieved once the displaced are dissociated from narratives of difference and dehumanization, and are rather fully grounded in humanizing narratives – which would resonate all the more as they build upon individualized narratives and draw upon the racial biases, cultural features, languages, and historical reminiscences of the host group. In such cases, relatedness would encourage openness.

From dehistoricization and depoliticization to implicatedness

Another shift may involve the hosts’ perceived level of *implication* in the plight of the displaced. As discussed above, refugees are often depicted as a “mere biological [...] presence” (Malkki 1996, 390; see also Fassin 2005; 2011), with the corollary that the particular histories and politics of their circumstances are generally occulted (Malkki 1996; see also Rajaram 2002; Sigona 2014; Seu 2003, 161; 164; Wright 2014, 463). In other words, such practices would *dehistoricize* and *depoliticize* the refugee category. As a result, such representations would “tend to hide the political, or political-economic, connections that link television viewers’ own history with that of ‘those poor people over there’” (Malkki 1996, 389). The displaced then become “generic refugees and generic Africans in whose societies tribal violence periodically flares up” (Malkki 1996, 389), while remains concealed the West’s “present and past involvement in producing the causes of conflict and forced migration” (Sigona 2014, 372; see also Gibney 1999, 30).¹⁰

⁹ The response to Kosovar refugees notably took the form of a Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP), under which 95,931 Kosovars were evacuated from Macedonia to 28 third countries where they were offered temporary protection (see UNHCR 1999, van Selm 2001).

¹⁰ Dehistoricization, depoliticization, and perceived disconnect between the actions of host societies and the plight of the displaced are often central to representations of deservingness (see Ticktin 2011; 2017; Holmes and Castaneda

In contrast, Gibney (1999, 29) argues that Kosovar refugees “had something going on for them which other refugees from Ethiopia or Sierra Leone do not”: perceived political connections between their displacement and the actions of Western states.¹¹ According to Gibney (1999, 29), the NATO bombing campaign “turned what was, at most, a plausible scenario – the mass expulsion of Kosovans – into an immediate and pressing reality.” Such perceived implicatedness would thus have created a “deep and special responsibility” for the plight of the displaced (Gibney 1999, 29).¹² Boltanski (1999, 16-17) similarly argues that responsibility towards the “unfortunates” may arise from understandings that “everyone has allowed something to happen, from the nearest to the most distant spectator,” as well as from the perception that “the most distant spectator continues to draw a personal or collective profit from the suffering of the unfortunate.”

A third shift may thus be achieved once the connections between the host society’s actions and the plight of the displaced are not obscured, but rather exposed. While implicatedness may not have the power to shift negative representations and perceptions, it may contribute to turning unresponsiveness into openness.¹³

From distance to regionality

Perceptions and responses may also vary depending on the level of proximity the hosts perceive to have with the displaced. As de Swaan (1997, 106) indicates, “for people even to begin to have any feelings at all about distant strangers they must first find out about their existence,” while indifference may still arise from “a vague awareness of the presence of other people in

2016). According to Ticktin (2017, 583-584), innocence “erases larger structural inequalities” by appearing “outside history.” Holmes and Castaneda (2016, 13) argue that “the discourse of deservingness displaces responsibility from historical political and economic policies supported by powerful actors in Europe and the United States and instead locates it in displaced people themselves.” I will return to this paradox in the synthesis section below.

¹¹ Mares (2003, 341) also notes that the (Australian) media generally depicted the Kosovo conflict “as a contained narrative with a clear aggressor (Serbia/Milosevic) and obvious victims (the Kosovars),” thus enabling audiences to grasp “some understanding of why people had been forced to seek refuge outside their home country.” In contrast, the conflict in Afghanistan over the same period was “generally presented as an intractable site of conflict, in which individual actors could not easily be identified or ascribed with motives” (Mares 2003, 341).

¹² According to Gibney (1999, 29), despite the “complicated and unintentional” part that Western countries played “in creating these refugee movements,” it remained “hard for Western states to deny a duty to ease the plight of the displaced.” Robinson (2002, 109), however, argues that American media coverage did not raise questions on the potential role of the NATO campaign in exacerbating the humanitarian situation. Such findings would weaken the perception of implicatedness.

¹³ For example, Mares (2003, 341) argues that sympathy for displaced Afghans after September 11, 2001 was “constrained by the identification of their country as enemy territory and the home of terrorists.” As such, the host society’s perceived implication in the situation of a displaced group does not necessarily mean that these individuals will be constructed as deserving of protection.

distant lands.” Distance may not impede mobilization at all times, however, and several authors indeed describe the sympathy Western audiences may feel when confronted with images of suffering ‘distant strangers’ (see e.g. Boltanski 1999; Robinson 2002). In fact, distance is often discussed as central to such sympathy – “for when [unfortunates] come together in person to invade the space of those more fortunate than they and with the desire to mix with them, [...] then they no longer appear as unfortunates” (Boltanski 1999, 13). Refugees are thus often understood as ‘distant strangers’ suffering “over there” (Wright 2014, 463) – they become threats once they seek shelter in the Global North (Mares 2003; Hammerstad 2014a, 270-271; Seu 2003, 164).

The effect of perceived proximity on attitudes would seem to be mediated by the perceived deservingness of the group. In their discursive analysis of UK media reports during the 2015 ‘crisis,’ Goodman et al. (2017, 111-112) argue that the “geographical marker of the migrant crisis [...] help[ed] to signify the level of threat that the migrants [were] deemed to be bringing.” As such, references to a ‘Mediterranean,’ ‘Calais,’ and ‘European’ migrant crisis indicated increasing levels of threat. However, once the discourse shifted from a ‘migrant crisis’ to a ‘refugee crisis’ – thus changing the perceived level of deservingness of the group -, a “relative outpouring of sympathy” was observed (Goodman et al. 2017, 110).

In fact, when a narrative of deservingness is present, perceived proximity between the hosts and the displaced may encourage openness. In her analysis of the response of Western audiences to the plight of Kosovars, Van Selm (2001, 259) indeed describes how “the popular perception of [Kosovars] as refugees indicated they should and would move on to ‘better’ protection elsewhere. And since they were European, and therefore ‘close’, they should move on to protection in Europe and traditional reception states.”¹⁴ In contrast to van Selm (2001), Gibney (1999) particularly focuses on the economic, social, and political interests induced by perceived geographical proximity – or what he calls *regionality*. As such, Gibney (1999, 29) argues that the perceived proximity of Kosovo to Europe “gave a special impetus to Western involvement and interest that

¹⁴ Moeller (2018, 77) similarly argues that audiences that are “physically distant from the crisis being covered” may be especially prone to ‘compassion fatigue,’ which occurs when “a reader’s or viewer’s emotions are deeply engaged by a tragedy, but there appears to be no easy or meaningful contribution that the individual can make in response to the news of tragedy.” Individuals may then respond by disengaging from the news. Following this logic, perceived proximity could remove a significant barrier to engagement.

has been lacking in most other refugee-generating situations,” thereby triggering efforts to develop a more ordered response to the outflow (see Mares 2003, 341).¹⁵

Thus, a fourth shift may be achieved once deserving ‘refugees’ are perceived not as distant, but as geographically close to the hosts. In such cases, regionality would encourage openness.

National identity as a double-edged sword

Representations and perceptions may also vary depending on the hosts’ perceived connections between their national identity and the plight of the displaced. According to Dauvergne (2005, 48), *national identity* would refer to a “sense of belonging to a nation.” In turn, the concept of *nation* can be understood as an “imagined political community”¹⁶ (Anderson 2006, 6) constructed through myths and symbols (Dauvergne 2005, 41-48). Nations could be based on elements such as migration myths, perceived attributes, or respective roles on the international scene (Dauvergne 2005, 7; 58; Paris 2014).¹⁷ National identities would thus primarily be a social construct; a way to “locate [oneself] in the world with some reference to the mythic dimensions of [one’s] nation” (Dauvergne 2005, 49). Such constructs would also have political potential (Waeber 1993, 38; Dauvergne 2005, 24). As Waeber (1993, 38) argues,

In a deeply religious society one would be ill advised to attempt political mobilization without including a religious appeal. The same goes for societies where there is a resonance for a national appeal, in which various political programmes will easily turn nationalist, i.e. include a logic of arguing from the nation: that this is good because it is in the interest of the nation, or the way ‘we do things’, or some other appeal with the nation as source of motivation.

Thus, the nation can become a political resource which can arguably be used both to support *and* oppose movements of refugees and asylum seekers.

¹⁵ Regionality would remain a social and political construct insofar as refugee-generating situations in Africa may also affect the long-term interests of Western states, in a context where “changes in technology, including transportation and communication, have fundamentally transformed the nature of distance” (Gibney 1999, 30).

¹⁶ According to Anderson (2006, 6), the nation “is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

¹⁷ Those myths and symbols can be contested and debated. For example, in his analysis of Canadian foreign policy under Stephen Harper, Paris (2014, 283; 275) discusses how the Conservative government sought to “change the stories Canadians ‘tell themselves,’” by “play[ing] down the accomplishments of Canada as a multilateral entrepreneur and peacemaker, and instead highlight[ing] Canada’s participation in wars and great moral struggles.” Despite these efforts, Paris (2014, 276; 305) finds that Canadians continued to perceive their country’s role in the world primarily through liberal internationalist lenses.

Indeed, the literature points to contrasting effects of national identity on representations, perceptions, and responses to refugees. First, the role of national identity would depend on how the nation is defined (see Esses et al. 2017; Louis et al. 2013). At the individual level of analysis, those believing in the superiority of their nation, as well as those perceiving national identity in nativist terms, would hold more negative attitudes towards refugees (Verkuyten 2009; Willis-Esqueda et al. 2016; in Esses et al. 2017, 86). In contrast, individuals holding civic/cultural beliefs of their nation – that is, “believing that national identity is based on a personal commitment to a country’s laws and institutions, as well as feeling like a member of that country’s national group” – would not be associated with negative attitudes (see Esses et al. 2017, 86-87). Citrin et al. (2012, 534) further argue that the relationship between national pride and attitudes towards immigrants is mediated by the “normative content of national identity,” which would be “crafted or *constructed* over time by elite conduct [...] and transmitted from one generation to the next by families and other reference groups” (emphasis in text). Citrin et al. (2012) notably find that among Canadians, patriotic feeling is associated with pro-immigrant sentiment and support for multiculturalism, while such relationships would not hold in the case of the United States.

The effect of national identity on hosts’ responses may also vary depending on the perceived level of deservingness of the displaced. When refugees are perceived as deserving, welcoming them would indeed work to “confirm and reify the identity of the nation as good, prosperous, and generous” (Dauvergne 2005, 4). As such, Dauvergne (2005, 164) argues that “humanitarianism is about identity. The individual identity of the other who benefits from our grace is important, but only because of the light it reflects back on us. When we admit the deserving, we are good.” Reicher et al. (2008, 1335) warn, however, that “protestations of ingroup virtue” can have paradoxical effects when the outgroup is “construed as sinful.” In such cases, they argue, “the more serious the outgroup threat becomes” (Reicher et al. 2008, 1335).

National identity may thus be understood as a double-edged sword, which can nourish both welcoming *and* negative representations and perceptions of the displaced. In cases where the understandings, myths and symbols of the nation are framed towards inclusion, and where a narrative of deservingness is present, national identity could reinforce openness.

Synthesizing representations and perceptions of the displaced

Some observations may be noted in light of the discussion above. First, deservingness could be understood as a necessary factor for the other perceptions to act towards openness. Indeed, openness is unlikely to be encouraged if the displaced are perceived as unworthy of aid, despite the hosts' sense of identification with that group; the hosts' perceived implication in their plight; the hosts' perceived geographical proximity with them; or the hosts' understandings of their nation as welcoming and generous to newcomers. In fact, undeservingness often reverses the potential of openness these other features may have. Groups of displaced persons perceived as undeserving (or 'bogus') indeed tend to be dehumanized, thus deemed unrelatable (see Kirkwood 2017, 116; Esses et al. 2008; 2011; 2017, 88-89). Moreover, 'undeserving migrants' are generally considered all the more threatening as they are perceived to be geographically close (see Goodman et al. 2017; Mares 2003; Seu 2003, 164). 'Bogus' asylum seekers also tend to be perceived as threats to the nation (see Louis et al. 2013). The lever of implicatedness is likewise impeded when the country connected to the actions of the host state and from which refugees are fleeing is perceived as an (undeserving and dehumanized) enemy (see Mares 2003, 341).

In contrast to deservingness, the levers of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity may not all need to be present in contexts of relative openness. Their roles may rather be to reinforce sympathy, and as such they should be understood as complementary. As discussed, deservingness may even, at times, paradoxically hinder the potential of relatedness and implicatedness by producing anonymity and depoliticization (see Ticktin 2017; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; Holzberg et al. 2018; Holmes and Castaneda 2016). In such cases, deservingness would work to limit the amplitude of its very effects.

The roles of representations and perceptions in policy-making

The displaced may thus be represented and perceived in various ways, with contrasting implications for their treatment. The question then becomes – whose representations and perceptions matter? Indeed, the host country should not be understood as a monolithic entity, as various social groups – and various individuals within those social groups – may represent and perceive the displaced in contrasting manners, and favour just as contrasting responses to their plight. Representations and perceptions are thus part of what could be called a “politics of signification” (Hall 1982, in Benford and Snow 2000, 625), in which “signifying agents [are]

actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). This “signifying work,” or “framing,” would thus be a dynamic process (Benford and Snow 2000, 614; see also Hansen 2006). Such a process could be marked by contention, and could also have the potential to convince or reinforce certain understandings (see Benford and Snow 2000; Hansen 2006).¹⁸

Within these ‘politics of signification,’ two main approaches can be disentangled regarding the roles that representations and perceptions may play on policy-making. The first follows a top-down perspective and understands governing elites as constructing representations and from there legitimizing the response. The second aligns with a bottom-up approach and conceives societal perceptions as affecting the political calculus of decision-makers. The following section presents these two approaches. As will be highlighted, few works test the application of those mechanisms to more welcoming responses to refugees.

Top-down approach

In the realm of refugee studies, political elites are often described as ‘securitizing actors’ (Buzan et al. 1998, 40) engaged in the construction of refugees and asylum seekers as threats to the cultural, economic, and physical well-being of the ingroup (see Hammerstad 2014b; Bigo 2004; Huysmans and Buonfino 2008; Mares 2003).¹⁹ This approach has been used in particular to explain the rise of restrictive measures from the mid-eighties onwards (see Gibney 2003; 2006). Scholars focusing on the role of political elites within this context usually point to the individual preferences and ideological affiliations of political leaders as well as to their changing interests (Gibney 2003, 24-26). For example, Bigo (2004, 65) argues that “controlling migration became a priority [...] when politicians were confronted with economic difficulties” in the mid-seventies and early eighties, thus needing a “simple and visible ‘explanation’ for the consequences of [...] their own policies.” Chimni (1998, 357) similarly argues that once the refugee ceased to have geopolitical value with the end of the Cold War, “a clear message was *sent to* the population [...]:

¹⁸ Such framing processes are necessarily intertwined with particular events (e.g. the publication of a photograph showing a three-year-old child, Alan Kurdi, found dead on Turkish shores after trying to reach Europe in September 2015; or the attacks in Paris in November 2015). Yet, as argues Hansen (2006; 2015; 2018, 596; 601-603), events (and images as visual events) need to be understood as “discursively constituted phenomena” (2006, 214) whose meanings may be more or less contested by the actors involved in their construction.

¹⁹ Political elites involved in the securitization of forced migration could include governments (see Hammerstad 2014b, 60-61; Gibney 2004, 245; 249; Mares 2003) and opposition parties (see Hansen 2014, 261-262).

that asylum seekers were here for no good reason, that they abused hospitality, and that their numbers were too large” (Chimni 1998, 357; emphasis added).

Political elites may therefore have particular motives for constructing refugees and asylum seekers negatively. The negative representations and perceptions (re)produced by political elites may then shape those of other actors. Various scholars have indeed noted the ability of elites to negatively influence media portrayals of refugees (see Klocker and Dunn 2003; Sulaiman-Hill et al. 2011; Kaye 1998).²⁰ Media portrayals may, in turn, negatively impact public attitudes towards immigration (see Esses et al. 2008; 2011; 2017; Eberl et al. 2018).²¹ Political elites would therefore be able to influence societal and media representations and perceptions towards restrictiveness through this top-down mechanism.

In contrast, relatively few works discuss the leading role political elites may play in producing more welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced. Watson’s work (2009) thus makes a particularly useful contribution by considering instances where refugees are not constructed as threats by political (and societal) elites, but are rather identified as “threatened objects deserving the protection of the state” (2009, 8). For example, in his discussion on the 1986 boat arrivals of Tamil asylum seekers to Canada, Watson describes the Mulroney government as “the actor most strongly engaged” in desecuritizing the issue, notably through its insistence on “Canada’s humanitarian traditions” (Mulroney, quoted in Watson 2009, 59-60).²² Watson similarly argues that Australian and Canadian political (and media) elites played a key role in resisting securitization attempts towards Indo-Chinese refugees in the late seventies, thus leading to an “extraordinary rate of refugee resettlement” in both countries (2009, 147).

While not specifically focusing on the production of welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced, several authors have highlighted the roles that perceived economic and strategic interests (Betts 2010), quest for international leadership (Molloy et al. 2017), and

²⁰ Klocker and Dunn analyze Australian media coverage on asylum in 2001 and 2002 and consider that the federal government played a “commanding role in [the] exchange of meaning” (2003, 85), which the authors interpret as the result of media’s reliance on governments for information. Kaye (1998) studies UK media coverage on asylum from 1990 to 1995 and finds that media outlets rarely initiated the use of expressions such as ‘bogus’ or ‘economic’ refugees, rather reporting their use by politicians and government officials.

²¹ For example, Esses et al.’s experimental studies (2008; 2011; 2017) show how depicting the displaced as ‘cheaters’ and ‘queue-jumpers’ increases exclusionary attitudes towards them (see also Eberl et al. 2018, 6-9). Communication studies designate those phenomena as *framing* effects, which refer to the capacity of the media to “tell us *how* to think about things” (Eberl et al. 2018, 2; see also Iyengar and Simon 1993; Côté 2010; Wallace 2018, 207).

²² The Mulroney government, however, became a leading securitizing actor a year later following the boat arrivals of 174 Sikh asylum seekers from India (see Watson 2007; 2009).

moral conviction (Helms et al. 2018) may play in driving political leaders towards openness.²³ A mix of individual, ideological, and instrumental concerns would thus underpin the leadership of political elites towards openness, in ways similar to those noted by the literature on restrictiveness.

Nonetheless, little research focuses on the influence political elites may exert on the representations and perceptions of other actors in contexts of relative openness. Wallace (2018, 209) thus makes a useful contribution by noting that the election of the Trudeau government in October 2015 led to changes in Canadian news content of the ‘refugee crisis,’ with the media coverage becoming more positive in tone and shifting to “more humanizing depictions of refugee families and their resettlement” following the change in government. The media may also have the potential to instill to the public more welcoming attitudes towards refugees and immigrants (see Verkuyten 2004; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009).²⁴ Such findings would suggest that a top-down mechanism from political elites to the media and the public is at least conceivable in contexts of relative openness.²⁵

Research in psychology also points to the motivation individuals may have to “defend and bolster their existing sociopolitical systems and extant status quo” (Esses et al. 2017, 84). As a result, public attitudes may become more favourable towards refugees as their admittance “becomes officially supported by the government and positively portrayed in mass media” (Esses et al. 2017, 84). Using the case of Canada in 2015-2016, Gaucher et al. (2016; in Esses et al. 2017, 105-106) indeed find that individuals who were prone to defend their existing sociopolitical

²³ To those individual, ideological and instrumental concerns should also be added the role of international norms in influencing the internalized behaviour of political elites (see Koh 1998-1999) and in constraining the realm of their possible actions, notably through domestic law and institutions (see e.g. Gibney 2003; Hollifield 1992; Hollifield and Wong 2015; Czaika and de Haas 2013). In the case of refugee protection, two central norms can be identified: the right to seek asylum (as entrenched in Article 14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*) and non-refoulement, which forbids states to “expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (1951 Refugee Convention, art. 33). However, an important literature also describes how states seek to circumvent those norms by preventing asylum seekers from reaching territory where they could access such protection (see Gibney 2003; Hyndman and Mountz 2008; Mountz 2010).

²⁴ Verkuyten (2004) finds that framing the displaced as forced to flee (i.e. ‘political refugees’) generates sympathy and support for inclusive immigrant policies, in contrast to depictions of the displaced as ‘economic refugees.’ In their analysis of news coverage in Germany from 1993 to 2005, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2009) also observe that employing a positive tone towards immigrants reduces public perceptions of immigration as a problem relatively to other issues. Nonetheless, few works capture the potential of the media to instill to the public more welcoming attitudes towards refugees and immigrants.

²⁵ As discussed above, political elites may also play a leading role in shaping the content of national identity (see Citrin et al. 2012). Esses et al. (2006) notably find that promoting an inclusive national ingroup can improve attitudes towards immigration, in contexts where such discourse does not clash with pre-existing views of national identity.

systems were especially likely to improve their attitudes towards refugees as the federal government undertook the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees. These findings would also align with the top-down approach.

Bottom-up approach

The second approach focuses on perceptions generated within the broader society and understands these attitudes as then affecting the political calculus of policy-makers. Two societal actors are particularly discussed within this approach: constituents, and the media. Both sets of actors and their potential impacts on policy-making will be reviewed in the following subsections.

Constituents

Although political elites may play a key role in driving representations and perceptions of the displaced, constituents should not be understood as a passive set of actors.²⁶ As Hansen (2006, 6-7) argues, “it would [...] be extremely unlikely – and politically unsavvy – for politicians to articulate [foreign] policy without any concern for the representations found within the wider public sphere as they attempt to present their policies as legitimate to their constituencies.” The ‘wider discursive field’ (Hansen 2006, 7) is also discussed in the securitization literature (see Hammerstad 2014b; Huysmans 2006). As Huysmans (2006, 25; in Hammerstad 2014b, 38) argues, ‘speech acts’ would need to draw upon “a historically constituted and socially institutionalized set of meanings,” which “evolves over time but [...] cannot be changed at random.” In the context of national identity constructions, Citrin et al. similarly argue that “the stickiness of psychologically significant predispositions is such that public opinion can also drive policy regimes or, at a minimum, constrain them and resist change” (2012, 534).

Publics are usually understood as creating *perceived* limits to the range of actions available to decision-makers (Kingdon 2011, 148-149; Gibney 2003, 29; van Selm 2001, 257). Public

²⁶ Constituents should not be understood as unitary, notably because representations and perceptions are mediated by individual factors (see Esses et al. 2017; Eberl et al. 2018). Furthermore, ‘society’ can be understood as “necessarily to some degree more than the sum of its parts, and not reducible to individuals” (Waever 1993, 18). Disentangling “who speaks for society” (van Selm 2000b, 194) thus becomes a challenge for scholars using society (or a similar concept) as a unit of analysis (see Waever et al. 1993, 187-189; van Selm 2000b, 194). According to Waever et al. (1993, 188), societal voices are often “controversial and only partly accepted.” Scholars must thus assess the “legitimacy an actor does have when trying to speak on behalf of society,” and how “consequential on a political scale” the actor has been (Waever et al. 1993, 188). Tracking public representations and perceptions thus also require capturing which ones are echoed and considered by the media and political elites, as will be undertaken in Part II.

opinion would therefore *facilitate* or *constrain* policy-making (Sobel 2001, 25). In line with this perspective, Gibney (2003; 2006) argues that the waves of restrictive policies in the Global North in the nineties were significantly shaped by negative public attitudes towards the displaced (see also Hansen 2014, 261). According to Gibney (2003, 28), while refugee admission remained an issue of ‘high politics’ during the Cold War, its end “deprived state leaders of the most powerful argument they had for constraining highly restrictionist public attitudes.” Such change to the global order, coupled with an increase in asylum applications in the Global North during the same period, would have led to what Gibney (2003, 28) calls a *democratization of asylum policy*. As a result, Gibney (2003, 28) argues, Western governments found themselves increasingly pressured to restrict entrance. The author thus concludes that “the roots of restrictive asylum policies, then, lie in a perception by elites that the conduct of asylum policy risks exacting political costs for them” (Gibney 2003, 29).

The ‘outpouring’ of sympathy towards Kosovar refugees in 1999 suggests that public representations and perceptions of the displaced could also constrain policy-makers towards openness. Indeed, van Selm observes that the public had leapt *ahead* of states in their will to protect the Kosovars, thus driving governments to take action “from a public relations perspective” (2001, 261; 2014, 519). Gibney (2003, 30) reaches a similar conclusion in 2003, arguing that the “force and immediacy of the public response goaded some reluctant governments” into the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme. Van Selm (2001, 257) thus concludes that “the perceptions that policymakers have of public perceptions of the ‘refugees’ and their treatment are the deciding factor in further ‘refugee’ protection, even if states in principle have to live up to a range of international protection and human rights commitments.”

In the case of Kosovo, van Selm nevertheless insists that policy-makers remained wary of the amplitude to give to the movement, in a context where the “short-term depth of feeling for Kosovars” contrasted with the “long-term intensity of xenophobic reaction” that had prevailed until then (2001, 262; see also Gibney 1999, 28). Van Selm (2000b, 194) thus argues that although “humanitarian sentiment appeared to speak the loudest, [...] governmental attention was still focused on other voices.” As a result, policy-makers would have restrained their responses to medium-term measures such as temporary protection, ‘reception in the region,’ and conversion of Kosovar asylum seekers into quota refugees (van Selm 2001, 261).

Although the case of Kosovo provides an insightful basis on which to build upon for the potential effects of public perceptions on openness, it has seldom been applied to other cases and as such highlights the need for further research.

The media

Although the top-down approach generally conceptualizes the media as passive intermediaries between political elites and constituents, they should not be understood as such. Indeed, several scholars highlight how depictions of refugees and immigrants may vary across media outlets, notably depending on their type or genre of medium (see Eberl et al. 2018), their political leanings and ownership (e.g. Wallace 2018; Kaye 1998, 172; McKay et al. 2011, in Cooper et al. 2017, 86), their geographical scope (Cooper et al. 2017; Wallace 2018), or their resources and access to the displaced (Wallace 2018; Bennett et al. 2013, Gemi et al. 2013, in Eberl et al. 2018, 10-11). The media should thus be understood as actors actively engaged in the ‘politics of signification,’ whose representations and perceptions may influence those of constituents and political elites with contrasting implications for the plight of the displaced.

Communication studies suggest that media coverage can affect how policy-makers perceive public opinion (see Tompsett et al. 2003, Hodgetts and Chamberlain 2006, in Sulaiman-Hill 2011, 346; Entman 2000, Kull and Ramsay 2000, in Robinson 2002, 3). Such discussions align with the public policy literature reviewed above, which insists that it is the *perceptions* that elites have of their electorates that matter (Gibney 2003, 29; van Selm 2001, 257; Kingdon 2011, 148-149). The potential role of the media in affecting policy-making has also been explored in the context of ‘humanitarian’ interventions, forming what has been called a ‘CNN-effect’ literature (see Robinson 1999; 2011). According to Robinson (1999; 2000; 2002), critical framings of government (in)action coupled with sympathizing representations of the plight of a group would drive policy-making in cases of *policy uncertainty*. In such cases, policy-makers would be “unable to feed a plausible and well-rehearsed line to the media,” and would thus be vulnerable to “media-driven public pressure or the fear of *potential* negative public reaction to government inaction” (Robinson 1999, 308; 2000, 614; emphasis in text).²⁷ Robinson also suggests that the media may

²⁷ In contrast, ‘top-down’ effects from governments to the media would be more likely in situations of policy certainty, as a given government could then be able to “draw upon its substantial resources and credibility as an information source to influence news media outputs” (Robinson 1999, 308; 2000, 614). Policy-makers could also pursue a particular course of action for the purpose of triggering positive media coverage (Robinson 2002; 2011, 9).

structure the “limits and possibilities of political action” as policy-makers anticipate the resulting media coverage of various courses of action (Robinson 2011, 9).²⁸

According to Mares (2003), the Australian response to Kosovar refugees in 1999 aligns with Robinson’s framework. Mares indeed stresses that Australia then had no clear policy on temporary resettlement upon which the international response to Kosovar refugees was centred. Albeit initially reluctant to join the international effort, the Australian government would have been ultimately driven to participate considering the “barrage of media criticism that portrayed the government as hard-hearted in the face of human suffering” (Mares 2003, 344). Such insights, however, remain scarce in the literature and highlight the need for further research.

Explaining shifts in openness

As few scholars delve into the emergence of movements of openness, the insights of the literature on their declines are equally limited. Several authors point to the expectation that refugees respond with gratitude to the hosts’ display of help (see Boltanski 1999; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; Moulin 2012). Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 129) thus note that this philanthropic relationship would be “highly precarious since it depends entirely on the constant repetition of an asymmetric pattern in which refugees need to act according to the needs of the emotional investment of the providers of help.” According to Ticktin (2017, 584), such a relationship is ultimately bound to fail, considering that “the innocent sufferer can never be isolated for long enough to keep it uncorrupted by history or context.” Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 131) indeed conclude that “once the representation of refugees, or immigrants at large, as deserving is damaged, the whole procedure [of acceptance] might be reversed.” Welcoming representations and perceptions could also become more difficult to hold as the number of arrivals increases, considering that the (real or imagined) size of a group and a perceived lack of control over arrivals may feed perceptions of threat and erode support for immigrants and refugees (see Esses et al. 2017, 85-86).

The volatility of welcoming representations and perceptions has particularly been discussed in the context of Kosovar refugees in 1999. Indeed, Van Selm and Gibney both note that

²⁸ These perspectives recall the concept of *priming*, which refers to the ability of the media to “affect the criteria by which political leaders are judged” (Iyengar and Simon 1993, 368). They also connect to the concept of *agenda-setting*, which refers to the potential of the media to “tel[l] us *what* to think about” (Eberl et al. 2018, 2), depending on the volume and intensity of coverage on various issues.

the movement of sympathy towards Kosovars was short-lived, and withered once the NATO bombing ended (van Selm 2000b, 205; 2001, 262; Gibney 2003, 31). As van Selm (2000b, 205) argues, “once the military became ‘peacekeepers’ [...] the perceptions seemed to change: implication was still the case, but in a different, seemingly peaceable and reconstruction oriented context.” Not only may the end of the military intervention have withered perceptions of implicatedness, but van Selm (2000b, 205) argues that it also suggested that “the conflict was, as far as the outside world was concerned, over” (van Selm 2000b, 205). Such perception may thus have pushed Kosovar ‘refugees’ outside of a clear narrative of deservingness, a shift that may have been strengthened by their continued arrivals to the Global North through asylum channels (van Selm 2000b, 206).

Although such accounts shed light on the roles of perceptions and representations in mediating movements of sympathy, they do not provide clear insight on the mechanisms and actors involved in their withering. Molloy et al.’s (2017) analysis of the Canadian response towards Indo-Chinese refugees in the late seventies is thus particularly helpful to build upon. According to the authors, the leadership of the Clark government ultimately withered as governing elites concluded that they “could not exceed the 50,000 target without provoking a [public] backlash” (Molloy et al. 2017, 11). The authors indeed recall that although the Indo-Chinese resettlement effort is now perceived by most Canadians as a success story, it did not reflect the attitudes of “a narrow majority of Canadians at the time,” who remained wary of such influx (Molloy et al. 2017, 457). These findings would thus align with the bottom-up approach, according to which societal perceptions affect the political calculus of policy-makers in their response to a particular refugee situation.

In contrast, Mares’ (2003) analysis of the Australian government’s response to Kosovar refugees in 1999 shows the limits of the bottom-up approach. Although the media would have played a significant role in triggering the Australian government’s temporary resettlement of Kosovar refugees, their influence would have withered in the later stages of the initiative. Governing elites would have remained convinced that Kosovar refugees had to return to their country once the conflict was over, despite the critical media coverage that such position sparked (Mares 2003, 344).

These partial findings thus indicate the need to further assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers may uphold or wither movements of openness, and the particular roles that representations and perceptions may play in those dynamics.

Conclusion

The existing literature thus provides some answers regarding the roles of representations and perceptions of displaced persons in influencing policy-making towards openness. A relatively well-developed area of work suggests that more welcoming attitudes towards displaced groups may fundamentally depend on the construction of the displaced as *deserving* of protection. Such classification would essentially rely on the perceived motives for fleeing of the displaced, and would be further mediated by age and gender. Women and children fleeing war and persecution would thus generally fit the narrative of deservingness. Perceptions of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity between the hosts and the displaced may further encourage welcoming attitudes towards those groups. These various representations and perceptions are rarely put into interaction with one another as was undertaken in this chapter.²⁹

The effects of representations and perceptions of displaced groups on policy-making have generally been tested in contexts of restrictiveness. Two approaches are usually delineated. The top-down perspective focuses on the negative representations that governing elites produce, and analyzes how those constructions are used to legitimize restrictive measures against the displaced. Under the bottom-up approach, negative societal representations and perceptions of the displaced are understood as constraining political elites towards restriction for fear of electoral costs. Few works test the application of those mechanisms to more welcoming responses to refugees, and as such highlight the need for further research on those dynamics.

Several scholars underline the instability of welcoming representations and perceptions of displaced people. Innocence would be particularly difficult to maintain across time. Although few scholars have delved into the mechanisms and actors involved in the withering of movements of openness, findings suggest that similar top-down and bottom-up interactions may be at play. More research is needed to disentangle such interactions and from there to gain a better understanding of declines in movements of openness.

Further research on the rare, yet possible movements of sympathy towards displaced people may thus open new insight into how inclusiveness and openness may be cultivated in the Global North.

²⁹ Gibney (1999) suggests the concepts of relatedness, implicatedness, and regionality, but does not explicitly build upon those concepts of deservingness and national identity.

Chapter 3 – The Politics of Openness: A Research Design

This thesis asks: how do representations and perceptions of displaced persons influence policy-making towards openness? This chapter discusses the research design that will be employed to answer this research question. I will first present the three objectives and hypotheses of this research. I will then justify my case selection and time frames, before discussing the appropriateness of process-tracing and thematic analysis for this project. Lastly, I will present the main indicators and data that will be used throughout the process-tracing.

Objectives

My objectives for this research are threefold: i) to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that are produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents, and the media in contexts of relative openness; ii) to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers are driven towards openness, as either the initiators or followers of the movement; iii) to examine the mechanisms through which movements of openness may wither. In the following subsection, I will present each of these objectives in greater length and the hypotheses that underpin my inquiry.

Objective 1: To identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that are produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents, and the media in contexts of relative openness.

In line with Chapter 2, my hypothesis is that openness towards displaced groups relies on the construction of the displaced as *deserving* of protection, and that such openness is further encouraged by perceptions of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity.

Following Holmes and Castaneda (2016, 17), I will qualify representations as *deserving* if they depict a particular group of displaced persons as worthy of the international (or national) community's "physical, economic, social, and health aid." I expect notions of forced displacement, suffering and innocence to underlie representations of deservingness. I also expect deserving representations to intersect with gender and age, with women and children as the most likely emblems of deservingness.

I also expect perceptions of *relatedness* to reinforce openness towards the displaced. According to Gibney (1999), relatedness refers to the hosts' sense of identification with the

displaced. Relatedness could be based on elements such as a common humanity (Kirkwood 2017), individualized narratives (Slovic et al. 2017; Boltanski 1999), racial biases (Gibney 1999; van Selm 2000b; El-Enany 2016), cultural features (Gibney 1999), a common language in which to express suffering (Gibney 1999), or historical reminiscences (van Selm 2001, 258; 261). Relatedness would encourage openness as perceiving deserving ‘refugees’ as relatable would enable the hosts to catch “an inkling of what it would actually be like to be a refugee” (Gibney 1999, 30), thus stimulating support for that group’s access to protection in the host region or host country.

Similarly, I expect perceptions of *implicatedness* to encourage openness towards the displaced. Following Gibney (1999), implicatedness refers to the hosts’ perceived sense of implication in the plight of the displaced. Implicatedness would encourage openness by portraying deserving ‘refugees’ as suffering the consequences of actions for which the host region or host country is perceived as involved in and potentially responsible for, thus justifying that group’s access to protection in the host region or host country.

Likewise, I expect perceptions of *regionality* to reinforce openness towards the displaced. According to Gibney (1999), regionality refers to the perceived geographical proximity of the displaced to the hosts. Regionality would encourage openness by depicting deserving ‘refugees’ as ‘close’ to one region or country, thus justifying the access of that group to protection in the polity (van Selm 2001). Regionality could also connect a specific refugee situation to the economic, social, and political interests of a particular host region or host country (Gibney 1999).

Lastly, I expect perceptions of *connectedness to national identity* to reinforce openness towards the displaced. I understand national identity as a “sense of belonging to a nation” (Dauvergne 2005, 48), while the concept of nation refers to an “imagined political community” (Anderson 2006, 6) constructed through myths and symbols (Dauvergne 2005, 41-48). Connectedness to national identity would encourage openness by depicting deserving ‘refugees’ as linked to the understandings, myths and symbols of the nation, thus justifying the access of the group to protection within the polity.

Objective 2: To assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers are driven towards openness, as either the initiators or followers of the movement.

In line with Chapter 2, I hypothesize that policy-makers either rely on welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they respond to the welcoming representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of electoral interest.

According to the top-down approach, policy-makers should initiate movements of sympathy out of conviction or interest. I expect these elites to rely on welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors. Time order and decision-making processes should indicate that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced did *not* act as constraints on policy-makers. Evidence that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced *facilitated* policy-making towards openness would partially support the top-down hypothesis. Societal representations and perceptions could become more welcoming towards the displaced as a consequence of welcoming elite discourses and policies.

According to the bottom-up approach, policy-makers should be the followers of the movement of sympathy. I would thus expect constituents and/or the media to display conviction in the righteousness of protecting refugees. I expect these societal actors to hold, produce and reproduce welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced. Time order and decision-making processes should indicate that policy-makers engaged in openness as a result of those pressures. Evidence that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced *facilitated* policy-making towards openness would partially support the bottom-up hypothesis.

Policy-makers, constituents and the media are likely to engage in this framing process through a myriad of pathways. These actors are also likely to hold heterogeneous perceptions and representations of the displaced. Top-down and bottom-up approaches are thus meant to guide the analysis, while recognizing that the task will likely be to assess multiple interactions and their cumulative effects.

Objective 3: To examine the mechanisms through which movements of openness may wither.

In light of Chapter 2, my hypothesis is that policy-makers either rely on negative representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they respond to the negative representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of consideration for their electoral costs.

According to the top-down approach, policy-makers should initiate the decline in the movement of sympathy out of conviction or interest. I expect these elites to rely on negative representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors. Time order and decision-making processes should indicate that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced did *not* act as constraints on policy-makers. Evidence that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced *facilitated* policy-making towards restrictiveness would partially support the top-down hypothesis. Societal representations and perceptions could become more negative towards the displaced as a consequence of negative elite discourses and policies.

According to the bottom-up approach, policy-makers should be the followers of the decline in the movement of sympathy. I would thus expect constituents and/or the media to display conviction in the righteousness of excluding the displaced. I expect these societal actors to hold, produce and reproduce negative representations and perceptions of the displaced. Time order and decision-making processes should indicate that policy-makers engaged in restrictiveness as a result of those pressures. Evidence that policy-makers *anticipated* negative societal representations and perceptions and adapted their political calculus in consequence would similarly align with the bottom-up approach. Evidence that societal representations and perceptions of the displaced *facilitated* policy-making towards restrictiveness would partially support the bottom-up hypothesis.

Again, policy-makers, constituents and the media are likely to engage in this framing process through a myriad of pathways. These actors are also likely to hold heterogeneous perceptions and representations of the displaced. Top-down and bottom-up approaches are thus meant to guide the analysis, while recognizing that the task will likely be to assess multiple interactions and their cumulative effects.

Case selection and time frames

Germany's response to the refugee 'crisis' of 2015-2016 is used as a way to initiate a broader research project on the emergence and decline of movements of sympathy in the Global North. George and Bennett (2005, 23; 75; 81) indeed argue that studying deviant cases and those at extreme values can be very useful for the heuristic purposes of identifying potential causal mechanisms (see George and Bennett 2005, 23; 75; 81; 223). The resulting model can then be

tested to other cases – varying in their dependent and independent variables – in order to build a typological theory (see George and Bennett 2005, 79-83; 207; 233-262).³⁰

In this context, the response of Germany to the refugee ‘crisis’ of 2015-2016 can be identified as a ‘deviant’ case study. Indeed, while several countries closed their borders to the flows of asylum seekers arriving in Europe and refrained from providing opportunities for resettlement (Triandafyllidou 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018), Chancellor Angela Merkel maintained a relatively positive discourse and demonstrated leadership in receiving about a million asylum seekers within a year (Grote 2018, 15-16).³¹ Moreover, the ‘movement of sympathy’ Germany experienced seems to have been particularly strong, as evidence suggests that positive portrayals of refugees gained momentum (at least momentarily) among all three sets of actors under study: political elites, constituents, and the media (see e.g. Mushaben 2017a; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). In a context where few scholars have studied movements of openness in the Global North, the case of Germany in 2015-2016 provides the opportunity to analyze these movements further.

The case study begins with a contextualization of Germany’s history towards asylum and immigration. Detailed process-tracing starts in 2011 in order to track the emergence of the refugee issue on the country’s agenda. The number of asylum seekers to Europe indeed increased following the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 (see Eurostat 2019).³² The case study ends in March 2016, as it coincides with the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement and a significant decrease and stabilization in the number of arrivals to Germany thereafter.³³ This project does not encompass longer-term issues linked with the aftermath of movements of openness, although future research should broaden the scope to those considerations.

³⁰ Typological theories seek to “chart the repertoire of causal paths that lead to a given outcome and the conditions under which they occur,” in order to develop “a rich, differentiated theory about that phenomenon” (George and Bennett 2005, 207; 216).

³¹ As will be discussed in Part II, the existing literature mainly suggests that Merkel initiated and maintained a relatively open approach to asylum during this period out of conviction and compassion for the displaced (see e.g. Mushaben 2017a; Helms et al. 2018). The images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child pictured dead on Turkish shores on September 2, 2015 after trying to reach Europe, have similarly been described as the trigger for Merkel’s welcoming stance (see e.g. Bleiker 2018, 19; Hutchison 2018, 306).

³² Influxes through the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes increased as the fall of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime reduced state control of the Libyan coast, while the conflict in Syria displaced millions (see Betts and Collier 2017, 67-88; UNHCR 2016; Frontex 2015).

³³ As will be discussed, other factors – such as the closure of the Balkan route by the end of February 2016 – also contributed to the decrease in arrivals (see Triandafyllidou 2017; Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8; Adam 2017).

Process-tracing

Process-tracing aims to “figur[e] out *which* aspects of the initial conditions observed, in conjunction with *which simple principles* of the many that may be at work, would have *combined* to generate the observed sequence of events” (Goldstone 1991, in George and Bennett 2005, 206). Process-tracing shares some basic features with the historical explanation in that they both tend to produce detailed narratives of events, although process-tracing generally converts them into “an *analytical* causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms” (George and Bennett 2005, 211). Within this approach, process-tracing requires assessing “*all* the intervening steps in a case” and analyzing “whether the observed processes among variables [...] match those predicted or implied by the theory” (George and Bennett 2005, 207; 217; see also Bennett and Elman 2006, 459). To check for spuriousness, complementarity, or overdetermination, alternative paths to the outcome must also be considered (George and Bennett 2005, 217-223; Bennett and Elman 2006, 460). George and Bennett (2005, 207) thus describe process-tracing as an “indispensable tool for theory testing and theory development.” This method is therefore particularly suited to this research project, as its central aim is to better understand the *mechanisms* or *processes* through which representations and perceptions of the displaced influence policy-making towards openness.

For its careful attention to causal processes, process-tracing is also “a methodology well-suited to testing theories in a world marked by multiple interaction effects, where it is difficult to explain outcomes in terms of two or three independent variables” (George 1979, in George and Bennett 2005, 206). This sensitivity is crucial in the current project as it relies upon the ability to assess the possibly multidirectional relationships between policy-makers and other societal actors in the mediation of movements of openness.

Thematic analysis

Governing elite representations and perceptions of the displaced are assessed through the conduct of *thematic analysis*, which can be defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79; see also Vaismoradi et al. 2013; Braun et al. 2019).³⁴ Braun et al. (2019, 845) refer to *themes* as “reflecting a *pattern* of shared meaning, organized around a core concept or idea.” I take a deductive approach (Braun and

³⁴ As discussed below, I refer to governing elites as the decision- and policy-makers involved at the highest level of government in the response to the refugee situation.

Clarke 2006, 83) by assessing how policy-makers construct the displaced on five aforementioned themes: deservingness, relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. I allow for both negative and welcoming variations on those themes, as well as for the absence of a given theme in discourses.³⁵ Themes are constituted of smaller meaning units, known as codes, which refer to “the most basic segment[s], or element[s], of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998, 63; in Braun and Clarke 2006, 88). Thematic analysis thus requires systematically coding data samples for their relevant themes and sub-themes.

Thematic analysis is different from discourse analysis insofar as it does not allow (nor seek) to “make claims about language use, or the fine-grained functionality of talk” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 97). Nor is its purpose to analyze the “broader patterns of social structures and practices” (Kirkwood et al. 2016, 30; see also Hansen 2006, 75). While the use of thematic analysis is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, more detailed discourse analyses would be limited due to my limited proficiency in the German language. Such micro and macro discourse analyses could however be conducted in future research to deepen the results presented in this thesis. Likewise, thematic analysis is distinct from content analysis, as in the former “the importance of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (Vaismoradi et al. 2013, 402-403; see also Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). Future research could however sophisticate the results presented in this thesis by conducting content analyses of governing elite discourses, which could additionally be assessed for the evolution of their tone through the use of sentiment dictionaries. These possibilities were left out due to time constraints, in a context where thematic analysis was considered sufficient for the present purposes.

Indicators and data

Through process-tracing, I intend to track the evolution of elite, public, and media representations and perceptions of the displaced in Germany from 2011 to 2016. I seek to contextualize the evolution of these representations and perceptions with that of policies,

³⁵ Although I am not fluent in German (which certainly constitutes a limitation to my research), I believe that English versions of official statements available on German governmental websites, media reports published in English by German media outlets, and secondary sources written in English allow me to assess the evolution of German governing elite discourses on those themes. The main data sources used for such an analysis are further discussed below.

measures, and number of arrivals. I also supplement this analysis with evidence of decision-making processes across the period under study. Alternative hypothesized processes are also considered. The following discussion describes how each of these indicators is operationalized and the main data sources that are used.

Elite representations and perceptions of the displaced

As discussed above, governing elite representations and perceptions of the displaced are captured through the use of thematic analysis. My data are first constituted of the systematic collection of official statements and discourses related to the refugee situation pronounced by federal heads of government and the ministers in charge of the refugee situation in Germany from January 2011 to March 31, 2016. I therefore collected every English-language statement, discourse and press release published on the websites of the Federal Chancellor (Bundeskanzlerin) and of the Federal Government (Bundesregierung) that contained the words ‘refugees,’ ‘asylum’ or ‘migrants.’ For the Federal Government, I restricted results to those that were related to the Ministry of the Interior. After eliminating duplicates between keywords, 134 results were generated from the Chancellery and 40 from the Federal Government (but many were published on both platforms). I also gathered the verbatim of two prominent speeches by Chancellor Angela Merkel (the 2014-2015 New Year’s Eve speech and the August 31, 2015 summer press conference). Those verbatim were only available in German. I used Google Translate to have working versions of the speeches and validated the excerpts I quoted with official press releases, media reports, and German speakers. The constituted samples were divided into three defining periods.³⁶ The first period spans over the emergence and growth of the refugee issue in Germany from 2011 to September 3, 2015. The second period encompasses developments from September 4, 2015 to December 2015 as the country received an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers. The third period covers reactions to the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 and ends with the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016. The resulting samples of each defining period were printed and their relevant themes and sub-themes systematically coded through annotations and colour systems. The resulting ideas and their prevalence were then reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 as empirical findings.

³⁶ These three periods also correspond with the three chapters presenting empirical findings in Part II.

I complemented those samples with elite discourses found in media reports throughout the period under study. Media reports indeed provide the opportunity to capture more spontaneous statements by federal government officials as well as the discourses of other political elites. I therefore collected every English-language media report from *Spiegel Online* and *Deutsche Welle* that contained the words ‘refugees,’ ‘asylum’ or ‘migrants’ with the word ‘Germany’ from January 2011 to March 31, 2016. The searches generated 4,076 results and were screened for entries that suggested reporting on political elites.³⁷ The media outlet *Spiegel Online* was chosen because it is one of the most consulted news websites in Germany (see German Audit Bureau of Circulation 2019) and further has a user-friendly English-language news page and search engine. It is associated with *Der Spiegel*, a weekly magazine directed to a highly educated readership (see Özcan 2013, 433; Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017, 737). However, only 165 results were generated and the sample contained many duplicates.³⁸ The media outlet *Deutsche Welle* is Germany’s public international broadcaster and was chosen for its wide coverage of domestic politics in the English language (3,911 results were generated). Although the constituted samples are deemed to capture the most significant debates among political elites, future research should increase the number of media outlets to diversify political leanings (e.g. by adding *Bild*, a widely-read German tabloid). The resulting samples were analyzed using the same methodology as that outlined above for official statements and discourses. I also complemented these samples with the findings of the existing secondary literature.

This project thus predominantly focuses on a specific group of political elites: decision- and policy-makers involved in the response to the refugee situation at the highest level of the federal government. Such focus is in line with the overall project, which is mainly interested in the policy-making process and the ways in which it is shaped by representations and perceptions. Future work could deepen the representations and perceptions conveyed by political elites outside of this narrow policy circle by analyzing parliamentary debates and other official documents. This option was not pursued because of time constraints, in a context where media reports are expected to capture the most significant political debates structuring the wider discursive field.

³⁷ The generated entries on *Spiegel Online* only encompassed those that contained the keywords in either the title or the headline, but included reports that were outside of the relevant time frame. The *Deutsche Welle* search engine could limit time frames but not control for the location of the keywords in the text.

³⁸ These low results seem to come from a relatively small publication rate in the English language. Indeed, the same searches triggered 1,146 results in the German language.

Public representations and perceptions of the displaced

Public representations of the displaced are first assessed by gathering data on the evolution of *public opinion* on the refugee issue. I therefore screened every *ZDF-Politbarometer* conducted between January 2011 and March 31, 2016 as well as every poll carried out by *Infratest Dimap* during the same time period. Between January 2015 and March 2016, I also used the more comprehensive *ARD Deutschland Trends* conducted by *Infratest Dimap*. The Forschungsgruppe Wahlen is the polling firm in charge of the *Politbarometer*, which is used by the public-service television broadcaster ZDF. *Infratest Dimap* is a polling firm notably affiliated with ARD, a consortium of public-service broadcasters. Infratest Dimap surveys are particularly helpful for assessing the perceived legitimacy of various motives for fleeing. German public opinion on the refugee issue was also assessed by tracking the evolution of voting intentions across political parties. Such data are useful to draw inferences about public attitudes towards the displaced as well as to contextualize the electoral constraints faced by political elites. Voting intentions were particularly assessed by consulting the user-friendly archives compiled by the *Institute für Demoskopie Allensbach*, a leading German survey research institute. Public opinion data were only available in German. I thus used Google Translate and validated relevant excerpts with German speakers. The resulting data were assembled into timelines to assess their evolution.

I consider the evolution of *public mobilization* as another indicator of public representations of the displaced. Actions such as donations, volunteering, and pro-refugee demonstrations typically depict the displaced as deserving of protection. Conversely, actions such as anti-refugee protests and hate crimes generally depict the displaced as undeserving. I tracked the evolution of public mobilization through the evidence compiled in surveys (e.g. Ahrens 2017), NGO reports (e.g. Amnesty International 2016), media reports, and secondary literature.³⁹ Public mobilization data are especially likely to capture heterogeneity within public representations and perceptions of the displaced. In order to assess the prominence of various societal voices, I paid particular attention to their relative capture in elite considerations and media coverage.

The lack of data makes it impossible to precisely track the evolution of public perceptions in terms of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity.

³⁹ Media reports were gathered using the same methodology outlined above for constituting samples of elite discourses. The resulting entries of both *Spiegel Online* and *Deutsche Welle* were screened for reports that suggested coverage of mobilizing actions.

Measuring these public perceptions would have necessitated polls, interviews and/or focus groups as events were unfolding. Such lack of data constitutes a limitation to this research.

Media representations and perceptions of the displaced

To capture the evolution of media representations and perceptions of ‘refugees,’ I relied on recent communication studies, which have conducted content and discourse analyses of German media coverage during the period under study (see e.g. Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; Holzberg et al. 2018).⁴⁰ I paid particular attention to findings related to representations and perceptions of deservingness, relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. I also considered differences in coverage across media outlets. I supplemented these content and discourse analyses with further iconographic and iconological studies of popular images displayed in the media during the period under study, particularly regarding those of Alan Kurdi (see e.g. Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; de-Andrés et al. 2016).⁴¹

Policies, measures, and number of arrivals

Policies, measures, and number of arrivals were also tracked across the period under study. Policies and measures may include laws, regulations, resettlement targets, financial resources, bilateral or multilateral agreements, or other types of initiatives. Policies and measures were assessed for their intended level of openness or restrictiveness. They were also examined for their level of *certainty*. Following Robinson (2000, 617), policy uncertainty can be observed when there is: i) *no policy line*, i.e. no official policy in place regarding an issue; ii) a *wavering policy line*, i.e. frequent changes in the policy line; or iii) an *inconsistent policy line*, i.e. when the subsystems of the executive are divided and pursue or advocate different policies. Rightly contextualized, the evolution of arrivals may also help in assessing the effects of those policies and measures.⁴² Data were gathered through government publications (see e.g. Grote 2018), official statements, media reports, and secondary literature.

⁴⁰ A possibility would have been to conduct my own discourse and content analyses of media coverage, but this option was not pursued due to time constraints and language limitations.

⁴¹ Iconography refers to what can be seen of an image while iconology refers to the interpretation that is made of it (de-Andrés et al. 2015).

⁴² As discussed by Czaika and de Haas (2013), international migration outcomes can be affected by other factors, such as political conflicts, migration networks, and social and economic opportunities.

Decision-making processes

Evidence of decision-making processes across the period under study are useful for gaining insight into the motivations of policy-makers for their discourses and policies. Evidence of decision-making processes are also helpful for assessing policy (un)certainty (Robinson 2000) as well as dissent among policy-makers regarding a particular course of action. Data on decision-making processes were gathered by consulting official statements, media reports, journalistic investigations, and secondary literature.⁴³

The evidence gathered on decision-making processes is bound to remain limited. As George and Bennett (2005, 207) note, “it may be difficult to eliminate all potential rival explanations but one, especially when human agents are involved – for they may be doing their best to conceal causal processes” (see also Czaika and de Haas 2013). Nevertheless, as George and Bennett (2005, 222) also note, it may still be possible “to exclude at least some explanations and thereby to draw inferences that are useful for theory-building or policymaking.”

Alternative hypothesized processes

My theoretical framework essentially allows for two options: policy-makers may lead, legitimize and ultimately wither movements of sympathy out of conviction or interest, or they may navigate that movement out of consideration for their electoral costs. In order to have a more accurate understanding of the roles of representations and perceptions within these dynamics, other significant variables must be considered for their impacts on decision-making processes and on the discourses policy-makers choose to adopt. As such, regional politics – that is, Germany’s relationships with and considerations towards its European counterparts – were considered while tracking elite discourses, policies, and decision-making processes. The agency of the displaced, international norms, and domestic political opponents may also shape possibilities and constraints for policy-makers and were likewise considered throughout the process-tracing.

⁴³ More thorough investigations of Angela Merkel’s decision-making processes in September 2015 have been conducted by various German media outlets. I therefore drew upon the findings published in English in *Spiegel Online* (Abé et al. 2015; Alkousaa et al. 2016), *Zeit Online* (Blume et al. 2016), and *Bild* (Blome et al. 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d). The first two media outlets are associated with weekly magazines known for their investigative work while *Bild* is a widely read tabloid. A possibility could have been to conduct my own interviews with policy-makers, but this option was not pursued due to time constraints and accessibility concerns.

Conclusion

The central objective of this thesis is thus to better understand how representations and perceptions of the displaced influence policy-making towards openness. In doing so, my first objective is to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that are produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents and the media in contexts of relative openness. My hypothesis is that openness towards displaced groups relies on the construction of the displaced as *deserving* of protection, and that such openness is further encouraged by perceptions of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity. In line with Objectives 2 and 3, I also seek to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers may be driven towards openness or renewed restrictiveness. My hypotheses are that policy-makers either rely on welcoming (negative) representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they respond to the welcoming (negative) representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of electoral interest.

To address this research question, this project analyzes the response of Germany to the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis.’ This case can indeed be classified as ‘deviant’ considering its relatively welcoming approach to asylum seekers during 2015-2016. The analysis begins in 2011 in order to track the emergence of the refugee issue on the agenda, and ends in March 2016 with the decline in openness the country experienced. Process-tracing is employed for its aptitude to test and develop theories and for its sensitivity to multiple interaction effects. Thematic analysis is also used for capturing the representations and perceptions produced by policy-makers throughout the period under study. The evolution of elite, public, and media representations and perceptions of the displaced are tracked and contextualized with the evolution of policies, measures, and number of arrivals in Germany from 2011 to 2016. The case study also provides evidence of decision-making processes. Alternative hypothesized processes are also considered, particularly by assessing whether and how regional politics, the agency of the displaced, international norms, and domestic political opponents affect the decision-making processes and the discourses policy-makers choose to adopt. As a result, this thesis seeks to provide new insights into how inclusiveness and openness may be cultivated in the Global North.

Part II

Note to Part II

The case of Germany in the refugee ‘crisis’ is rather exceptional: between 2015 and 2016, more than a million asylum seekers entered the country (Grote 2018, 15-16). Many observers, including in academia, have argued that Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated and maintained a relatively open approach to asylum during this period out of conviction and compassion for the displaced (see e.g. Mushaben 2017a; Helms et al. 2018). The images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child pictured dead on Turkish shores on September 2, 2015 after trying to reach Europe, have similarly been described as the trigger for Merkel’s welcoming stance (see e.g. Bleiker 2018, 19; Hutchison 2018, 306).

The next three chapters thus seek to further explore these claims. As such, *how did representations and perceptions of displaced persons influence policy-making towards openness in Germany during the 2015-2016 ‘refugee crisis’?* Again, three objectives informed my research: i) to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that were produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents and the media in this context; ii) to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers were driven towards openness, as either the initiators or followers of the movement; iii) to examine the mechanisms through which the movement of openness withered.

As discussed in Chapter 3, I explored these questions by carefully tracing the evolution of elite, public and media representations and perceptions of the displaced in Germany from 2011 to 2016. I similarly traced the evolution of decision-making processes, policies, measures, and number of arrivals. I also considered alternative processes, particularly by assessing whether and how regional politics, the agency of the displaced, international norms, and domestic political opponents affected the decision-making processes and the discourses policy-makers chose to adopt. The next three chapters present the findings of this endeavour through a chronological approach.

Chapter 4 contextualizes historical and legal developments in the areas of asylum and immigration in Germany until the early 2010s, and spans over the emergence and growth of the refugee issue on the country’s agenda from 2011 to September 3, 2015. Results show that welcoming representations and perceptions dominated across the public, the media and political

elites during this period, although they did not apply to all displaced groups. Elite discourses and decision-making processes, however, do not indicate an active will to trigger arrivals. Such relative wariness was marked by concerns over social acceptance.

Chapter 5 traces developments from September 4, 2015 to December 2015 as the country received an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers. During this period, representations and perceptions of the displaced remained predominantly welcoming across all three sets of actors, although they were not left unchallenged. The pace of arrivals provided opportunities for public and media actors to demonstrate their support towards the displaced. Process-tracing evidence shows that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during this period. The agency of the displaced and regional considerations are likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel's welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. Findings suggest that societal representations and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may have likewise impacted Merkel's discourses and policy decisions.

Chapter 6 covers reactions to the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 and ends with the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, which also correlates with a significant decrease and stabilization of arrivals from then onwards. Representations and perceptions of the displaced became more negative during this period across all three sets of actors. Restrictive measures were implemented in response to the events in Cologne. Evidence suggests that such restrictionism was influenced by the desire to control public contestation by appearing proactive in fighting crime. Efforts to curb the number of arrivals were also pursued. The persistent efforts by political elites throughout the period under study to curb the number of arrivals, combined with allusions to social acceptance, indeed suggest that policy-makers rather *anticipated* the shift in societal representations and perceptions.

Chapter 7 constitutes the conclusion of this thesis, in which the key findings of the case study are tied back to the objectives of this research. The limitations and implications of those findings are also discussed.

Chapter 4 – ‘Wir schaffen das’: Setting the stage for the ‘crisis’ in Germany, 1945-2015

This chapter seeks to trace the emergence and growth of the refugee ‘crisis’ in the years, months and weeks preceding its height in the fall of 2015. As such, the first section contextualizes historical and legal developments in the areas of asylum and immigration in Germany from the end of the Second World War until the early 2010s. The second section traces the emergence of the refugee issue on the country’s agenda from 2011 to March 2015. The third section discusses developments as the number of arrivals to Germany accelerates between April 2015 and early September 2015. Results show that welcoming representations and perceptions dominated across the public, the media and political elites during this early period of the ‘crisis,’ although they did not apply to all displaced groups. Nonetheless, elite discourses and decision-making processes do not indicate an active will to trigger arrivals. Such relative wariness was marked by concerns over social acceptance.

Contextualizing the ‘crisis’: Asylum and immigration in Germany (1945 – 2010s)

In order to situate the case study, the following section presents the historical and legal developments in asylum and immigration in Germany from the end of the Second World War until the early 2010s. As will be seen, the right to asylum represents a special duty in light of Germany’s history. Nevertheless, such a right is bounded by the expectation that refugees eventually return to their countries of origin. Its access and enjoyment were also significantly restricted in the nineties. In the broader area of immigration, the country evolved from an ‘ethnic nation’ to more expansionist and inclusive understandings of its relationship to newcomers.

Asylum in Germany: Mediating a special duty

Asylum holds a special status in the German context and is to be understood in light of the country’s Nazi past (see e.g. Lehr 2015; Cragge 2016; Joppke 1998, 122-123; 1999, 86). As the Federal Ministry of the Interior noted in 2004, “at the time, many Germans only managed to survive because they had been admitted to and had found shelter in other countries” (in Cragge 2016, 346). In this context, the *right to asylum* was entrenched in West Germany’s constitution,

the Basic Law (see Crage 2016, 346).⁴⁴ This constitutional provision went beyond international requirements, which merely expect states not to expel or return ('refouler') refugees (see Gibney 2004; Bergmann 1997, in Lehr 2015, 116; Joppke 1998, 122; 1999, 85). As a result, Crage (2016, 347) argues, "Germany's historical legal commitment to refugees has meant that debates about who should receive asylum and how to treat asylum seekers have touched on some of the most sensitive issues in German debates about its nationhood, including what many consider its particular duty to respect and defend human rights" (see also Joppke 1998, 123; 1999, 86).

Such relationship is not without contradictions, however. On the one hand, such legal and moral obligations to provide asylum would not have translated into an inclusion of "humanitarian immigrants into the national self" (Bauder 2009, 275; see also 2011, 190-198; 2016, 74).⁴⁵ According to Bauder, such boundaries are exemplified in the 'repatriation narrative,' which expects refugees "to return to their countries when the situation permits and help rebuild these countries" (2016, 74). This narrative was particularly used towards refugees from the former Yugoslavia in the nineties (see Gibney 2004, 104; Koser 2000).

Moreover, Germany's right to asylum was significantly circumscribed in the nineties. The number of asylum seekers reaching Germany indeed significantly increased in the years that preceded.⁴⁶ By the late eighties, more than 100,000 individuals would apply for asylum in

⁴⁴ This right is enshrined in Article 16(2) of the Basic Law and applies to "every politically persecuted individual" (in Crage 2016, 246). This provision has been interpreted as encompassing political persecution based on political opinion, race, religion, nationality, and membership to a social group (Fullerton 1990, 388-389; BAMF 2016a). West Germany also ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1953. Two schemes of refugee protection thus coexist in the German legal context. Individuals who are not granted constitutional asylum or Convention-based refugee status may be authorized to remain in Germany under more precarious protection schemes, such as subsidiary protection or deportation bans (see BAMF 2016a; Mushaben 2017a). Asylum applications are assessed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), a subordinate authority of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Its decisions may then be appealed in court (see BAMF 2016a; Grote 2018).

⁴⁵ The exclusion of 'humanitarian immigrants' from the national self would align with the 'ethnic' model of nationhood, as further discussed below.

⁴⁶ For the evolution of the number of asylum applications in Germany since 1953, see Figure 1 in the Appendix. According to Gibney (2004, 94-98; 2006), the increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany (and elsewhere in the Global North) in the eighties and nineties was notably the result of greater access to transportation means and the closure of foreign worker programs. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the war in the former Yugoslavia further increased the number of asylum seekers entering Germany (Gibney 2004, 96; see also Bosswick 2000, 48). To these trends should also be noted the large influxes of 'ethnic' Germans from East Germany and Eastern Europe that came to the Federal Republic following the demise of communist regimes (see Gibney 2004, 98-99; Bosswick 2000, 47; Joppke 1999, 91-96). These migrations were regulated by Article 116 of the Basic Law, which grants German citizenship to "descendants and spouses of people settled in the frontiers of the German Reich as of 31 December 1937, as well as refugees and expellees of German stock" (in Gibney 2004, 92).

Germany on a yearly basis (BAMF 2018).⁴⁷ In this context, various restrictive measures were implemented, ranging from the acceleration of asylum procedures to the accumulation of barriers to entry (see Gibney 2004, 100-103; Bosswick 2000; Crag 2016; Joppke 1998, 124-130; 1999, 86-94). In 1993, the constitutional right to asylum was successfully amended. Exceptions to its enjoyment were added by introducing the concepts of safe third countries and safe countries of origin.⁴⁸ In the years that followed – and indeed until the early 2010s – the number of asylum seekers arriving to Germany reduced considerably, while asylum issues faded from the headlines (BAMF 2018; Crag 2016, 352; Bosswick 2000, 50).

Immigration in Germany: Revisiting the ethnic nation

In the immigration literature, Germany is typically described as an ‘ethnic nation’ (see Brubaker 1990; Bauder 2011; 2014; 2016). Indeed, the German nation has long been conceived as a “kind of ‘biological’ entity, into which membership is gained at birth rather than acquired by non-citizens through accession” (Gibney 2004, 91). This perspective underpinned Germany’s citizenship laws, which from 1913 to 2000 were centered upon *jus sanguinis*, i.e. the granting of citizenship on the basis of descent (see Bauder 2011, 57; Gibney 2004, 91; Joppke 1999). Such understandings of the nation also affected post-war immigration policies, which significantly did not encompass a general immigration program but rather focused on the recruitment of temporary workers (see Gibney 2004, 91; Bauder 2011, 58).⁴⁹ Political elites, throughout the post-war period

⁴⁷ Germany received approximately two-thirds of all asylum applications lodged in EU countries in the 1980s and 1990s (Gibney 2004, 97). According to Gibney (2004, 97; 100), Germany’s constitutional right to asylum acted as a “magnet for asylum seekers” while leaving the country “exceptionally vulnerable to the entrance decisions of other states” that were not as constrained by the law (see also Joppke 1998, 122; 128-129; 1999, 85; 93).

⁴⁸ In Germany, the logic of safe third countries primarily works through the Dublin system, which expects asylum seekers to lodge their claims in (or else be returned to) the first country of the European Union (EU) they have entered. As Germany is surrounded by EU members (and Switzerland, which participates in the Dublin system), accessing asylum in Germany by land is theoretically impossible unless one enters irregularly and conceals its access route or otherwise falls under the responsibility of Germany (see Regulation (EU) No 604/2013; Bosswick 2000, 51; Gibney 2004, 104). The logic of safe countries of origin, in turn, enables the state to accelerate asylum proceedings for those country nationals. Germany’s original list included EU countries (or having since joined it), as well as Ghana and Senegal (Crag 2016, 357). As will be discussed, it now also includes Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (BAMF 2016a).

⁴⁹ Labour recruiting agreements were first signed with Italy in 1955 and were multiplied in the years that followed (see Gibney 2004, 89-90; Molnar 2014; Joppke 1999, 65-66). Although the guestworker program was dismantled in 1974 – following the OPEC oil crisis – and foreign workers were expected to leave, many remained and transformed Germany into a ‘de facto’ immigration country (see Gibney 2004, 94; Bauder 2011; Joppke 1999).

until the late 1990s, rather predominantly insisted that Germany was not a ‘country of immigration’ (see e.g. Gibney 2004; Bauder 2011, 163-165; 2016; Joppke 1999; Green 2013).⁵⁰

Several authors note a “policy shift” in immigration and integration in Germany in the early 2000s (see e.g. Heckmann 2016; Mushaben 2017a; Triadafilopoulos 2012). Under the leadership of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, citizenship reforms were implemented in 2000, which notably introduced elements of *jus soli* (i.e. citizenship based on birthplace) and eased naturalization procedures (see e.g. Heckmann 2016; Bauder 2011, 60; Rietig and Müller 2016; Abali 2009). Immigration reforms and integration measures were also implemented in 2005, and were further developed under Chancellor Angela Merkel in the decade that followed (see e.g. Heckmann 2016; Mushaben 2017a; 2017b; Kolb 2014; Green 2013). Over this period, argues Heckmann (2016, 1), “a strong [...] consensus” was consolidated among political elites over the value of immigration for Germany’s economic growth and competitiveness (see also Adam 2015; Green 2013; Boswell and Hampshire 2017). In contrast, far-right parties, while present at local and regional levels of governance, remained at the margins of the political and party systems (see Green 2013, 345). According to several authors, expected demographic changes encouraged expansionist perspectives: with a birthrate below the replacement levels and longer life expectancies, Germany’s need for immigration became “clear and pressing” (Green 2013, 335; see also Heckmann 2016; Mushaben 2017a; 2017b; Rietig and Müller 2016).⁵¹

Such expansionism in policy and political rhetoric seems to have partially translated into more welcoming stances on immigration by constituents and the media. On the one hand, evidence suggests that German public opinion became more supportive of immigration during the 2000s and early 2010s, and more so than their European counterparts (see Heckmann 2016; Abali 2009; Adam 2015; Green 2013, 345). Nevertheless, xenophobia towards certain groups of immigrants, and particularly those of the Muslim faith, remained salient throughout those years (see Adam

⁵⁰ The partition of post-war Germany also explained such resistance to the inclusion of immigrants (see Joppke 1999, 63-64; 95-99; Gibney 2004, 91; Green 2013, 341-342). As a Christian Democrat resolution read in 1981, “the role of the German Federal Republic as a national unitary state and as part of a divided nation does not permit the commencement of an irreversible development into a multi-ethnic state” (in Gibney 2004, 91).

⁵¹ The concept of a *Willkommenskultur* (i.e. ‘welcoming culture’) would have emerged in political rhetoric around 2010 with the purpose of attracting new immigrants in a context of labor market shortages (see Heckmann 2016, 5). The concept would then have been “broadly taken up and promoted by major political actors, private sector stakeholders, and the public” (Heckmann 2016, 5, see also Adam 2015, 452).

2015; Abali 2009).⁵² Likewise, although major media outlets became more sensitive to integration issues and echoed the preoccupations of political elites for economic immigration (see Heckmann 2016; Zambonini 2009; Bozdag 2014; Bauder 2011), evidence also suggests that media coverage of immigration (and Islam) remained predominantly negative (see Zambonini 2009; Bozdag 2014; Ehrkamp 2010; Özcan 2013).

The emergence of the ‘crisis’ (2011 – March 2015)

Although asylum applications lodged in Germany remained relatively low and stable throughout the 2000s, notable increases are perceptible in the early 2010s (BAMF 2018; see Figure 1). In 2013, 109,580 new applications were lodged; a total that had not been attained since 1996 (BAMF 2015). Numbers would again increase in 2014, with a total of 173,072 new applications lodged by the end of the year (BAMF 2015). Such trends emerged most notably from increases in sea arrivals to Italian and Greek shores (see Frontex 2015, 16; UNHCR 2019a).⁵³ Influxes through the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes indeed increased following the Arab Spring, as the fall of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime reduced control of the Libyan coast while the conflict in Syria displaced millions (see Betts and Collier 2017; UNHCR 2016).⁵⁴

In the following subsections, the representations and perceptions mobilized by constituents, the media, and political elites to designate displaced groups during this period are consecutively reviewed. Results show that welcoming representations and perceptions dominated across all three sets of actors. Such acceptability, however, did not apply to all displaced groups. Political elites

⁵² Negative attitudes towards immigrants are substantially higher in the former East Germany than in the former West Germany (see Adam 2015). Adam explains those variations as a result of higher unemployment rates in the former East Germany as well as a legacy of anti-racist political reeducation in the former West Germany (see also Jäckle and König 2017).

⁵³ Although the Dublin system would theoretically expect Germany to not receive any asylum seeker from land routes, the lack of capacity and/or laxity of Italian and Greek local authorities, compounded with the absence of border controls in the Schengen area, are identified as key factors for arrivals to Germany (see Betts and Collier 2017, 69-81).

⁵⁴ The deterioration of the situation in Syria and poor conditions of asylum in neighbouring countries such as Turkey are identified as key factors for the sustained increase in arrivals of Syrian nationals on EU Mediterranean shores, particularly from 2013 onwards (see Triandafyllidou 2018, 3; Betts and Collier 2017, 73-81; Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015). While Syria was identified as the top country of origin using both the Central and the Eastern Mediterranean routes in 2014, it was proportionally less so for the Central Mediterranean route (see Frontex 2015). Other major countries of origin using the Central Mediterranean route were Eritrea and Somalia (see Frontex 2014; 2015).

particularly focused on filtering arrivals and stays based on the deemed deservingness of the displaced.

Public representations and perceptions (2011 – March 2015)

Several authors highlight that although the number of crossings and deaths on the Mediterranean increased in the years and months leading up to the spring of 2015, such trends “took a long time to build up” (Betts and Collier 2017, 70) and to constitute a crisis from the perspective of the Global North (see Holmes and Castaneda 2016; Goodman et al. 2017; Betts and Collier 2017). Such observations also apply to the case of Germany. Indeed, relatively few polls reported on the evolution of German public opinion on the issue of asylum before the summer of 2015. In October 2013, the *ZDF-Politbarometer* nonetheless indicated that about 41% of respondents were in favor of Germany receiving “more refugees from Africa,” who were then predominantly arriving to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route (see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2013). About a year later, in September 2014, the issue of refugees emerged as “the most important problem in Germany,” a position it was going to keep in the months – and years – to come (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015a; 2019).

The salience of the refugee issue in the minds of German citizens does not necessarily reflect negative representations and perceptions of the displaced. In September 2014, 51% of respondents agreed that Germany should accommodate “significantly more refugees” from “Syria and Iraq” (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2014).⁵⁵ In December 2014, according to an *Infratest Dimap* survey, 67% of respondents either believed the number of refugees admitted by Germany to be just right (39%) or considered the country could take in more refugees (28%) (Infratest Dimap 2014). A month later, the proportion of respondents supporting current or increased arrivals slightly increased to 73% (Infratest Dimap 2015a).⁵⁶ Such figures suggest a relatively high level of sympathy towards the displaced.

⁵⁵ An increase in the number of Syrian nationals crossing both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes between 2013 and 2014 helps to account for the shift from “African refugees” to “Syrian and Iraqi refugees” in survey questions during this period (see Frontex 2014; 2015). The proportion of Syrian asylum seekers arriving to Germany also increases between 2013 and 2014, evolving from 10.8% to 22.7% of all initial applications (see BAMF 2014; 2015).

⁵⁶ The ‘status quo’ option in Infratest Dimap surveys slightly changed between December 2014 and January 2015 from the number of refugees admitted to Germany being “just right” to whether Germany should admit “as many refugees as it does today” (see Infratest Dimap 2014; 2015a).

Infratest Dimap surveys are also helpful for assessing notions of deservingness among the German public. In January 2015, 94% of respondents believed it was “right” (as opposed to “wrong”) for Germany to receive refugees who had left their country because of war or civil war (Infratest Dimap 2015a). In addition, about 80% of respondents considered it right to receive individuals who had fled because of hunger and natural disasters (83%), political or religious persecution (82%), and belonging to a particular ethnic group (79%). In contrast, economic hardship was accepted by only 41% of respondents. Although respondents were not polled on the motives of the displaced groups *actually* arriving to Germany, it may be safe to infer that individuals supporting current or increased arrivals generally perceived the displaced to have legitimate reasons for entering Germany and thus considered them to be deserving of protection.

Nevertheless, the evolution of hate crimes and anti-refugee protests during the same period depicts a more nuanced picture of public representations and perceptions. In 2013, 63 politically motivated crimes against asylum shelters were reported by German authorities (Amnesty International 2016, 9). Such crimes were to triple the year after (Amnesty International 2016, 9). Likewise, the number of violent hate crimes perpetrated with a racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic or religious motive increased by 22% between 2013 and 2014, evolving from 693 to 844 reported crimes (Amnesty International 2016, 55). In addition, about 292 anti-refugee protests were recorded in Germany in 2014 (Amnesty International 2016, 42). The PEGIDA movement notably emerged in the fall of 2014 and was to significantly expand in the months that followed, mobilizing thousands of participants in weekly street rallies (see Dostal 2015).⁵⁷

Although such findings indicate the heterogeneity of public attitudes during this period, the majority of Germans remained against the PEGIDA movement (see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015b; Infratest Dimap 2015a) and counter-rallies expressing solidarity with minorities soon emerged (Dostal 2015, 524-525, see also Deutsche Welle 2015a; 2015b). Research also indicates that the number of volunteers involved in refugee work continuously increased in Germany in the

⁵⁷ The acronym PEGIDA stands for ‘*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*’ (i.e. ‘European Patriots against the Islamisation of the West’). The emergence of the movement would not be directly related to the increased arrivals of asylum seekers in Germany but would rather have formed in response to a rally by supporters of the Kurdish Workers’ Party (outlawed in Germany) in Dresden in October 2014 (see Dostal 2015). Interestingly, 87% of PEGIDA supporters agreed that it was right to admit refugees who had fled because of war or civil war (Infratest Dimap 2015a). Differences between PEGIDA supporters and the general population were larger when it came to accepting individuals fleeing political or religious persecution (66% versus 82%), belonging to a particular ethnic group (63% versus 79%), and economic hardship (23% versus 41%).

years following the beginning of the war in Syria (Karakayali and Kleist 2015, in Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 128).

These findings thus indicate that displaced groups were generally perceived positively by German constituents in the years and months leading up to the refugee ‘crisis.’

Media representations and perceptions (2011 – March 2015)

Berry et al.’s (2015) content analysis of German press coverage from June 1, 2014 to April 1, 2015 helps in assessing media representations and perceptions of the displaced during this period. The authors particularly look at press content from three major German newspapers across the political spectrum: *Bild* (populist right), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (centre-left), and *Die Welt* (centre-right). Based on this sample, Berry et al. (2015, 113) find that the displaced were overwhelmingly described as ‘refugees’: between 70% (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) and 77% (*Bild*) of all references indeed used this label. The term ‘asylum seeker’ followed with approximately 15% to 20% of all occurrences, while less than 10% of mentions described the displaced as ‘migrants,’ ‘immigrants,’ ‘economic refugees,’ ‘illegals,’ ‘economic migrants,’ or ‘foreigners’ (Berry et al. 2015, 113-114). In line with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, Berry et al. (2015, 114) indicate that the German term for ‘refugee’ (*Flüchtling*) has a neutral to positive connotation, while other terms have neutral to negative connotations. Through this language, media outlets thus generally constructed the displaced as legitimate refugees in need of protection.

Berry et al. also note that press coverage rarely contextualized the displaced’s motives for fleeing, although armed conflict was by far the main reason evoked across media outlets (Berry et al. 2015, 117-118). Likewise, Syria was the most commonly cited country of origin (Berry et al. 2015, 112-113). Although these groups were sometimes associated with economic, security and cultural concerns – and more so in right leaning newspapers –, such themes were outweighed by that of humanitarianism (Berry et al. 2015, 115-166). Again, these findings suggest that the German press generally constructed the displaced as individuals deserving of protection.

Berry et al.’s study is also helpful in assessing the main sources used in press coverage. The authors indeed find that the German press predominantly relied on domestic political sources, and that the governing coalition represented more than 75% of such sourcing (Berry et al. 2015, 259). The main opposition to Merkel’s coalition, as reflected in press coverage, came from the *left* through the pro-immigrant Greens. In contrast, far-right parties “lack[ed] a political voice in the

German press,” which Berry et al. (2015, 11) interpret as the result of their absence in the Bundestag.⁵⁸ The citizen voices captured in German press coverage were also “overwhelmingly neutral or positive towards refugees,” and were notably featured criticizing the activities of PEGIDA (Berry et al. 2015, 107-108). The German press therefore generally captured and echoed positive attitudes towards the displaced, both from political elites and constituents.

Thus, German press coverage in the year and months preceding the ‘crisis’ suggests that the displaced were generally depicted as deserving of protection.

Elite discourses and policies (2011 – March 2015)

The issue of asylum also regained in salience on the political arena as the number of arrivals to Germany increased. Throughout the early 2010s, a recurring rhetoric among governing elites pertained to disentangling the deserving from the undeserving (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2013a; 2014a; 2014b).⁵⁹ Not only the arrivals and stays of the underserving had to be circumscribed, but such measures were argued as essential for guaranteeing access to protection for the deserving. For example, in 2013, Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) indicated being “determined to take action to ensure that our asylum system is not subject to abuse so that those who are genuinely vulnerable can find protection in Germany” (in Deutsche Welle 2013a). A similar rhetoric was employed by Friedrich’s successor, Thomas de Maizière (CDU). As he indicated in February 2014,

We’ll only be able to obtain the approval of the general public when we’re clear about which immigrants are not welcome here.⁶⁰ And we’ll only be able to get outright approval for the right to asylum – to our humanitarian obligation, the granting of asylum – when it’s clear that those who are not politically persecuted are not permitted to call upon the right to asylum in our country (in Deutsche Welle 2014a).

⁵⁸ Such findings may suggest top-down effects from political elites to the media in the coverage of the refugee situation, although these interaction effects are not the specific focus of Berry et al.’s research.

⁵⁹ During most of the period under study (2013-2016), the governing coalition was composed of the CDU/CSU (respectively under Angela Merkel and Horst Seehofer) and the SPD (under Sigmar Gabriel). From 2009 to 2013, the governing coalition was formed with the CDU/CSU and the FDP. The CSU is CDU’s so-called ‘sister party’ in Bavaria. The parties do not compete against one another in elections and they form a joint parliamentary party in the Bundestag, Germany’s federal parliament (see Bräuninger et al. 2019). The CDU/CSU and the FDP are centre-right parties while the SPD is centre-left (see Bräuninger et al. 2019; Berry et al. 2015, 111-112). The acronym CDU stands for the Christian Democratic Union of Germany; the CSU for the Christian Social Union in Bavaria; the SPD for the Social Democratic Party of Germany; and the FDP for the Free Democratic Party.

⁶⁰ Note that this sentence suggests concerns over social acceptance.

Nationals from the Balkans were particularly targeted by this rhetoric of asylum abuse and undeservingness. In the fall of 2014, the list of safe countries of origin was successfully expanded to include Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. De Maizière justified these changes by highlighting the low recognition rates of those nationals (Deutscher Bundestag 2014, in Crage 2016, 353).⁶¹ Although the Greens were particularly vocal in their opposition to the inclusion of these Balkan countries as safe countries of origin (see Deutsche Welle 2013b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e), the votes from the Green-governed state of Baden-Württemberg ultimately enabled those revisions to asylum law to pass in the Bundesrat, Germany's second legislative chamber representing the federal states (see Deutsche Welle 2014e).⁶²

In contrast to asylum seekers from the Balkans, Syrian nationals were presented as deserving refugees for whom resources could be devoted (see Deutscher Bundestag 2014, in Crage 2016, 353; Deutsche Welle 2014e). In 2014, De Maizière notably argued that the expansion of the list of safe countries of origin would lead Germany to have more resources for Syrian asylum seekers (Deutscher Bundestag 2014, in Crage 2016, 353). The federal government, in cooperation with the federal states (thereafter *Länder*), also established a humanitarian admission programme for Syrian refugees in 2013 (see Deutsche Welle 2013c; Bundeskanzlerin 2013a). This programme was subsequently extended and led to the admittance of 18,952 Syrian refugees to Germany between 2013 and 2015 (Oxfam 2016, 20; see also Deutsche Welle 2013d; 2014f; UNHCR 2018).⁶³ Germany thus went beyond its asylum obligations to protect displaced Syrians, which again highlight the deemed deservingness of that group.

For her 2014-2015 New Year's address, Merkel raised the issue of refugees. Her discourse delved into notions of deservingness, national identity, and relatedness. As she argued,

⁶¹ In 2013, asylum applications from Serbian, Macedonian and Bosnian nationals constituted between 15% and 20% of all applications (BAMF 2014, 20). Recognition rates (including Constitution- and Convention-based asylum, subsidiary protection, and deportation bans) were below 2% for those countries of origin (BAMF 2014, 56).

⁶² Opponents to the inclusion of Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as safe countries of origin particularly highlighted the Roma origin of many of those asylum seekers, and the discrimination and hardship they faced in their home countries (see e.g. Spiegel 2011a; Deutsche Welle 2014c; 2014e). Along with revisions to the list of safe countries of origin, the 2014 'asylum package' also included an expansion of asylum seekers' freedom of movement; a reduction of employment restrictions; and a shift from in-kind to cash aid (Crage 2016, 354-357; see also Bundesregierung 2014). Improvements to aid provisions for asylum seekers were partly required by a 2012 ruling of the German Constitutional Court (Crage 2012; see also Deutsche Welle 2012b). The Greens party premier of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, argued that his regional government ultimately voted in favor of the asylum package as refugee conditions in Germany would be substantially improved (see Deutsche Welle 2014e).

⁶³ Most *Länder* also implemented family reunification schemes based on private sponsorship, through which 22,216 Syrian refugees had arrived by September 2016 (Oxfam 2016, 20; see also UNHCR 2018).

... many literally escaped death. It goes without saying that we will help them and take in people who seek refuge with us.⁶⁴ [...] Recently someone told me about a Kurd who is German today. Many years ago he fled Iraq – under very difficult conditions. Under mortal danger. He said that the most important thing for him in Germany was that his children could grow up here without fear. That is perhaps the greatest compliment anybody can pay our country – the children of those who have suffered persecution can grow up here free of fear. And that was also a motive of the many people who took the streets in the GDR every Monday. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in 1989 for democracy and freedom and against a dictatorship that made children grow up in fear (Time 2015; Spiegel 2014; Bundeskanzlerin 2015a).

Merkel's discourse thus resolutely constructed the displaced as deserving of protection: many of them would have escaped death, fear and persecution. Moreover, the Chancellor depicted the nation as virtuous – it was because of Germany that (innocent) children could grow up without fear. Merkel also linked the stories of the displaced with Germany's very own historical reminiscences, so as to mobilize perceptions of relatedness between the hosts and the displaced.

Meanwhile, PEGIDA protests were generally condemned by political elites (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2015a; Deutsche Welle 2014g; 2014h; 2015c). Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) insisted that the movement projected a very negative image of the country, and that “we must make it very clear that those shouting their slogans in a few streets are a tiny minority with a loud voice” (in Bundeskanzlerin 2015a). Several political elites, including the Federal Economics Affairs Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD), nonetheless noted that such fears among the population had to be taken seriously (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015a; Deutsche Welle 2015d). Although most political elites condemned the PEGIDA movement, the leader of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), Alexander Gauland, rather argued that Merkel was “condescending towards people she did not know” (in Deutsche Welle 2015d).⁶⁵

Discursive and policy developments among political elites in the years and months preceding the ‘crisis’ thus indicate a relative consensus about the need to welcome war-fleeing refugees. Political attention was rather focused on limiting the arrivals and stays of those deemed undeserving of protection.

⁶⁴ Note that this sentence more so suggests a passive intention to welcome those arriving to Germany, rather than an active will to trigger arrivals.

⁶⁵ The AfD was founded in 2013 as a Euroskeptic party and was to move further to the right in 2015 (see Rietig and Müller 2016; Jäckle and König 2017; Spiegel 2015g).

The growth of the ‘crisis’ (March 2015 to September 3, 2015)

Sea arrivals on Greek shores were to substantially and rapidly grow in the spring and summer of 2015, evolving from 7,874 arrivals in March 2015 to 107,843 arrivals in August 2015 (UNHCR 2019a).⁶⁶ The number of people entering the western Balkans from Greece similarly increased during this period (UNHCR 2015a, 3; Frontex 2016, 19). Such trends were reflected in the number of arrivals to Germany, which increased from 38,892 registered arrivals in February 2015 to 104,460 registered arrivals in August 2015 (Grote 2018).⁶⁷ As will be further discussed below, this period shows an accumulation of tragedies and individualized narratives, and again captures predominantly welcoming representations and perceptions across the public, the media, and elites. Elite discourses and decision-making processes, however, do not indicate an active will to trigger arrivals. Such relative wariness was marked by concerns over social acceptance.

Public representations and perceptions (April 2015 –Sept. 3, 2015)

Throughout the first half of 2015, support towards the displaced remained relatively high, although it somewhat diminished as the number of arrivals grew (see Infratest Dimap 2015b; Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015c; 2015d). Indeed, while 73% of respondents had agreed in January 2015 that Germany should welcome more or as many refugees, such support had decreased to 57% by late July 2015 (Infratest Dimap 2015b; see also Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015d).⁶⁸ Similar percentages were captured at the end of August 2015 (see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015i). Such findings align with the public opinion literature, which expects perceptions of threat to grow and support to wither as the perceived size of the outgroup increases (see Esses et al. 2017). Nonetheless, I would argue that a 57% approval rate for current or increased arrivals

⁶⁶ The insecurity of the Central Mediterranean route would have encouraged further crossings from Turkey to Greece in early 2015 (Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015; Betts and Collier 2017, 78-83). Such crossings would then have been amplified by social networks and windows of opportunity (see Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015; Betts and Collier 2017, 78-83). As such, while the Central Mediterranean route was associated with the most sea arrivals to Europe until the end of 2014, it was outpaced in the first half of 2015 by the Eastern Mediterranean route (see UNHCR 2019a; Frontex 2016). For the evolution of sea arrivals to Greece from 2014 to 2018, see Figure 2 in the Appendix.

⁶⁷ For the monthly evolution of the number of requests for asylum in Germany from 2014 to 2017, see Figure 3 in the Appendix.

⁶⁸ Meanwhile, consensus remained on the righteousness of receiving refugees who had fled war or persecution (see Infratest Dimap 2015b, 6). Support for economic hardship, however, declined from 41% in January 2015 to 28% in late July 2015 (Infratest Dimap 2015b, 6). The German public thus generally grew more intolerant of economic motivations as the number of arrivals increased.

still represented significant solidarity towards the displaced in a context where it meant supporting the arrival of about 100,000 asylum seekers per month (see Grote 2018, 16; Figure 3).

Nevertheless, violence against asylum seekers also continued to increase. During the first half of 2015, 199 attacks against refugee housing were reported by the Federal Criminal Police Office – which represented about a threefold increase in comparison to the first six months of 2014 (Spiegel 2015a). The general population remained, however, overwhelmingly opposed to violent protests against refugees (see Infratest Dimap 2015c, 4). Pro-refugee protests and volunteering were also reported during this period (see e.g. Spiegel 2015a; 2015b; Holmes and Castaneda 2016).

Thus, although a relative erosion can be perceived, public representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally positive as the ‘crisis’ grew in importance in the spring and summer of 2015.

Media representations and perceptions (April 2015 – Sept. 3, 2015)

Vollmer and Karakayali’s (2018) analysis of textual and visual developments in German newspapers and weekly magazines from March 2015 to March 2016 is particularly helpful for assessing the evolution of media frames during this period. In line with Berry et al. (2015), the authors describe an overwhelmingly supportive coverage of the cause of refugees throughout the year 2015. The images of boats crossing the Mediterranean became icons, Vollmer and Karakayali argue, while the Mediterranean was framed as a “refugee graveyard” and a site of “mass casualties” (2018, 113). Moreover, displacement through the Balkans would have facilitated the migration of more women and children and eased media coverage of their journeys and hardships. As a result, Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 133) argue, “more *deserving migrants* moved into the spotlight of the media” (emphasis in text). Other media content analyses, however, note that the presence of female refugees remained rare in German press coverage (see Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017; Holzberg et al. 2018, 540).⁶⁹ These findings would suggest that representations of deservingness spanned beyond gender divides.

Moreover, Holzberg et al. (2018, 539) note that the media rarely mentioned names and the personal stories of the displaced, let alone the reasons behind their displacement (see also Georgiou

⁶⁹ Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) and Holzberg et al.’s (2018) media content analyses do not cover a continuous period of coverage but rather analyze media reactions to three specific events from July 2015 to November 2015. Such methodology may thus explain discrepancies between their findings and those of Vollmer and Karakayali.

and Zaborowski 2017).⁷⁰ Refugee women, in particular, were “mostly represented without a voice or as passive victims in need of saving” (Holzberg et al. 2018, 540; see also Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). As such, assert Holzberg et al. (2018, 539), “with few historical or socio-political reasons discussed to explain the plight of refugees, the evaluation of political action was shifted away from structural considerations and onto the refugees themselves.” In this context, along with more usual concerns over the costs associated with asylum, a prevalent argument within the German press was that increases in arrivals could benefit the country’s economy in a context of demographic decline and labor shortage (Holzberg et al. 2018, 541-543).⁷¹

These findings thus describe media representations and perceptions throughout the spring and summer of 2015 as predominantly welcoming, albeit decontextualizing. The death of Alan Kurdi on September 2, 2015, and the massive international coverage that his images sparked (see Vis and Goriunova 2015), therefore provided a strong individualized narrative on which to build. Several authors have indeed sought to analyze the iconographical and iconological power of those photographs (see e.g. de-Andrés et al. 2015; Lenette and Cleland 2016; El-Enany 2016; Lenette and Miskovic 2018; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). In line with the themes explored in Chapter 2, the images of Alan Kurdi mobilized representations and perceptions of deservingness, relatedness, regionality, and implicatedness. Indeed, the image depicted a clear figure of *deservingness*: not only was the subject a child, but he appeared to be sleeping. As Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 125) note, “the sleeping child is [...] the utmost symbol of innocence that childhood stands for.” Moreover, the body of Alan Kurdi appeared undamaged, so that looking at it was “not unbearable at first sight” (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 125; see also de-Andrés et al. 2015, 32). His light skin, his western-like clothes, and his intact shoes all added up to create *relatedness* between him and Western audiences (see de-Andrés et al. 2015, 32; Lenette and Cleland 2016, 78; El-Enany 2016). As argue de-Andrés et al. (2015, 34), “it is a boy who can be

⁷⁰ Along with these decontextualizing trends, Gross (2015, in Berry et al. 2015) finds that German press coverage particularly blamed people smugglers for the April 2015 shipwreck that left more than 800 people dead off the coast of Libya. In doing so, Berry et al. (2015, 9) argue that politicians were absolved from “some of their responsibility for the loss of life.” As will be discussed below, such rhetoric was also identified among political elites. Gross (2015, 223) indeed suggests top-down effects from political elites to the media to explain the prevalence of the Mafia/traffic theme in the German media coverage of the tragedy.

⁷¹ Such findings thus expand the concept of deservingness, which generally focuses on innocence and suffering (see e.g. Ticktin 2017; Holmes and Castaneda 2016). Ideas of economic deservingness also appeared in elite discourses (see Holzberg et al. 2018, 542; Deutsche Welle 2014i; 2015e; Adam 2015, 452), which could suggest top-down influences from political elites to the media.

clearly identified by anybody in the West as ‘one of us.’” Such relatedness was amplified by mentions of his name and background story, which eased a sense of identification with the victim and further dragged “the Syrian exodus out of anonymity” (de-Andrés et al. 2015, 35; see also Lenette and Cleland 2016, 79; Lenette and Miskovic 2018, 117). Lastly, the image is discussed as having conveyed messages of *regionality* and *implicatedness* (see Vollmer and Karakayali 2018; Lenette and Cleland 2016). As argue Lenette and Cleland (2016, 79), the photograph was not taken in what appeared as a “foreign environment,” but rather depicted a child at the doors of Europe whose death “could [have been] prevented through political action” (Lenette and Cleland 2016, 79). According to Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 124-125), the image of Alan Kurdi indeed became “representative of the EU border regime and its practices,” and synonym of “shame, failure, and shared pain.”

Thus, media representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally welcoming as the ‘crisis’ grew in importance in the spring and summer of 2015. The displaced were commonly depicted as deserving of protection while the images of Alan Kurdi further mobilized messages of relatedness, regionality, and implicatedness.

Elite discourses and policies (April 2015 –Sept. 3, 2015)

In May 2015, it was announced by the BAMF that more than 400,000 asylum seekers were expected to arrive by the end of the year (Bundesregierung 2015c). Significant attention was again devoted to the need to disentangle between “those who have good prospects of being granted asylum or protected status in Germany, and those who are likely to have to leave Germany” (Bundeskanzlerin 2015c; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2015d; Bundesregierung 2015e). Such rhetoric was notably used by Merkel (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2015c; 2015d; Bundesregierung 2015e), de Maizièrè (see e.g. Bundesregierung 2015e; Deutsche Welle 2015f; 2015g), and Horst Seehofer (CSU) (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2015h; 2015i; Spiegel 2015c). Asylum seekers from the Balkans were reported as constituting about 40% of the number of asylum applications lodged in Germany in the first six months of 2015, which was, according to de Maizièrè, “unacceptable and an embarrassment for Europe” (in Deutsche Welle 2015f; 2015g). The head of the BAMF, Manfred

Schmidt, hinted that certain decisions needed to be made as “we have to be careful not to jeopardize the entire welcoming culture that we have built” (in Spiegel 2015c).⁷²

In this context, including Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro to the list of safe countries of origin was discussed (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2015f; 2015i). The SPD had blocked such additions until then and notably during the asylum law revisions of 2014 (see Deutsche Welle 2014c; 2015i). Although the SPD remained divided over such changes, prominent voices within the party emerged and advocated for them – including the SPD leader and Economic Minister Gabriel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015d; Deutsche Welle 2015j; 2015k; Spiegel 2015c). The Residence Act was also successfully amended in the summer of 2015 to impose temporary re-entry bans for asylum seekers from safe countries of origin whose initial or follow-up applications had been rejected (see BAMF 2016b; Grote 2018; Deutsche Welle 2015l).

The federal government also frequently called for greater cooperation at the European level, notably through burden-sharing schemes (see e.g. Bundesregierung 2015e; 2015f; 2015g; 2015h). As de Maizière argued, “Europe has to prove itself as a community of solidarity,” in a context where “Germany cannot, on a permanent basis, take on 40 percent of all refugees who arrive in Europe” (Bundeskanzlerin 2015e; Deutsche Welle 2015g). Ministers Gabriel and Steinmeier (SPD) argued that the “unprecedented readiness” by many Germans to accept and assist refugees could not last if the influx was not fairly distributed (Deutsche Welle 2015j). Such rhetoric thus highlights concerns by governing elites over social acceptance.

As suggested above, the spring and summer of 2015 were to witness an accumulation of tragedies and individualized narratives. In April 2015, more than 800 people died while trying to cross the Mediterranean from Libya (UNHCR 2015b). The tragedy rapidly triggered talks at the EU level. As the German federal government spokesperson Steffen Seibert argued, “the fact that incidents like this occur with depressing regularity in the Mediterranean is not worthy of Europe” (in Bundeskanzlerin 2015b). Merkel similarly stressed that “what is at stake is the acceptance of the European Union and its values worldwide” (in Bundesregierung 2015a). Such statements suggest perceptions of implicatedness and regionality. Nonetheless, governing elites mainly converged on the need to address smuggling networks and improve conditions in countries of

⁷² The zero-sum logic of circumscribing the access and stays of the undeserving in order to allocate resources to the most deserving also conveys ideas of limited state capacity. Such concerns over state capacity were to grow more salient as the number of arrivals increased, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

origin (see Bundesregierung 2015a; 2015b; Bundeskanzlerin 2015b). Such perspectives do not portray the displaced as suffering the consequences of actions for which Europe or Germany are perceived as involved in and potentially responsible for, as perceptions of implicatedness would expect.

In July 2015, a discussion between Merkel and Reem Sahwil, a young Palestinian whose family was at risk of being deported, sparked widespread news coverage. Merkel had replied to Reem, who was speaking “fluent German” (Deutsche Welle 2015m; Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 14), that “politics is sometimes hard,” but “we cannot manage [thousands and thousands of asylum seekers coming here]” and “some will have to go back.” As the girl burst into tears, Merkel sought to console her. When prompted about that interaction a month later, Merkel noted that Reem was “very impressively integrated and has learned German and enjoys going to school with us” (Bundesregierung 2015i). Merkel however maintained that her task as Chancellor was also to “pay attention to rules and overall contexts,” and that despite the difficult, protracted situation of Palestinian refugees, their conditions did not necessarily entitle them to asylum (Bundesregierung 2015i). In contrast, “the people who are now fleeing Aleppo” needed immediate assistance, she argued (Bundesregierung 2015i; see also Deutsche Welle 2015m). Again, the Syrian asylum seeker was constructed as the ultimate figure of deservingness.⁷³

On August 26, 2015, seventy-one displaced persons were found dead in an abandoned truck on a highway in Austria (see Deutsche Welle 2015n; Grote 2018, 22). Merkel claimed being “shocked by this horrific news,” stating that “these were people on the way to seek protection and security, instead of which they have died such a tragic death” (Bundesregierung 2015j). She argued that such tragedy was “a warning to us that we must tackle the issue of migration swiftly in line with the European spirit. And that means on the basis of solidarity” (Bundesregierung 2015j). The responsibility for those deaths, however, remained framed as that of “criminal traffickers [who] exploit the desperation of these people” (de Maizièrè, in Bundesregierung 2015j).

⁷³ Holmes and Castaneda (2016, 19) argue that popular accounts of the refugee ‘crisis’ focused on Syrians and other Middle Eastern ‘refugees’ while occulting Africans, “even though many of the latter [were] coming from areas similarly affected by conflict and economic precarity.” According to the authors, “this hierarchy of deservingness reflects arrangements of race that are interpenetrated by US and European political-economic interests” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 19). Such findings would align with the sense of alienness and decontextualization towards ‘African refugees’ that Gibney (1999) and Malkki (1996) deplore (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, the proportion of asylum applications lodged in Germany by Syrian nationals was also persistently higher than that of any other African country throughout the period under study (see BAMF 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2017).

Many observers have argued that the accumulation of tragedies and individualized narratives in the summer of 2015 had a significant impact on Merkel, thus driving her to accept the even larger numbers of asylum seekers that were to arrive from September 4 onwards (see e.g. Time 2015; Bleiker 2018, 19; Hutchison 2018, 306; Helms et al. 2018; Grote 2018, 22).⁷⁴ Such analyses would also align with the welcoming representations and perceptions that Merkel had mobilized to refer to the displaced, as the excerpts above highlight. Journalistic investigations, however, depict a more complex picture of decision-making processes during this period (see Abé et al. 2015; Blume et al. 2016; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d). Abé et al. (2015) indicate that Merkel was “alarmed” when she learned on August 19 that the forecasts for the year 2015 had been revised from 450,000 to 800,000 arrivals (see also Blome et al. 2016a). Abé et al. (2015) indicate that the Chancellor “kn[ew] how fragile the situation [was],” and that although the economy was booming, she was “all too familiar with the often irrational fears harbored by Germans.” On August 15, 2015, de Maizière indicated that he would need to “prepare the German public to the fact that the number [of asylum seekers] will be significantly higher than we had previously predicted” (in Bundeskanzlerin 2015f; see also in Alkousaa et al. 2016). These findings suggest clear concerns by governing elites over social acceptance in a context of increased arrivals.

Significant confusion was also triggered by a tweet posted by the BAMF on August 25, 2015, which indicated that “by and large, we are not actually pursuing the Dublin procedure in relation to Syrian nationals” (in Grote 2018, 22). In fact, these guidelines were initially issued on August 21 as an internal memo that was “never meant to go public” but was rather intended to provide “some bureaucratic relief” to an agency that was already overstretched (Abé et al. 2015; see also Blume et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016b). The memo was then leaked to the media, thus generating an “increasing number of queries,” through which the BAMF finally responded by sending that post (Blume et al. 2016). According to media investigations, no official in the German Interior Ministry was familiar with the tweet (see Blume et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016b). De Maizière insisted that it was “not a legally binding act, so to speak – no requirement, no suspension of Dublin – it’s much more a guideline for administrators” (in Abé et al. 2015). Merkel argued that

⁷⁴ The images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child pictured dead on Turkish shores on September 2, 2015 after trying to reach Europe, have similarly been described as the trigger for Merkel’s welcoming stance (see e.g. Bleiker 2018, 19; Hutchison 2018, 306).

the post triggered “a certain amount of confusion,” and led to the misunderstanding that “only to Germany could all Syrians come” (Bundesregierung 2015i; Alkousaa et al. 2016).⁷⁵ She rather insisted that the Dublin system remained the “legal basis [...] which is valid today” (Bundesregierung 2015i). Official press releases published during the same period similarly recalled that “Dublin III still applies [...] to all EU member states” (see Bundesregierung 2015l; 2015m).⁷⁶ Such confusion among the ‘subsystems of the executive’ suggests an inconsistent policy line and thus recalls Robinson’s (2000) concept of *policy uncertainty*. It does not indicate, however, an intention by Merkel to ‘open the gates,’ as it was subsequently reported in the international press (see Abé et al. 2015).

Merkel’s summer press conference on August 31, 2015 was not significantly different from the discourses she had earlier either. In line with her 2014-2015 New Year’s speech, the Chancellor firmly constructed the displaced as deserving refugees who often had “to overcome situations or endure fears that would probably just make us collapse” (in Bundesregierung 2015i).⁷⁷ She also insisted on the need to tackle the root causes of the refugee situation, notably by seeking to resolve the conflicts from which the displaced were fleeing (Bundesregierung 2015i). As she argued, such conflicts “take place on our doorstep, and when we do not solve them, [then] we have to solve them by taking in refugees; this truth is manifesting more and more” (Bundesregierung 2015i). Such rhetoric recalls Gibney’s (1999) concept of regionality, for whom perceived proximity triggers a range of economic, social, and political interests.

Merkel also recalled how the right to asylum was enshrined in the German Constitution, and how “we should be proud of the humanitarian principles” it contained (Bundesregierung 2015i; 2015k). Merkel similarly depicted the German nation as prosperous, arguing that “our freedom, our rule of law, our economic strength, the order in which we live together – that’s what people dream of, who have come to know persecution, war, arbitrariness in their lives. The world

⁷⁵ According to several observers, the BAMF tweet “spread like wildfire among the many refugees travelling along the Balkan route” (Grote 2018, 22), where it was interpreted as an “open invitation” (Blume et al. 2016; see also Bundesregierung 2015i; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Blume et al. 2016b).

⁷⁶ On August 31, 2015, Hungarian authorities allowed more than 3,000 displaced people to take trains towards Austria and Germany, resulting in a record number of daily arrivals to Bavaria and particularly Munich (see Deutsche Welle 2015o; 2015p; Alkousaa et al. 2016). In that context, federal government spokesperson Steffen Seibert insisted that Hungary had “the legally binding obligation [to] properly register the refugees, to provide for them and to carry out asylum proceedings [...] in accordance with European standards” (in Blume et al. 2016).

⁷⁷ Merkel also reasserted the usual demarcation between deserving, war-fleeing refugees and those – primarily from the Western Balkans – who were unlikely to be granted a right to stay and whose repatriations had to be expedited (Bundesregierung 2015i; 2015k).

looks up to Germany as a land of hope and opportunity, and that was not always the case” (Bundesregierung 2015i; Deutsche Welle 2015q). The last sentence is particularly interesting as it implicitly contrasts Germany’s now virtuous reputation to its Nazi past. Merkel also enumerated several challenges the country had faced in its recent history, including its reunification. As such, she introduced the refugee situation as a new challenge to be dealt with, thus exclaiming in that context that “we have already achieved so much – we can do it!” (Bundesregierung 2015i; 2015k). ‘We can do it,’ or ‘*wir schaffen das*,’ was to become Merkel’s famous motto in the weeks to follow (see e.g. Blume et al. 2016; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Deutsche Welle 2015v).⁷⁸

Merkel again called for European solidarity in responding to the refugee situation. She highlighted that “universal civil rights have so far been closely linked to Europe and its history,” and that such rights were “one of the founding impulses of the European Union” (Bundesregierung 2015i; 2015k). As such, argued the Chancellor, “if Europe fails on the question of refugees, [...] it will not be the Europe we wished for, not the Europe that as a founding myth we must continue to develop today” (Bundesregierung 2015i; Deutsche Welle 2015q). Merkel thus not only grounded her rhetoric in ideas of a prosperous, courageous German nation, but also in those of a moral, law-abiding European community.

Elite representations and perceptions of the displaced in the spring and summer of 2015 therefore remained relatively welcoming towards the displaced, although narratives of deservingness, again, did not apply to all asylum seekers. Merkel particularly drew upon notions of suffering and death to highlight the deservingness of the displaced. She connected the plight of the displaced to the courage and virtue of the German nation and to the founding myths of the European Union. The Chancellor also highlighted the regionality of the refugee situation to mobilize action. Nonetheless, her discourses do not indicate an intention to actively trigger arrivals.⁷⁹ Governing elites rather remained wary of the number of asylum seekers to come. Elite

⁷⁸ Linguists note that ‘*wir schaffen das*’ does not quite convey the same degree of enthusiasm as the ‘we can do it’ English translation (see Politico 2016). As can be perceived from the context, Merkel’s ‘*wir schaffen das*’ implied that “we will manage [the situation], because we have no other choice” (in Politico 2016).

⁷⁹ As Betts and Collier (2017, 85) argue, “the offer of asylum did not come with any means of reaching Germany [...]; it amounted to ‘*Wir schaffen das*... provided you can swim’. Had Germany’s objective been to provide safe passage, it would surely have also provided humanitarian visas to allow people to fly directly from Bodrum to Frankfurt, rather than risking their lives on rickety boats.” Nonetheless, responding relatively passively to the entrance of asylum seekers should be understood as a significant decision in and of itself in a context where more aggressive border controls could have been enacted, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

discourses and decision-making processes suggest that such relative wariness was marked by concerns over social acceptance.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to trace the emergence and growth of the refugee ‘crisis’ in the years, months, and weeks preceding its height in the fall of 2015. The historical context showed that the right to asylum represents a special duty in light of Germany’s history. Such a right was nevertheless significantly restricted in the nineties, and is bounded by the expectation that refugees eventually return to their countries of origin. In the broader area of immigration, the country evolved from an ‘ethnic nation’ to more expansionist and inclusive understandings of its relationship to newcomers. Nevertheless, xenophobia towards certain groups of immigrants and negative media coverage of immigration remained salient throughout the 2000s (see e.g. Adam 2015; Abali 2009; Zambonini 2009; Bozdag 2014).

As the refugee issue grew in salience from 2011 onwards, findings indicate that welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced dominated across all three sets of actors. Public attitudes towards the displaced remained generally positive, although a relative erosion can be perceived as the ‘crisis’ grew in importance in the spring and summer of 2015. German press coverage in the year and months preceding the ‘crisis’ commonly depicted the displaced as deserving of protection (Berry et al. 2015; Vollmer and Karakayali 2015). Asylum seekers were, however, often decontextualized as the media rarely mentioned names and the personal stories of the displaced, let alone the reasons behind their displacement (Holzberg et al. 2018). Such perspectives run counter to perceptions of implicatedness, as the political connections linking Europeans to the displaced are then obscured. The death of Alan Kurdi on September 2, 2015, and the massive international coverage that his images sparked, provided a strong individualized narrative on which to build. As iconographical and iconological studies have showed, the images of Alan Kurdi further mobilized messages of relatedness, regionality, and implicatedness. Therefore, in early September 2015, public attitudes and dominant media representations and perceptions of ‘refugees’ are likely to have formed a momentum strongly geared towards openness.

Discursive and policy developments among political elites in the years and months preceding the ‘crisis’ likewise indicate a relative consensus about the need to welcome war-fleeing

refugees. Political attention was rather focused on limiting the arrivals and stays of those deemed undeserving of protection. In this context, asylum seekers from the Balkans were often designated as figures of undeservingness, while those from Syria were generally elevated as the ultimate symbols of deservingness. Merkel, most notably, frequently highlighted the suffering and death that had punctuated their journeys. She also connected the plight of the displaced to the courage and virtue of the German nation and to the founding myths of the European Union. The Chancellor linked the stories of the displaced with Germany's very own historical reminiscences, so as to mobilize perceptions of relatedness between the hosts and the displaced. She also highlighted the regionality of the refugee situation to mobilize action. The responsibility for the deaths in the Mediterranean, however, remained framed as that of smugglers. Such framings run counter to perceptions of implicatedness.

Elite discourses and decision-making processes, however, do not indicate an active will to trigger arrivals. The waiving of the Dublin procedure for Syrian nationals and the confusion that followed thus suggests policy uncertainty in a context of increased arrivals and bureaucratic overstretch. Elite discourses and decision-making processes rather indicate that governing elites remained wary of the number of asylum seekers to come, and that such relative wariness was marked by concerns over social acceptance. These considerations suggest potential for real or perceived negative societal representations and perceptions of the displaced to affect the political calculus of policy-makers towards renewed restrictionism.

These findings thus set the stage for the fall of 2015, which was to witness an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany.

Chapter 5 – A ‘September fairy tale’? Inside Germany’s movement of openness

In the fall of 2015, the number of displaced persons reaching Germany again substantially increased (Grote 2018, 16; see Figures 2 and 3). The numbers grew from 104,460 registered arrivals in August 2015 to 163,772 in September 2015 (Grote 2018, 16).⁸⁰ Monthly arrivals were to reach their peak in November 2015 with a total of 206,101 registered arrivals (Grote 2018, 16). Although the numbers slightly decreased in December 2015 to 127,320 registered arrivals, such influx remained unprecedented in contrast to earlier months and years (Grote 2018, 16; BAMF 2018).⁸¹ About a million asylum seekers would enter Germany by the end of the year 2015, thus surpassing the 800,000 arrivals that were forecast in August 2015 (Grote 2018, 15-16).

This chapter traces developments from September 4, 2015 to December 2015 as the country received an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers. The first section presents public representations and perceptions over this period. The second section focuses on media representations and perceptions. The third section covers elite discourses and policy processes, which accelerated over the fall of 2015 along with the number of arrivals. These developments are divided into two subsections. The first pertains to the pace of arrivals and responses within this context; the second focuses on delineating the deserving from the undeserving among the influx.

Results indicate that representations and perceptions of the displaced remained predominantly welcoming across the public, the media and elites during the fall of 2015, although they were not left unchallenged. Process-tracing evidence shows that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during this period. The agency of the displaced and regional interests and constraints are likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel’s welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. Findings suggest that societal representations and perceptions

⁸⁰ As discussed above, the BAMF tweet waiving the Dublin procedure for Syrian nationals is identified by several observers as having triggered arrivals to Germany (see Grote 2018; Blume et al. 2016; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016b). The decision by Angela Merkel on September 4, 2015 to receive displaced persons stranded in Hungary, as discussed below, is likewise described as having had a pull effect on several populations (see Betts and Collier 2017, 85-87; Blume et al. 2016). As the process-tracing above indicates, however, such migratory trends well preceded the BAMF or Merkel’s decisions in late August and early September 2015.

⁸¹ The relative decrease in the number of arrivals both to Greece (from November 2015 onwards) and Germany (from December 2015 onwards) may be associated with deteriorating weather conditions (Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8), obstructions on the Balkan route (Betts and Collier 2017, 241; Triandafyllidou 2017, 9), and Turkish mobility controls following the first EU-Turkey Action Plan in the fall of 2015 (Betts and Collier 2017, 241). Nonetheless, the influx would not significantly decrease and stabilize until March 2016 (see Grote 2018; Figures 2 and 3).

constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may likewise have impacted Merkel's discourses and policy decisions. The pace of arrivals also provided opportunities for public and media actors to demonstrate their support towards the displaced.

Public representations and perceptions (Sept. 4, 2015 – Dec. 2015)

Public opinion polls conducted in early September 2015 suggest significant public support towards the displaced. The decision by Merkel on September 4, 2015 to receive several thousand displaced persons stranded in Hungary was indeed backed by 66% of German citizens (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015e). Likewise, 62% of respondents considered that Germany could “cope” with the number of arrivals (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015e). While the share of respondents considering that Germany should take in “more” refugees decreased between late July and mid-September 2015, the proportion of people approving of current arrivals increased over the same period (Infratest Dimap 2015d). As a result, the overall approval rate remained quite constant, evolving from 57% in July 2015 to 56% by mid-September 2015 (Infratest Dimap 2015d). Such figures suggest significant sympathy towards the displaced in a context where the pace of arrivals to the country accelerated over the same period.

According to Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 120), “one can hardly overestimate the general euphoria that captured large parts of the civil society for a few months, when numerous organizations (the press, companies, trade unions, associations, schools and universities, and so forth) joined in efforts to ‘welcome’ the refugees” (see also Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 19; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Blume et al. 2016). By November 2015, it is estimated that a significant share of the population had made in-kind (37%) or cash (17%) donations; had been involved in the distribution of clothes and food (16%); and had provided support to a local refugee center (11%) (in Ahrens 2017, 41).⁸² According to Ahrens (2017, 7), such figures represented an “impressive engagement of the population.” Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 128) argue that the accumulation of deserving representations of ‘refugees’ in August and September 2015, combined with a feeling of national pride, might have “mobilized a population that was hitherto not active in

⁸² In 2017, a study commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth Affairs (BMFSFJ) would indicate that about 55% of the population had been involved in supporting refugees since 2015, either through donations or other types of engagement (BMFSFJ 2017; 2018). About 19% of the population was still involved in 2017 (BMFSFJ 2017; 2018). Among those still involved, 39% would have become mobilized in response to media reports (BMFSFJ 2017, 27). Such findings would suggest top-down effects from the media to the public.

terms of refugee support” (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 128). In fact, about 12% of the population had never been involved or donated money for any type of cause before the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 (BMFSFJ 2017, 11-13).⁸³

Despite the strength of public mobilization in favor of ‘refugees’ during the fall of 2015, anti-refugee demonstrations and violence against asylum seekers also grew over the same period. While the number of anti-refugee protests remained relatively similar to the figures of 2014 (Amnesty International 2016, 42), such protests also spread to more cities (Rietig and Müller 2016). By the end of the year 2015, violent attacks against asylum seekers had increased four to five times the levels of 2014 (Amnesty International 2016, 8-9). Support for the far-right party AfD also steadily increased over the fall 2015, evolving from 3.5% of voting intentions in August 2015 to 8% in December 2015 (IfD Allensbach 2019).⁸⁴

Dissatisfaction also grew stronger across the broader society over the fall of 2015. While 62% of respondents agreed in September 2015 that the country could handle the number of arrivals, they were 51% to believe so by December 2015 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015e; 2015f).⁸⁵ Likewise, support for the CDU/CSU slightly declined, evolving from 41.5% in August 2015 to 38% in December 2015 (IfD Allensbach 2019).⁸⁶ Such evolution is again in line with the insights of the public opinion literature, which expects perceptions of threat to grow and support to wither as the perceived size of the group increases (see Esses et al. 2017). Nonetheless, I would argue that such figures still demonstrated significant support towards the displaced and relative optimism regarding the capacity of Germany to rise to the challenge in a context where approximately a million asylum seekers would have entered the country by the end of the year.

Thus, public representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally welcoming throughout the fall of 2015, despite signs of erosion as the number of arrivals increased.

⁸³ Note, however, that available data do not allow to track the evolution of public mobilization within the year 2015, namely *before* or *after* early September 2015.

⁸⁴ While internal disputes had left the AfD weakened in the summer of 2015, several observers argue that the party grew more populist and further moved to the right in response to the refugee situation (see Spiegel 2015g; Jäckle and König 2017; Rietig and Müller 2016). The AfD notably suggested to use firearms to prevent the displaced from entering Germany (see Spiegel 2015g; Jäckle and König 2017; Rietig and Müller 2016). The rise of the AfD is a particularly significant development to consider, as the party emerged as a new political force on the right of the governing CDU/CSU (see Deutsche Welle 2015ii; Spiegel 2015f; 2015g).

⁸⁵ Public opinion trends were not significantly affected by the Paris attacks in November 2015 (see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2015g; 2015h; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 129).

⁸⁶ Voting intentions for the SPD remained relatively stable over the same period (see IfD Allensbach 2019).

The pace of arrivals also provided opportunities for members of civil society to demonstrate their support towards the displaced, although it also nourished anti-refugee protests, violence against asylum seekers, and support for the far-right.

Media representations and perceptions (Sept. 4, 2015 – Dec. 2015)

According to Vollmer and Karakayali's analysis of German media coverage, the accumulation of deserving representations of 'refugees' in the days and weeks preceding the arrivals from Hungary in early September 2015 seemed to "prepar[e] the ground for what has been called the 'September fairy tale' in Germany" (2018, 126-127). The authors indeed argue that images of hospitality and generosity "dominated the discursive landscape" during this period (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 127; see also Winter et al. 2018, 24; 29). German citizens were seen volunteering and warmly welcoming the displaced at train stations with cheers and gifts (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 127; see also Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 19; Adam 2015, 462; Abé et al. 2015; Alkousaa et al. 2016). According to Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 127), encounters with refugee children "came to represent the philanthropic relationship" between the German host society and the displaced. Media outlets thus overwhelmingly captured the enthusiasm found within civil society. Such images and discourses represented both the displaced as *deserving* of protection and the German nation as *virtuous* for providing that aid.

Media outlets not only echoed public enthusiasm but also actively participated in the production of such welcoming attitudes. In early September 2015, *Bild* notably published a special issue in Arabic in its Berlin edition, whose front page read "Welcome [to you all] in Berlin" (BZ 2015, in Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). Several newspapers also published headlines that reasserted the virtue of the German nation (see Blume et al. 2016; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). On September 6, the front page of the tabloid *Bild* indicated, "You can come to us – Merkel ends the Budapest disgrace" (in Blume et al. 2016). Three days later, the conservative newspaper *Die Welt* would claim, "The world is praising Germany: heart-warming!" Winter et al. (2018, 29) similarly capture a feeling of national redemption in the press coverage of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* over the fall of 2015.

According to Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 128), the conventional press – and particularly *Bild* as a widely read tabloid – played a significant role in creating the welcoming atmosphere observed in early September. As the authors argue, "for a remarkably long period of

time, media outlets such as the newspapers of the Springer Press⁸⁷ have covered the whole process in a language supportive of the cause of refugees and hostile toward right-wing populist movements such as PEGIDA” (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 120). In contrast, “up to a certain point in time, even the powerful topic of numbers or, as Vollmer (2014) argued the ‘Malthusian paranoia’ – that is, the fear of ‘overpopulation’ – did not gain momentum” (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 120). Although the attacks in Paris in November 2015 created a first breach in that discourse, Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 129) note that the events had “only moderate implications,” with several outlets insisting on the need not to compare “terrorists with refugees” (see also Holzberg et al. 2018).⁸⁸ Holzberg et al. (2018, 539) nonetheless perceive a spike in the coverage of negative consequences of refugee flows in the aftermath of the attacks.

Thus, media representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally welcoming towards the displaced during the fall of 2015, and particularly connected the plight of the displaced to the virtue of the German nation. The pace of arrivals also provided opportunities for media actors to demonstrate their support and strengthen the movement of sympathy.

Elite discourses and policies (Sept. 4, 2015 – Dec. 2015)

Along with the number of arrivals, elite discourses and policy processes accelerated during the fall of 2015. These developments will be divided into two subsections. The first pertains to the pace of arrivals and responses within this context; the second focuses on delineating the deserving from the undeserving among the influx. Results indicate that elite representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally welcoming during this period, although narratives of deservingness did not apply to all displaced groups. The perceived deservingness of Syrian asylum seekers also showed signs of erosion. The main point of contention among political elites did not specifically concern the representations and perceptions of the displaced, but rather pertained to the capacity of the country to face the influx and whether or not an upper limit to the number of arrivals should be established. Process-tracing evidence shows that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during this

⁸⁷ The Springer Press refers to the Axel Springer publishing company that notably owns *Bild* (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 134).

⁸⁸ According to Holzberg et al.’s (2018, 543) discourse and content analysis of German press coverage in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, the displaced were framed as either “extremist[s] in disguise” or as “victims of exactly such terror.”

period. The agency of the displaced and regional considerations are likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel's welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. Findings suggest that societal representations and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may likewise have impacted Merkel's discourses and policy decisions.

Responding to arrivals

The decision by Merkel on September 4, 2015 to receive several thousand displaced persons stranded in Hungary is described by many observers as a turning point in the 'crisis,' considering the many more asylum seekers who would come to the country from then on (see e.g. Betts and Collier 2017, 85-87, Blume et al. 2016). At that point in time, more than 2,000 displaced persons had been stranded in the Keleti railway station in Budapest for several days, waiting for a train to Germany (see Blume et al. 2016; Deutsche Welle 2015r; 2015s). On Friday, September 4, more than 2,000 displaced persons decided to make the journey towards Austria on foot (see Blume et al. 2016). On that evening, the Hungarian government unilaterally decided to dispatch displaced groups by bus from the Keleti railway station and the M1 Highway to the Austrian border (see Blume et al. 2016; Alkousaa et al. 2016).⁸⁹ According to Blume et al. (2016), Merkel was "certain" that force would be necessary to stop the displaced from crossing the borders, thus triggering a "humanitarian catastrophe." The journalists report that Merkel was "extremely wary of such images and of their political impact, and she [was] convinced that Germany wouldn't tolerate them" (in Blume et al. 2016; see also Abé et al. 2015; Blome et al. 2016c). Shortly after midnight, a joint statement between Berlin, Budapest and Vienna was issued, which indicated that the displaced traveling through Hungary would be allowed to continue their journeys to Austria and Germany (in Blume et al. 2016).⁹⁰ Such arrangement – which *de facto* waived the Dublin procedure

⁸⁹ The number of displaced persons that was to be expected by Austria (and Germany) was unclear, with forecasts ranging from 1,000 to 8,000 people (see Blume et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016c). Ultimately, 6,780 displaced persons arrived at Munich's Central Station on September 5th, some of whom were not associated with the bus arrangements but rather arrived by their own means (see Blume et al. 2016). On the next day, approximately 11,000 displaced persons arrived at Munich's Central Station (Blume et al. 2016).

⁹⁰ Additional buses were made available at the Austrian-Hungarian border and took displaced groups to the Westbahnhof station in Vienna, where they could embark on trains to Germany (see Blume et al. 2016). Most of those crossing the Hungarian-Austrian border over that weekend did not claim asylum in Austria but rather continued onward to Germany (see Blume et al. 2016).

– was, according to media investigations, understood by Merkel to remain an exception (see Blume et al. 2016). This perspective was also conveyed in government press releases and statements in the following days (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2015h; Blume et al. 2016).

Such findings thus qualify the commonly held idea that Merkel ‘opened the doors’ of Germany out of conviction and compassion for the displaced (see e.g. Time 2015; Mushaben 2017a; Helms et al. 2018). As Blume et al. (2016) highlight, “Merkel had to make the [September 4th] decision under considerable pressure, within barely three hours, after [Hungarian Prime Minister] Viktor Orban succeeded in creating a situation for which there was practically no alternative.” The agency of the displaced and of Hungarian counterparts thus significantly qualify the role of elite compassion on policy-making. In this context, societal representations and perceptions of the displaced constituted yet another constraint towards openness. The welcoming societal representations and perceptions of the displaced that were (re)produced in the months, weeks and days that preceded the height of the ‘crisis’ in the fall of 2015 are also likely to have *facilitated* policy-making in an otherwise highly constrained environment.

Nonetheless, responding relatively passively to the entrance of asylum seekers should be understood as a significant decision in and of itself in a context where more aggressive border controls could have been reenacted. Although media investigations report that such option was considered in the days and weeks that followed September 4 (see Blume et al. 2016; Blome et al. 2016d; Abé et al. 2015), only moderate controls were reintroduced.⁹¹ According to Alkousaa et al. (2016), the decision not to impose stricter border controls was motivated by similar concerns to those of September 4th: German authorities would not have been able to entirely close the border without force, and “the Chancellery and [...] de Maizièrre” considered that “no one would have been able to bear images like that” (see also Blome et al. 2016d). Moreover, as will be further discussed below, Merkel persistently demanded a so-called European solution to the ‘crisis,’ and deemed the closure of Germany’s borders as harmful and counter-productive to those ends.⁹²

⁹¹ Internal border controls were reenacted at the Austrian border from September 13 onwards, although “nobody expressing a request for asylum was turned away” (Grote 2018, 23). Further controls were enacted on October 30th as “refugee transfers” between Austria and Germany became limited to five border crossing points and the influx constrained to “50 refugees” per hour at each of those points (Grote 2018, 23). However, Grote (2018, 23) indicates that “the actual number of refugees admitted through the border crossing points in the weeks that followed was much higher,” and indeed coincided with the highest peak in the number of arrivals in November 2015.

⁹² According to “one top German politician,” Merkel’s “mistake” was precisely her “constant focus on a common European solution to the refugee issue, because it had already become clear, long before the Hungary decision, that her European counterparts weren’t interested” (in Blume et al. 2016). Niemann and Zaun (2017) indeed speak of

Media investigations also report that de Maizière inquired about whether turning back displaced people at the border would be ‘legally possible’ (see Spiegel 2015e; Alkousaa et al. 2016). A joint report from the Interior and Justice ministries would conclude that such measures were permissible (Alkousaa et al. 2016), potentially as Germany’s neighbours were considered safe third countries (Blome et al. 2016d). Such findings suggest that international norms – foremost that of non-refoulement – did not significantly shape the sequence of events.

The agency of the displaced, regional interests and constraints, and societal representations and perceptions are therefore likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel’s welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. Several elements of continuity can indeed be perceived in Merkel’s discourses over the fall of 2015. Drawing again upon the themes of deservingness and suffering, the Chancellor asserted that “the horrific images of dead children and the dreadful fate of so many people must make it clear where our responsibility lies” (Bundeskanzlerin 2015i). She argued that Germany had a “moral and political” duty to provide help and support to “the world’s most desperate and vulnerable people” (Deutsche Welle 2015v). Likewise, Merkel drew upon ideas of a German national identity to support her decisions. Following the arrivals from Hungary in early September 2015 and the criticism that followed, she stated, “if we now start to apologize for showing a friendly face in emergency situations, then this is no longer my country” (Deutsche Welle 2015t; Alkousaa et al. 2016; Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 14).⁹³ The Chancellor also noted being pleased that Germany “has become a country with whom people outside Germany associate with hope” (Deutsche Welle 2015u; see also Blome et al. 2016d; Abé et al. 2015). As she argued, “that is something very valuable when one looks back at our history” (Deutsche Welle 2015u). Merkel reasserted that Germany could “manage this,” as it was “part of our country’s identity to achieve great things” (Deutsche Welle 2015v). Merkel’s discourses thus constructed Germany as a virtuous, courageous, and redeemed nation for providing assistance to the displaced.

Merkel reasserted the regionality of the refugee situation on several occasions (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015i; Bundesregierung 2015n). As she argued, conflicts in Syria and Iraq “are

‘persistent dysfunctionalities’ and ‘systemic deficiencies’ to describe the management of the refugee ‘crisis’ by European actors in 2015 (see also Trauner 2016; Thielemann 2018; Zaun 2018).

⁹³ The ‘Hungarian decision’ was mostly criticized by CDU’s sister party, the CSU, and its leader Horst Seehofer (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2015x; 2015y; Blome et al. 2016c; Blume et al. 2016). According to Seehofer, the decision to welcome asylum seekers stranded in Hungary was to trigger “an emergency situation that we will no longer be able to control” (Spiegel 2015d).

happening on Europe's doorstep, and they affect us directly" (Bundeskanzlerin 2015i). Addressing the European Parliament in October 2015, she similarly argued, "in these past few months in particular, we in Europe have seen how closely connected we are to these global events, directly, whether we like it or not. We can no longer shut ourselves off from what is happening in the world" (Bundesregierung 2015n). Doing "something in our neighbourhood to overcome the many crises that are happening on our doorstep" was the only way to "successfully protect our external borders," she claimed (Bundesregierung 2015n). In her speech to the European Parliament, Merkel also used the language of relatedness to instill mobilization. As she argued, "the reasons why people leave their homelands are all too familiar to us from our own European history. For centuries, our continent was not the destination, but first and foremost the starting point for refugees, displaced persons and migrants" (Bundesregierung 2015n). In contrast, she continued, "today Europe is a region on which many people from all over the world pin their hopes and aspirations – a region that people dream of, in the way that, 25 years ago, I and millions of others in Central and Eastern Europe dreamed of a free and united Germany and Europe" (Bundesregierung 2015n).

The main point of contention among political elites was not directly over representations and perceptions of the displaced, although concerns over security did emerge.⁹⁴ It rather pertained to the capacity of the country to face the influx and whether or not an upper limit to the number of arrivals should be established. Merkel systematically refused to set such limit. The CSU and its leader Horst Seehofer, present in Bavaria where most asylum seekers were arriving, constituted the most vocal domestic opponents to Merkel's course of action.⁹⁵ They considered the number of arrivals to exceed state capacity and advocated throughout the fall for stronger border controls and caps to the numbers of arrivals (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2015bb; 2015cc; 2015dd; 2015ee; 2015ff; 2015gg; Blome et al. 2016d).⁹⁶ Seehofer further argued that Merkel's policy fueled support for the AfD, which indeed became a new political force on the right of the CDU/CSU during the fall of

⁹⁴ In reaction to the Paris attacks in November 2015, Bavarian Finance Minister Markus Söder most notoriously claimed, "the time of uncontrolled immigration and illegal immigration can not [sic] go on. Paris has changed everything" (Deutsche Welle 2015xx; see also Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 18). On the other hand, several governing elites construed the displaced as *victims* of such terror (see Deutsche Welle 2015xx; 2015yy; Bundeskanzlerin 2015u). Concerns over security were also raised by the CSU and by President Gauck in the months that preceded the Paris attacks (see Deutsche Welle. 2015bb; 2015pp).

⁹⁵ Seehofer was also the Premier of Bavaria.

⁹⁶ Similar concerns over capacity were voiced by other regional and municipal actors throughout the fall as well as by President Gauck (see Spiegel 2015d; Deutsche Welle 2015nn; 2015oo; 2015pp).

2015 (see Deutsche Welle 2015ff; 2015hh; 2015ii). Discontent also grew within Merkel's own party, the CDU (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2015jj; 2015kk; 2015ll; 2015mm; 2015nn; 2015v; Spiegel 2015e; 2015f). Journalists reported fierce debates within private parliamentary meetings while the party's conferences focused on the possibility of setting caps to the number of arrivals.⁹⁷

According to Merkel, Germany could not "unilaterally" set ceilings on the number of asylum seekers the country was willing to accept (Bundeskanzlerin 2015p; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2015i; Deutsche Welle 2015z). As she argued, "simply sealing off our [internal] borders will not solve the problem" (Bundeskanzlerin 2015q; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2015o; 2015r; Bundesregierung 2015u). Merkel rather reasserted the need for a European solution to the 'crisis,' particularly through the establishment of a permanent allocation mechanism (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2015i; 2015m; 2015n; 2015o; Bundesregierung 2015t). To those pragmatic arguments, Merkel also added normative concerns. As she argued, "every human is entitled to the right of asylum and protection against civil war and persecution" (Deutsche Welle 2015kk). The Chancellor also asserted that the refugee response had to be guided by Europe's values of human dignity, rule of law, tolerance, respect for minorities and solidarity (Bundesregierung 2015n; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2015h). Doing otherwise would be "abandoning our values and thereby losing our identity," Merkel insisted (Bundesregierung 2015n; see also Deutsche Welle 2015aa). As such, Merkel remained relatively constant in her discourses and policy positions throughout the fall, despite significant dissension across political elites and within her own party. Such developments indicate that elite pressures had a limited impact on the sequence of events.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, in November 2015, the CDU/CSU agreed on a 'Berlin Declaration' (see Deutsche Welle 2015oo). While stopping short of mentioning an upper limit to the number of arrivals, the Declaration noted that "immigration is to be limited to a degree that does not exceed social acceptance and that also safeguards the long-term integration capabilities of this country" (Deutsche Welle 2015oo). Concerns over social acceptance are here made explicit.

Although Merkel refused to set an upper limit to the number of asylum seekers entering Germany, she sought to do so indirectly. The Chancellor indeed frequently insisted on the need to "secure the EU's external borders" (Bundeskanzlerin 2015n; 2015o; 2015p; 2015r;

⁹⁷ The SPD, in contrast, remained relatively aligned with Merkel's approach throughout the fall of 2015 (see e.g. Spiegel 2015h; 2015i; Deutsche Welle 2015dd; 2015qq).

⁹⁸ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that elite dissension influenced the decision to restrict family reunification for individuals granted subsidiary protection, as will be discussed below.

Bundesregierung 2015n). A major component of such objective was to enhance cooperation with Turkey in order to decrease the number of arrivals on Greek shores.⁹⁹ Talks were held throughout the fall and led to the conclusion of the Joint EU-Turkey Action Plan in November 2015, through which Ankara was to curtail border crossings to Europe and improve the conditions and prospects of refugees living in Turkey (Bundeskanzlerin 2015s; see also Grote 2018, 24). In return, the EU was to provide three billion euros in assistance to Turkey; commit to swifter negotiations on the country's accession to the EU; and make progress on visa liberalization for Turkish citizens (Bundeskanzlerin 2015s). Such efforts towards external solutions further highlight Merkel's prevalent concern not to close Germany's borders simply to redirect asylum seekers to other European countries.¹⁰⁰

Merkel's 2015-2016 New Year's address is in many ways a continuity of her previous discourses. She recalled her New Year's speech from the year before, thus repeating that "many of these refugees are literally fleeing death," and that "it goes without saying that we will help them, and that we will take in people who seek refuge here" (Bundeskanzlerin 2015t). As in her August 2015 speech, Merkel recalled the many challenges the German nation had faced and overcome, including its reunification. Despite such calls to solidarity, Merkel also enumerated the efforts her government devoted to 'protecting' European external borders and addressing root causes of migration so as to "noticeably reduce the number of refugees – sustainably and permanently" (Bundeskanzlerin 2015t).

Delineating deservingness

As with earlier periods, significant political attention was paid to delineating deservingness among asylum seekers. In October 2015, Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro were successfully added to the list of safe countries of origin (see Grote 2018). Again, the central argument was that circumscribing the access and stay of these country nationals was needed *in order to* provide resources to the deserving (see Bundesregierung 2015n; 2015p; 2015q; Bundeskanzlerin 2015i;

⁹⁹ Another component was to establish 'hotspots' in Greece and Italy where the displaced could be registered and from there either be returned or distributed across the EU (Bundeskanzlerin 2015j; 2015n; see also Niemann and Zaun 2017).

¹⁰⁰ According to several authors, the relative inability of EU member states to engage in internal responsibility-sharing further fed efforts towards the externalization of the refugee flows (see e.g. Niemann and Zaun 2017; Betts and Collier 2017, 90-91).

2015j). As de Maizière summed up, “we can only afford protection to those who are entitled to it, and support them, if those who are not entitled to protection either do not come in the first place, or are rapidly returned to their home countries” (Bundeskanzlerin 2015j).¹⁰¹ Afghans also became associated with this rhetoric. According to de Maizière, the fact that Afghanistan was the second most frequent country of origin of the displaced was “unacceptable” (Bundesregierung 2015s). The Interior Minister indeed depicted most displaced Afghans as “middle class families [who] ought to stay in their country and help rebuild it” (Bundesregierung 2015s; see also Deutsche Welle 2015w).

Although efforts to limit the access and stays of those deemed undeserving of protection were prevalent in earlier periods as well, more striking is the emergence in the fall of 2015 of the intent by governing elites to suspend family reunification for those granted subsidiary protection (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015k).¹⁰² According to Grote (2018, 57), such measure became “a lever for limiting further migration” in a context where “some media [had] published figures on the alleged number of asylum seekers who could potentially come to Germany for family reunification purposes.” Deutsche Welle seems to first report on this possibility in November 2015 as part of a compromise between the CDU and the CSU (see Deutsche Welle 2015rr; 2015qq).¹⁰³ Such considerations suggest an effect of elite dissension on policy-making. As subsidiary protection may be granted to individuals fleeing war – including Syrians –, these developments are particularly significant as they targeted a category of people that were generally perceived as deserving of protection.

¹⁰¹ Following changes to asylum law in October 2015, asylum seekers from safe countries of origin were also to remain at initial reception facilities until the end of their asylum procedure (see Grote 2018). Additionally, their deportation was to be eased with the establishment of ‘special reception centres,’ where applicants with little prospect to remain were to be housed and their applications swiftly processed (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015k; Bundesregierung 2015r; Grote 2018). In October 2015, priority was also shifted back from cash to in-kind benefits for asylum seekers staying at initial reception facilities (see Bundeskanzlerin 2015h; Bundeskanzlerin 2015l; Grote 2018). Merkel asserted that the aim of such change was to “eradicate unintended incentives” (Bundeskanzlerin 2015h).

¹⁰² In line with European directives, subsidiary protection is to be granted to those “who put forward substantial grounds for the presumption that they are at risk of serious harm in their country of origin and that they cannot take up the protection of their country of origin or do not wish to take it up because of that threat” (BAMF 2016a, 19). The threshold is thus lower than for refugee status, which draws upon notions of individual persecution. Residence in Germany is made more precarious for those granted subsidiary protection in comparison to those recognized as refugees (see BAMF 2016a).

¹⁰³ In her August 2015 summer press conference, Merkel anticipated “family reunification for many, especially among the Syrian civil war refugees” (Bundesregierung 2015i). As such, restricting family reunification seems to have been an unforeseen policy development in direct response to the increased numbers of arrivals over the fall of 2015.

In the fall of 2015, de Maizière also indicated that Syrian asylum seekers would no longer receive full refugee status but rather be granted subsidiary protection (see Deutsche Welle 2015ss; Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 21). The instruction triggered confusion among governing elites, however, as it was reported that “de Maiziere had not informed the chancellery about the instruction of the Interior Ministry” and that there would be, in fact, “no unilateral changes” to the protection status of Syrians (see Deutsche Welle 2015ss). De Maizière would also have reinstated the Dublin procedure for Syrian nationals on October 21, 2015 without consulting Merkel (see Deutsche Welle 2015tt; 2015uu; 2015vv). The Interior Minister further suggested that about 30 percent of all applicants had falsified their identities as Syrian in order to increase the chances of success of their applications (see Deutsche Welle 2015ww; 2015nn; Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 19). These discursive and policy developments similarly erode the previously unquestioned deservingness of displaced Syrians.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to trace developments from September 4, 2015 to December 2015 as the country responded to an ever-increasing number of asylum seekers. Findings indicate that representations and perceptions of the displaced remained predominantly welcoming across all sets of actors under study, although they were not left unchallenged. As such, public representations and perceptions of the displaced remained generally welcoming throughout the fall of 2015, despite signs of erosion as the number of arrivals increased. The pace of arrivals also provided opportunities for members of civil society to demonstrate their support towards the displaced, although it also nourished anti-refugee protests, violence against asylum seekers, and support for the far-right. Media representations and perceptions of the displaced during the fall of 2015 similarly remained generally welcoming. Media actors particularly connected the plight of the displaced to the virtue of the German nation. The pace of arrivals also provided them with opportunities to demonstrate their support and strengthen the movement of sympathy. Elite representations and perceptions of the displaced likewise remained generally welcoming towards the displaced during the fall of 2015. Merkel, most notably, commonly depicted them as individuals fleeing suffering and death, and particularly insisted on the courage, virtue and redemption of the German nation to mobilize support. She also linked so-called European values to the plight of the displaced. The Chancellor reasserted the regionality of the refugee situation on

several occasions, and also relied on the language of relatedness to instill mobilization. Nevertheless, narratives of deservingness did not apply to all displaced groups. Moreover, the perceived deservingness of Syrian nationals showed signs of erosion during the fall, as their protection status, their eligibility to family reunification, and their true identities were at times questioned.

The main point of contention among political elites was not directly over representations and perceptions of the displaced, although concerns over security did emerge. It rather pertained to the capacity of the country to face the influx and whether or not an upper limit to the number of arrivals should be established. The effects of elite pressures on the Chancellor were, however, limited. They seem to have been most salient in the intent to suspend family reunification for individuals granted subsidiary protection. Although Merkel refused to set an upper limit to the number of asylum seekers entering Germany, she nevertheless sought to do so indirectly. Concerns over social acceptance – and the rise of the AfD in this context – are likely to have influenced such efforts. These motivations would be in line with the process-tracing evidence gathered in Chapter 4 and with the ‘Berlin Declaration’ formulated between the CDU and the CSU in November 2015.

Process-tracing evidence showed that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during this period. The agency of the displaced indeed significantly shaped the possibilities of policy-making. Moreover, federal governing elites – and Merkel in particular - persistently demanded a so-called European solution to the ‘crisis,’ and deemed the closure of Germany’s borders as harmful and counter-productive to those ends. European counterparts, nonetheless, were to remain relatively uncooperative. The Hungarian government notably played a leading role in the sequence of events in early September 2015 by unilaterally deciding to dispatch displaced groups from their territory to the Austrian border. Regional considerations are thus important to consider for both the constraints they constituted for German policy-makers and the interests they inspired. In this context, societal representations and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness. The agency of the displaced, regional considerations, and societal representations and perceptions are therefore likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel’s welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. The Chancellor thus exerted leadership towards the displaced, although that leadership was significantly constrained.

Chapter 6 – From Cologne to Ankara: Navigating the decline in openness in Germany

In early January 2016, word spread that approximately ninety women had been sexually assaulted, robbed, or threatened by “North African and Arab-looking men” in Cologne on New Year’s Eve (see Deutsche Welle 2016a; 2016b).¹⁰⁴ In the days that followed, the Federal Ministry of the Interior confirmed that identified suspects included asylum seekers (Bundeskanzlerin 2016a). This chapter covers reactions to these events across the public, the media and political elites, and ends with the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016. The agreement indeed correlates with a significant decrease and stabilization of arrivals from then onwards (see Figures 2 and 3), although several factors – among them the closure of the Balkan route – are deemed to have contributed to such shift (see Triandafyllidou 2017; Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8; Adam 2017).

The first section of this chapter presents public representations and perceptions over the winter of 2016, while the second section focuses on media representations and perceptions. The third section covers elite discourses and policy processes. These developments are divided into two subsections. The first focuses on delineating deservingness among the displaced, particularly in the aftermath of the events in Cologne. The second pertains more broadly to the responses to the pace of arrivals, and the position of the EU-Turkey statement within this context.

Findings indicate that representations and perceptions of the displaced became more negative during this period across all three sets of actors. Restrictive measures were implemented in response to the events in Cologne. Evidence suggests that such restrictionism was influenced by the desire to control public contestation by appearing proactive in fighting crime. Efforts to curb the number of arrivals were also pursued. The persistent efforts by political elites throughout the period under study to curb the number of arrivals, combined with allusions to social acceptance, indeed suggest that policy-makers rather *anticipated* the shift in societal representations and perceptions.

¹⁰⁴ The number of reported complaints rapidly grew to reach hundreds of cases, of which approximately 40% involved allegations of sexual offences (see Deutsche Welle 2016p). Although Cologne remained the focal point, similar assaults were reported in other cities across Germany (see e.g. Bundesregierung 2016b; Deutsche Welle 2016b; 2016h; 2016q). Doubts soon emerged as to the level of planning and coordination of those assaults (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2016r), although later reports would qualify those claims (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2016q; 2016s). Few allegations turned into convictions (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2016q; 2016s).

Public representations and perceptions (January – March 2016)

A significant shift can be perceived in public opinion polls following the events in Cologne. While 51% of Germans believed in December 2015 that the country could handle the large number of ‘refugees’ coming in, they were only 37% to think so in January 2016 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2016a). The events in Cologne were identified by 33% of respondents as having significantly changed their attitudes on the matter (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2016a). Voting intentions for the CDU/CSU further decreased from 38% in December 2015 to 35% in January 2016 – their lowest since September 2012 (IfD Allensbach 2019).¹⁰⁵ Support for the AfD increased by two points over the same period, reaching 10% in January 2016 – the highest the party had ever scored since its foundation in 2013 (IfD Allensbach 2019).

Meanwhile, consensus remained over the righteousness of taking in refugees who fled war or civil war. Indeed, 94% of respondents indicated being in agreement with such obligation in February 2016 – a figure that was just as high in January 2015 (Infratest Dimap 2016, 7). While the readiness to accept refugees fleeing political or religious persecution decreased slightly over the same period, 73% of respondents still considered those grounds as legitimate in February 2016 (Infratest Dimap 2016, 7). These trends suggest that the right to seek and enjoy asylum was not denied *per se* following the events in Cologne, but was rather challenged by perceptions of undeservingness. Czymara and Schmidt-Catran (2017, 746) also noted this “paradoxical situation” in their analysis of the evolution of German public attitudes towards immigrants and refugees between April 2015 and January 2016, observing that “people are clearly supportive of migrants in need,” but seem to be “critical about those who *actually* enter their country as refugees.”

The events in Cologne did not seem to affect volunteers, however. While about 10.9% of the population was involved in the welcoming of refugees in November 2015, such involvement had even slightly increased to 11.9% by May 2016 (see Ahrens 2017). According to Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 132-133),

...one can speculate that the active supporters of the refugee movements and arrivals in Germany are not the ones that lost their faith in their actions and beliefs after the incidents in Paris and Cologne and that there is a different cohort of people that was possibly driven by the media and instrumentalized to some extent by the political elites, who suddenly revisited their former framing of the notion of ‘the migrant.’

¹⁰⁵ Voting intentions for the SPD fell by one point over the same period (IfD Allensbach 2019).

Nonetheless, public attitudes improved over time (see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2016b). While only 37% of respondents considered that Germany could cope with the number of arrivals in January 2016, such perceptions had increased back to 55% by the end of March 2016 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2016b). At that point in time, the pace of arrivals had also been slowing down (see Figure 3). However, voting intentions for the CDU/CSU did not similarly improve over the same period, and support for the AfD remained relatively constant (IfD Allensbach 2019). The AfD also made major gains in the state elections of Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, and Saxony-Anhalt in March 2016 (see Deutsche Welle 2016c).

Thus, public representations and perceptions of the displaced became significantly more negative following the events in Cologne. Although support for the number of arrivals improved over time, voting preferences were not as volatile and represented notable electoral costs for the CDU/CSU.

Media representations and perceptions (January – March 2016)

According to Vollmer and Karakayali's (2018, 129; 133) analysis of German media coverage, the assaults in Cologne triggered a "discursive shift," a "re-demonizing process" through which the displaced were constructed as undeserving migrants once more. As Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 130) explain, the assaults were "seemingly performed by the very group that was newly welcomed and previously framed as help deserving." Several media outlets implied a betrayal, stating for example that "trust has been lost" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 130). Such discourses depicted the displaced as ungrateful for the emotional investment the hosts had provided (see Vollmer and Karakayali 2018, 129). Meanwhile, Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 131) observe, the motives of the displaced became further questioned. As the authors put it, "[were] they after all 'bogus refugees' and 'economic migrants' that mainly intend[ed] to exploit the German empathy, welcoming culture, and welfare state?" In this context, Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 130) argue, "it is no coincidence that the shift in the discourse went along with a shift in the representation regime, from families and children (as a vulnerable and help-deserving group) to young male adults." The perceived motives of the displaced thus intersected with gender and age to produce undeservingness.

Holzberg et al.'s (2018, 545) discourse and content analysis of German media coverage similarly refers to the events in Cologne as having "sparked the most volatile debates around the

threat that refugees are assumed to pose to the fabric of German society.” Among prevalent frames was that of “black and Arab men as hyper-sexualized and misogynist” (Holzberg et al. 2018, 546; see also Winter et al. 2018, 24). While a range of articles tried to counter these representations by giving a voice to North African and Middle Eastern refugee men, such publications often put 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” (Holzberg et al. 2018, 546). Counter-framing discourses, Holzberg et al. (2018, 545) observe, also tended to justify assistance to the displaced by depicting refugee children and women as victims of such sexual violence. These discourses, argue Holzberg et al. (2018, 545), “reinforced rather than challenged the racialized framing of the debate.” Women were thereby “represented [...] 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” (Holzberg et al. 2018, 546). Such framings, again, run counter to perceptions of implicatedness. Holzberg et al. (2018) further note that refugee children were often framed as future potential perpetrators, while “Muslim women” were frequently depicted as the “creators of their presumably oppressive situation” by passing “Islamist values” of misogyny and sexual violence to their sons (Holzberg et al. 2018, 546). Through these framings, refugee children and women were positioned on the verge of undeservingness.

Media representations and perceptions thus became more negative from January 2016 onwards. Perceptions of ingratitude underlay media coverage while the motives of the displaced became further questioned. Such shift was associated with changes in gender and age representations as young male adults came further into focus, although the innocence of refugee women and children also eroded during this period. As with preceding periods, perceptions of implicatedness were rarely conveyed in media coverage.

Elite discourses and policies (January – March 2016)

Elite discourses and policy processes during the winter of 2016 will be divided into two subsections. The first focuses on delineating deservingness among the displaced, particularly in the aftermath of the events in Cologne. The second pertains more broadly to the responses to the pace of arrivals, and the position of the EU-Turkey statement within this context. Results indicate that elite representations and perceptions of the displaced became more negative during the winter

of 2016. Restrictive measures were implemented in response to the events in Cologne. Efforts to curb the number of arrivals were also pursued.

Delineating deservingness

The reaction of political elites to the assaults in Cologne in January 2016 had as an effect to further erode the deservingness of newly-arrived asylum seekers. According to Merkel, these “disgusting criminal acts” highlighted the need to “discuss the basis of our cultural coexistence” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016a; Bundesregierung 2016a). The Chancellor argued that questions regarding behavioural patterns and disrespect towards women among some groups had to be “decisively confront[ed], because I do not believe that these are only individual cases” (Deutsche Welle 2016b; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2016a). De Maizièrè indicated that “no parallel societies [would] be accepted” (Bundesregierung 2016b; Bundeskanzlerin 2016a), while Gabriel warned against the emergence of ghettos (Bundesregierung 2016a). Although governing elites regularly stressed that the majority of the displaced were peaceful, law-abiding individuals (see Bundesregierung 2016a; 2016b), prevalent discursive frames rather suggested that the events in Cologne emanated from sociocultural patterns that had to be carefully dismantled through proper integration.¹⁰⁶

As a result, the *Act on the Facilitation of Expulsions of Criminal Foreigners* was adopted in February 2016, through which the deportation of foreign criminal offenders was to be expedited (see Bundesregierung 2016c; Grote 2018; Deutsche Welle 2016d; 2016e). De Maizièrè affirmed that it was “a harsh response, but [...] the right response of the state to those who believe that they can seek protection here and then commit crimes in our country without prejudicing their presence here” (Bundesregierung 2016c). Gabriel (SPD), while alluding to international law constraints, argued that “the threat of ending up in prison in their own countries is a far greater deterrent than the notion of a prison sentence in Germany” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016a). Justice Minister Maas (SPD) also framed the deportation of foreign criminals as “vital in order to protect the vast majority of innocent refugees in Germany [who] do not deserve to be lumped together with criminals” (Bundesregierung 2016a; 2016c). Federal government spokesperson Steffen Seibert indeed argued

¹⁰⁶ The need for education on ‘behavioural norms’ at initial reception centres was also highlighted by governing elites (see Bundesregierung 2016a; 2016b).

that “events like those seen on New Year’s Eve breed hostility towards the vast majority of foreigners who respect the law,” and as such foreign citizens committing serious criminal offences “jeopardise popular support within Germany for taking in those in need of our protection, and they risk adversely affecting social peace in Germany” (Bundesregierung 2016c). Such statements suggest that the *Act on the Facilitation of Expulsions of Criminal Foreigners* was adopted, at least partly, with the aim of controlling public contestation following the events in Cologne by appearing proactive in fighting crime.¹⁰⁷

In January 2016, coalition leaders also agreed on the expansion of the list of safe countries of origin to include Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (see Bundesregierung 2016d).¹⁰⁸ Deutsche Welle (2016f) seems to first report on these developments on January 13, 2016 as a CSU proposal that was endorsed by Merkel in the midst of reactions to the events in Cologne. These countries had not been the focus of debates in previous expansions to the list of safe countries of origin, whose last modifications dated from the preceding fall. Although the number of North African asylum seekers had meanwhile reportedly increased (see Deutsche Welle 2016g; 2016h), such policy attention suggests further restrictionism in response to the events in Cologne, in a context where the assailants had been described of “North African and Arab origin” (see e.g. Deutsche Welle 2016b; 2016h; 2016i).¹⁰⁹ Perceived deservingness was thus further circumscribed by excluding certain nationalities from it.

Usual delineations between the deserving and the undeserving were further entrenched in the winter of 2016, with various measures notably aimed at accelerating the proceedings and returns of applicants from safe countries of origin (see Bundesregierung 2016e; Bundeskanzlerin 2016b). The suspension of family reunification for those granted subsidiary protection, discussed

¹⁰⁷ Governing elites also frequently asserted the need for “more police [on the streets], swift investigations and the full force of the law” (Bundesregierung 2016a; see also Bundesregierung 2016b; Bundeskanzlerin 2016a).

¹⁰⁸ The Act was adopted by the Bundestag in May 2016 but failed to pass in the Bundesrat in March 2017 (see Grote 2018, 50).

¹⁰⁹ Although Deutsche Welle (2016g) reported that Morocco was one of the top five countries of origin of asylum seekers in Germany in December 2015, BAMF documents from the same period do not capture any North African country within the top ten (see BAMF 2016c, 8). The discrepancy between those two sources may come from the backlog in the processing of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016. Nevertheless, North African countries do not reach the top ten in neither the 2015 and 2016 annual figures (see BAMF 2017, 20). In another report, Deutsche Welle (2016h) indicated that the number of Algerian asylum seekers had increased from 847 in June 2015 to 2,296 by December 2015, while the number of Moroccan asylum seekers had risen from 368 to 2,896 over the same period. Such figures remain proportionally low in the context of the approximately one million asylum seekers that arrived in Germany in 2015.

in the fall of 2015, was also put into effect in March 2016 (see Grote 2018, 57-58).¹¹⁰ According to the Interior Ministry, such measures were to “allow Germany to cope better with the massive influx of refugees” (Bundesregierung 2016e). Gabriel thus explained that those “who are not being personally, urgently persecuted” would have to wait before their families could join them (Deutsche Welle 2016j). In contrast, resettlement to Germany from refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon was identified as the most appropriate channel for family reunification (see Bundesregierung 2016d; 2016e). The threshold of deservingness was thus elevated to those that suffered individual persecution and those that had ‘waited their turn’ in refugee camps.

As de Maizièrè had suggested in November 2015, a shift from refugee status to subsidiary protection for Syrian nationals was registered in the decisions taken by the BAMF between 2015 and 2016 (see BAMF 2016d, 50; 2017, 50; Grote 2018, 58). While only 0.2% of Syrian asylum seekers had been granted subsidiary protection in 2015, their proportion rose to 41.2% in 2016 (BAMF 2016d, 50; 2017, 50). Similar shifts, although not as pronounced, were registered for other nationalities (see BAMF 2016d, 50; 2017, 50).¹¹¹ Although little information is available on the nature of those changes,¹¹² they nonetheless capture an erosion of the deservingness of the displaced, for whom residence rights and access to family reunification were increasingly made more precarious. This focus on subsidiary protection was also stressed by Merkel, who noted that “we need [...] to say to people that this is a temporary residential status and we expect that, once there is peace in Syria again, once IS has been defeated in Iraq, that you go back to your home country with the knowledge that you have gained” (Deutsche Welle 2016k). The Chancellor explicitly referred to refugees from the former Yugoslavia who arrived in Germany in the nineties, and noted how 70% of them had returned to their countries of origin (Deutsche Welle 2016k). Such statements indicate that Merkel’s calls to solidarity in the name of German national identity

¹¹⁰ The suspension of family reunification was significantly criticized by the Greens and the Left (see Deutsche Welle 2016d; 2016e; 2016j). The Greens insisted that the provisions would only encourage more women and children to take dangerous routes to access Europe (Deutsche Welle 2016d; 2016e). The suspension of family reunification initially applied to unaccompanied minors in order not to create incentives for “parents [to] send their children ahead of them” (de Maizièrè, in Deutsche Welle 2016d). The Left had described that approach as “immoral and illegal” (Deutsche Welle 2016d). A hardship regulation was subsequently adopted to allow family reunification in individual cases based on urgent humanitarian grounds or international law (Grote 2018, 57-58).

¹¹¹ As a result, the rise in the granting of subsidiary protection between 2015 and 2016 was captured in overall decision rates (see BAMF 2016d, 50; 2017, 50; Grote 2018, 57-58). The number of appeals against the decisions of the BAMF similarly increased (Grote 2018, 58).

¹¹² Further research would be needed to better understand the political and bureaucratic influences that led to these shifts, and the extent to which changes in the profiles of the displaced can account for them.

did not translate into an inclusion of “humanitarian immigrants into the national self,” as previously noted by Bauder (2009, 275; see also 2016, 74).

Responding to arrivals

In line with the fall of 2015, a significant point of contention among political elites in the winter of 2016 pertained to whether or not an upper limit to the number of arrivals to Germany should be set. While the CSU continued to advocate for this option (see Deutsche Welle 2016l; 2016m), Merkel persisted in declining it. Her discourse, however, changed slightly. Although the Chancellor did continue to highlight the “violence and hardship on our doorstep” and the importance of “show[ing] humanity” in this context (see Deutsche Welle 2016n; Bundeskanzlerin 2016c), such statements were not as prevalent as in other periods. Her discourses rather focused on “achiev[ing] a tangible and lasting reduction in refugee numbers” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016b; see also 2016c; 2016d; 2016e). It is possible that Merkel limited her calls to solidarity as they would have been out of synch with the loss of optimism the German public experienced following the events in Cologne.

Merkel remained focused on a European solution to the refugee ‘crisis,’ albeit her discourses also became slightly more pragmatic. In contrast to her reliance on ‘European values’ as a leitmotiv for action in earlier periods, the attention was rather devoted, in the winter of 2016, to the political and economic interests associated with the maintenance of the Schengen Area (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2016d; 2016f; 2016g). Merkel also deplored the closure of internal borders as harmful and counter-productive, and criticized the actions of Austria and other Balkan states in this context (see Bundeskanzlerin 2016c; 2016h; 2016i; Bundesregierung 2016f).¹¹³ As Merkel argued, “unilateral solutions do not help us [...] because it simply means that Greece is facing more serious problems” (Bundesregierung 2016f). According to Merkel, “people fleeing from the bombing of Aleppo or from the murderous IS are not going to be put off by conditions in Greece” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016h). As such, she claimed that “we cannot simply abandon Greece now. That is precisely what I am afraid of. When one country decides to close a border, its neighbour is left with the problem. That is not my Europe” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016c; see also Bundeskanzlerin

¹¹³ Betts and Collier (2017, 90-91; 241) rather suggest that Merkel “colluded” to close the Balkan route. Following this approach, the EU-Turkey statement remained central to the Chancellor’s considerations in a context where Greece was perceived as otherwise “left alone with the problem” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016h).

2016m). Such statements indicate that regional dynamics continued to significantly influence policy decisions during this period.¹¹⁴

In this context, Merkel and other governing elites rather focused on sealing the EU's external borders, and collaborating with Turkey to this end (see Bundesregierung 2016f; Bundeskanzlerin 2016i).¹¹⁵ Germany indeed took a leading role in the conduct of EU-Turkey negotiations throughout the winter of 2016 (see e.g. Bundesregierung 2016g; Bundeskanzlerin 2016e; 2015j; 2016k; Betts and Collier 2017, 90-91). These developments were framed as essential for stopping “illegal smugglers” and “traffickers” from “rul[ing] the seas that separate Turkey and Greece” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016j; see also Bundeskanzlerin 2016e; 2016i). Such statements again run contrary to perceptions of implicatedness, which would rather portray the displaced as suffering the consequences of actions for which the host region or host country is perceived as involved in and potentially responsible for.

The EU-Turkey statement was concluded on March 18, 2016. In contrast to the Joint EU-Turkey Action Plan of November 2015, the agreement planned to return “all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016” (European Council 2016).¹¹⁶ The EU also pledged to resettle up to 72,000 Syrian nationals from Turkey for every Syrian national that was returned to Turkey from the Greek islands (European Council 2016). The EU-Turkey statement also drew upon engagements already outlined in November 2015, such as the commitment of the EU to accelerate the visa liberalization roadmap for Turkish citizens; to

¹¹⁴ Merkel also suggested that only a ‘common European solution’ would stabilize social acceptance in the long term (Bundeskanzlerin 2016m). Otherwise, she argued, the displaced would simply shift routes within Europe and “it would then become apparent that all the steps we have taken to date were not solutions but shams that addressed only the symptoms and ignored the root causes of the crisis. The disillusionment of the people would then be many times greater than the concerns of some today” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016m).

¹¹⁵ Efforts and investments were also made in addressing the ‘root causes’ of the refugee ‘crisis’ by improving the situation in Syria and the living conditions of refugees in neighbouring countries (see e.g. Bundeskanzlerin 2016n; 2016o).

¹¹⁶ The EU-Turkey statement indicated that such returns would take place “in full accordance with EU and international law,” as a result of which “migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible [...] will be returned to Turkey” (European Council 2016). Thus, as Menéndez (2016, 409) noted, “the whole mechanics of the agreement depend[ed] on the European Union, and in particular Greece, acknowledging Turkey as a safe third country.” In practice, Greece’s asylum appeals committees vacillated as to whether Turkey constituted a safe third country where individuals could be returned (see Amnesty International 2017; Menéndez 2016, 410; Adam 2017, 47). International non-governmental organizations also denounced violations to due process in the conduct of returns to Turkey (see Amnesty International 2017; Adam 2017, 47). The EU-Turkey statement is heavily criticized by human rights actors for the precarious protection (or lack thereof) provided to Syrian refugees in Turkey, and for the dire conditions and unclear prospects of asylum seekers in Greece (see Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8-9; Amnesty International 2017).

advance the accession process of Turkey to the EU; and to provide financial support for refugees living in Turkey (European Council 2016). In turn, Ankara was to “take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU, and [...] cooperate with neighboring states as well as the EU to this effect” (European Council 2016).

In practice, relatively few individuals were returned from the Greek islands to Turkey (see Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8; Adam 2017, 46).¹¹⁷ The EU-Turkey statement rather seems to have had a dissuasive effect considering the reduction in the number of arrivals to Greece that was registered thereafter (see Grote 2018, 24; Figure 2). The relative impact of the agreement is difficult to assess, however, since its conclusion notably coincided with the closure of the Balkan route and coverage of poor conditions in Greece, while the number of arrivals had already been declining (see Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8; Adam 2017, 46; Triandafyllidou 2017, 9; Betts and Collier 2017, 91).¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, for German policy-makers, the conclusion of the EU-Turkey statement provided the opportunity of “resolving the refugee crisis without abandoning our humanitarian principles” (Minister Maas, in Bundeskanzlerin 2016l). On the one hand, argued the federal government spokesperson Steffen Seibert, “we stand firm on our commitment to help people who seek shelter and protection here, and who have been accepted, to integrate into our society” (Bundeskanzlerin 2016l). On the other hand, as the Chief of Staff of the Chancellery Peter Altmaier highlighted, “the call for an upper limit consequently takes care of itself” (Deutsche Welle 2016o). The EU-Turkey deal thus provided the opportunity for Merkel and her federal counterparts to maintain the coherence of their domestic discourses and policies while redirecting would-be asylum seekers away from Germany and Europe.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

This chapter sought to analyze reactions to the events in Cologne across the public, the media and political elites, and to trace developments until the conclusion of the EU-Turkey

¹¹⁷ Between March 20, 2016 and September 4, 2017, 1,896 individuals were returned from Greece to Turkey (European Commission 2017, 5; see also Niemann and Zaun 2017, 8).

¹¹⁸ Partly in relation to the EU-Turkey statement, the increased restrictionism of Ankara towards smuggling networks and refugee flows from Syria may also account for the sustained decrease in the number of crossings from Turkey to the Greek islands after March 2016 (see Adam 2017, 46).

¹¹⁹ Betts and Collier (2017, 91) similarly argue that the EU-Turkey statement “had the additional advantage of not requiring any change of policy by Germany itself; anyone actually reaching Germany’s borders would still be welcomed. Consequently, there need be no admission that the earlier policy had been a mistake.”

statement in March 2016. Findings indicate that representations and perceptions of the displaced became more negative during this period across all three sets of actors. Although public support for the number of arrivals improved over time, voting preferences were not as volatile and represented notable electoral costs for the CDU/CSU. Across the media, perceptions of ingratitude were conveyed while the motives of the displaced became further questioned. Such shift was associated with changes in gender and age representations as young male adults came further into focus, although the innocence of refugee women and children also eroded during this period. As with earlier periods, perceptions of implicatedness were rarely conveyed in media coverage. Similarly, elite representations and perceptions of the displaced became more negative during the winter of 2016. The scope of undeservingness indeed became wider as the assaults in Cologne were framed, at least partly, as the result of sociocultural behaviours that had to be carefully dismantled through proper integration. The suspension of family reunification for those granted subsidiary protection, compounded with the increase in the number of asylum seekers granted such protection, further eroded the deservingness of the displaced. The responsibility for the insecurity of migration routes remained framed as that of smugglers and criminals. Such rhetoric ran counter to perceptions of implicatedness.

The *Act on the Facilitation of Expulsions of Criminal Foreigners* and the attempt to expand the list of safe countries of origin to include Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia can be interpreted as direct policy responses to the events in Cologne. Evidence suggests that such restrictionism was influenced by the desire to control public contestation by appearing proactive in fighting crime. These developments would suggest bottom-up effects of societal representations and perceptions onto policy-makers. According to Betts and Collier (2017, 89; 125), Angela Merkel “suffered an unprecedented collapse in political support [following the events in Cologne] as a result of which she completely reversed her policy, conspiring with the EU and Turkey to close the Balkan and Aegean Sea routes.” The evidence gathered in this case study shows a more complex picture. The persistent efforts by political elites throughout the period under study to curb the number of arrivals, combined with allusions to social acceptance, suggest that policy-makers rather *anticipated* the shift in societal representations and perceptions. Concerns over images of suffering at Germany’s periphery and regional considerations significantly structured the possibilities of that restrictionism towards the externalization of the influxes.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This thesis sought to better understand the ways in which representations and perceptions of the displaced may influence policy-making towards openness. The response of Germany to the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis’ was explored as a deviant case considering its relatively welcoming approach to asylum seekers during this period. This chapter ties the empirical findings of the case study back to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this project. It provides conclusions on the case study, highlights limitations, and indicates implications for future research. Each objective and hypothesis will be reviewed in turn. Alternative hypothesized processes will also be addressed. Such insights set the path for a broader research project on the emergence and decline of movements of sympathy in the Global North.

Objective 1: The representations and perceptions of the displaced

The first objective of this research was to identify key representations and perceptions of the displaced that were produced and reproduced by political elites, constituents, and the media in contexts of relative openness. In line with Chapter 2, I hypothesized that openness towards displaced groups relied on the construction of the displaced as *deserving* of protection, and that such openness was further encouraged by perceptions of relatedness, implicatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity.

Findings indicate that the movement of openness experienced by Germany during the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis’ indeed predominantly relied on deserving representations of the displaced. Such representations were mobilized across the public, the media, and political elites. Public support relied upon the *forced* nature of displacement. Media and elite actors similarly exploited themes of suffering and innocence. The salience of Alan Kurdi’s images indicate the mobilizing potential of childhood in representations of deservingness. Women were also generally constructed as deserving of protection. Nevertheless, during most of the period under study, the scope of deservingness spanned beyond age and gender categories and depicted the Syrian asylum seeker as the ultimate figure of deservingness. Political elites particularly focused on circumscribing access and stays of those deemed to hold economic motivations for fleeing.

Perceptions of relatedness and regionality were at times mobilized by Chancellor Merkel in an attempt to build support for her course of action. These perceptions were also conveyed by the images of Alan Kurdi and partly explain the iconographical and iconological power of those

photographs. Media and elite actors also relied upon understandings, myths and symbols of the German nation to justify the access of the displaced to protection within the polity. Germans were indeed depicted as virtuous, courageous, and redeemed for providing assistance to the displaced. Merkel further drew upon a European identity to mobilize support for her course of action. These findings align with my first hypothesis in that perceptions of relatedness, regionality, and connectedness to national identity further encouraged openness.

Nevertheless, media and elite actors did not significantly mobilize perceptions of implicatedness, and rather tended to obscure the political connections that linked Europeans to the displaced. Media actors often decontextualized the plight of the displaced while political elites generally framed deaths at sea as the sole responsibility of smugglers. These findings run counter to my hypothesis, although they are not surprising in a context where representations of deservingness often tend to shift responsibility “from historical political and economic policies supported by powerful actors in Europe and the United States [...] [onto] displaced people themselves” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016, 13; see also Ticktin 2017, 583-584). Perceptions of implicatedness would also have contradicted the perceived virtue of the hosts in providing assistance to the displaced. This tension was similarly noted by Ticktin (2017). As she argued,

As a space of purity, innocence itself appears outside history, and as such, it allows those who work as saviors to ignore the political and historical circumstances that created these victims. [...] This not only allows saviors to feel powerful or knowledgeable but also enables them to simultaneously capture innocence – to purify or absolve themselves. [...] If the people one is saving are understood as innocent, outside time and place, and one is intervening only to stop the suffering, how can this not be considered innocent too? (Ticktin 2017, 583)

Several limitations should be noted. As George and Bennett (2005, 25) highlight, case studies are generally “much stronger at assessing *whether* and *how* a variable mattered to the outcome than at assessing *how much* it mattered.” While this project framed deservingness as a necessary condition for other perceptions to work towards openness, it cannot conclude on the relative importance of each in mobilizing sympathy towards the displaced. The array of public perceptions captured by public opinion data and public mobilization data was likewise limited. Surveys and focus groups at the time of events would have helped in assessing the evolution of a larger range of public perceptions over the period under study. Similarly, this project had to rely on the results of published media content and discourse analyses. Conducting my own analyses would have permitted to gain a more detailed perspective on the evolution of my variables of interest over the period under study. Constituting a wider sample of elite discourses in the language

of origin and conducting in-depth discourse and content analyses of those samples would have likewise produced more detailed results of elite representations and perceptions throughout the period under study.

This research thus calls for a more precise assessment of the representations and perceptions that are produced and reproduced by constituents, the media, and political elites in contexts of relative openness. This project initiated such effort by focusing on five representations and perceptions that are rarely put into interaction with one another. By broadening the analysis to new cases – varying in the warmth of their responses to particular refugee situations - a more detailed understanding of the representations and perceptions mobilized in contexts of relative openness may be attained.¹²⁰ Such effort would also be helpful in assessing the different types and mixes of representations and perceptions that may be produced in such contexts, in an attempt to build a typological theory of movements of openness. Such knowledge, in turn, would be useful in assessing the level of fragility upon which these welcoming representations and perceptions rest. For example, can we imagine movements of openness that acknowledge the level of involvement and/or responsibility of the Global North in the production of certain sufferings, without disrupting the mobilizing power of a virtuous national identity? Can these two perceptions ever cohabit? Is the reliance on national identity more likely to backfire against the displaced? These are some of the questions that a more detailed study of movements of openness would enable to address.

Through a better understanding of the representations and perceptions that are (re)produced in contexts of relative openness, it may also be possible to gain insight into how present boundaries to deservingness can be effectively pushed. Several authors argue that nurturing perceptions of implicatedness may be key to transnational solidarity (see Holmes and Castaneda 2016; Holzberg et al. 2018). Ticktin (2017, 588) similarly invites to “embrace [the] contaminated reality [of a world without innocence] and let it be the site of new political emergence.” How these “more substantial forms of transnational solidarity” (Holzberg et al. 2018, 548) may be attained should

¹²⁰ The salience of economic deservingness – i.e. the perceived worthiness of the displaced based on the economic benefits that they would be deemed to bring to the country - should likewise be assessed in future cases. These ideas were mobilized in the German media (Holzberg et al. 2018) and also appeared in elite discourses (Deutsche Welle 2014i; 2015e; Adam 2015, 452). Such findings expand upon the concept of deservingness, which generally focuses on innocence and suffering (see e.g. Ticktin 2017; Holmes and Castaneda 2016).

be the object of empirical research. In this context, studying different types of movements of openness – and the place of implicatedness within them – may offer some useful insight.

The particularities of the German case would likewise be better captured by comparing it to other movements of openness. For instance, future research could compare the present case study to the response of Canada to the 2015 refugee ‘crisis.’ A central difference between the two cases is that while Germany predominantly received asylum seekers, Canada was particularly involved in refugee resettlement. In other words, it could carefully select the refugees it deemed *deserving* of protection from the outset. Canadian Immigration Minister John McCallum capitalized on this difference, arguing that “the [refugees] we are receiving we have carefully selected them, most of them are not single men – most of them are family members whereas Germany accepts everybody that comes to its borders” (CBC News 2016). The case of Germany could thus be particularly telling as it succeeded in creating relative openness towards the displaced in comparatively more challenging preconditions. There is also an important difference in scale: while Canada resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and February 2016, more than a million asylum seekers entered Germany between 2015 and 2016 (Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees Canada 2016; Grote 2018). This difference, again, would make the case of Germany particularly outstanding for the relative openness it maintained throughout most of the period under study while receiving an exceptionally high number of asylum seekers. Finally, employing a comparative approach would make it easier to highlight the incidence of different historical contexts on particular responses to refugees. For instance, Bauder (2016, 74) argues that the responses of Germany and Canada to the 2015 refugee ‘crisis’ respectively encapsulate ‘ethnic’ and ‘settler’ approaches to the nation. While refugees in Germany were expected to return when the situation permitted and rebuild their countries of origin, Syrian refugees resettled in Canada were framed as “new Canadians” (Bauder 2016, 74; see also Winter et al. 2018). The special status of asylum in the context of Germany’s Nazi past may likewise have had an idiosyncratic effect on the response of the country to the refugee situation.

Objective 2: The mechanisms of openness

The second objective of this research was to assess the mechanisms through which policy-makers were driven towards openness, as either the initiators or followers of the movement. In line with Chapter 2, I hypothesized that policy-makers either relied on welcoming representations and

perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they responded to the welcoming representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of electoral interest. The first pathway coincided with the top-down approach; the second with the bottom-up perspective. Findings indicate both top-down and bottom-up influences. Each approach will be discussed in turn.

Top-down influences

Process-tracing evidence showed that several interests and constraints must be considered to explain the relative openness of policy-makers during 2015-2016. Indeed, elite discourses and decision-making processes did not indicate an active will to trigger arrivals. In this context, the agency of the displaced significantly shaped the possibilities of policy-making. Moreover, federal governing elites – and Merkel in particular – persistently demanded a so-called European solution to the ‘crisis,’ and deemed the closure of Germany’s borders as harmful and counter-productive to those ends. European counterparts, nonetheless, were to remain relatively uncooperative. The Hungarian government notably played a leading role in the sequence of events in early September 2015 by unilaterally deciding to dispatch displaced groups from their territory to the Austrian border. Regional considerations are thus important to consider for both the constraints they constituted for German policy-makers and the interests they inspired. In a context where governing elites remained wary of the number of asylum seekers to come, the agency of the displaced and regional interests and constraints are likely to have motivated, at least partly, Merkel’s welcoming discourses towards the displaced in an attempt to legitimize her course of action. These insights better align with the top-down approach, which expects policy-makers to initiate movements of openness out of conviction or interest.

Merkel thus exerted leadership towards the displaced, although that leadership was significantly constrained. In turn, these elite narratives of deservingness are likely to have contributed to the (re)production of a relatively accepting environment towards the displaced throughout most of the period under study. The extent to which such welcoming discourses affected public and media representations and perceptions towards the displaced are, however, difficult to assess considering that they themselves remained relatively positive throughout most of the period under study. Future research should delve into the direction of those relationships

into more detail.¹²¹ Nonetheless, by maintaining internal borders which were relatively accessible to the displaced, federal policy-makers provided opportunities for the media and civil society to demonstrate their support towards the displaced and strengthen the movement of sympathy. Such findings better align with the top-down approach.

These results thus suggest that political elites may play leading roles in the emergence and navigation of movements of openness, and that their initiatives may positively impact those of other societal actors. These findings are important as they highlight that governing elites are not merely passive actors responding to public opinion: they also have the potential to “*reshap[e] the political space* in which they find themselves in ways more conducive to the reception of refugees and asylum seekers” (Gibney 2004, 244; emphasis in text). Further research is needed to better capture these effects as well as their scope and conditions.

Future research should also assess the different pathways through which policy-makers may opt for openness towards the displaced. The results of this case study indicate that although moral conviction may have further motivated Merkel’s position towards the displaced, such concerns did not lead her to actively trigger arrivals nor prevented her from seeking to externalize the influx away from Europe. Such results suggest that perceived interests and constraints may be key to elite leadership in such situations, and that nurturing perceived linkages between the host country and the refugee situation may indeed be central to responsibility-sharing schemes (see Betts 2010). These insights should be tested to other cases in which policy-makers were significantly more isolated from the situation at hand and yet became actively involved.¹²²

Bottom-up influences

Decision-making evidence also indicates that policy-makers – and most notably Merkel – sought to avoid images of violence at Germany’s periphery considering the upsetting impact such images would have had on German society. These findings suggest that societal representations

¹²¹ As discussed in Chapter 4, the content analyses of German press coverage conducted by Berry et al. (2015) and Gross (2015) in the months preceding September 2015 suggest top-down effects from political elites to the media. However, these interactions are not the specific focus of their studies. Vollmer and Karakayali (2018) rather depict the German press as leading actors in the framing process. Future research should thus further disentangle interaction effects between elite framings and those of the media over the entire period under study.

¹²² The response of Canada to the 2015 refugee ‘crisis’ may be useful to study for those purposes. The Liberals’ ambition to reinvest in Canada’s international presence has been identified as a key driver behind their response to the events (see e.g. Hadfield 2017; Molnar 2016). Such considerations and interests should be further studied.

and perceptions constituted yet another constraint towards openness, and may have likewise impacted Merkel's discourses and policy decisions.¹²³ The welcoming societal representations and perceptions of the displaced that were (re)produced in the months, weeks and days preceding the height of the 'crisis' in the fall of 2015 are also likely to have *facilitated* policy-making in an otherwise highly constrained environment. These findings better align with the bottom-up approach.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the extent to which societal representations and perceptions were decisive on policy-making, considering the other relevant interests and constraints that the process-tracing uncovered. As George and Bennett (2005, 222) explained, a common problem in process-tracing is that "competing explanations or interpretations could be equally consistent with the available process-tracing evidence, making it hard to determine whether both are at play and the outcome is overdetermined, whether the variables in competing explanations have a cumulative effect, or whether one variable is causal and the other spurious." Moreover, this project had to rely on the insights of journalistic investigations. Future research should deepen the results presented here by directly conducting elite interviews.¹²⁴ At this stage of the research, both top-down and bottom-up influences are viable hypotheses that should be further tested.

Thus, the results of this project suggest that societal representations and perceptions may indeed influence policy-making towards openness. Such results would imply that nurturing positive societal representations and perceptions of the displaced may further affect the political calculus of policy-makers and widen possibilities of openness and inclusion. Additional research is needed to better capture these effects as well as their scope and conditions.

Objective 3: The mechanisms of renewed restrictionism

The third objective of this research was to examine the mechanisms through which movements of openness may wither. In line with Chapter 2, I hypothesized that policy-makers

¹²³ In response to Robinson (1999; 2000; 2011), this project thus identifies more an *anticipation* of negative media coverage than direct media pressure as a significant variable in the sequence of events. Process-tracing evidence, indeed, does not suggest that policy-makers merely reacted to media coverage by adopting a more open approach to the displaced. Although policy uncertainty was at times captured, notably in August 2015 with the waiving of the Dublin procedure for Syrian nationals, Merkel remained generally consistent in her approach.

¹²⁴ Nevertheless, elite interviews are likely to also present limitations in a context where "human agents [...] may be doing their best to conceal causal processes" (George and Bennett 2005, 222).

either relied on negative representations and perceptions of the displaced to legitimize their positions and policies to other societal actors, or they responded to the negative representations and perceptions of other societal actors out of consideration for their electoral costs. The first pathway coincided with the top-down approach; the second with the bottom-up perspective.

Findings foremost indicate bottom-up influences. The persistent efforts by political elites throughout the period under study to curb the number of arrivals, combined with allusions to social acceptance, suggest that the anticipation of negative societal representations and perceptions significantly affected policy-making.¹²⁵ Following the assaults in Cologne and the actual shift in societal representations and perceptions, further restrictions were implemented. Evidence suggests that such restrictionism was influenced by the desire to control public contestation by appearing proactive in fighting crime. These findings better align with the bottom-up approach.

Meanwhile, several political elites, particularly within the CSU and the CDU, voiced their concerns over the capacity of the country to cope with the number of arrivals. These elite considerations may also have had an effect on renewed restrictionism, and would better align with the top-down approach. As discussed above, a common limitation in case studies and process-tracing pertains to the difficulty in assessing the relative importance of equally plausible explanations (see George and Bennett 2005, 25; 222). This limitation is particularly acute in this research considering the lack of direct elite interviews. Both explanations should therefore be considered in future research. Nevertheless, restrictive measures were put in place by policy-makers while maintaining a relatively welcoming discourse towards the displaced.¹²⁶ In this context, policy-makers did not drive representations and perceptions towards restrictiveness.

The shift in public and media attitudes following the assaults in Cologne also corroborates the insights of the existing literature on the fragility of welcoming representations and perceptions.

¹²⁵ Public support towards the displaced indeed decreased as the number of arrivals rose. These findings are in line with the insights of the public opinion literature, which expects perceptions of threat to grow and support to wither as the perceived size of the outgroup increases (see Esses et al. 2017). Support for the AfD also grew throughout the fall of 2015, while violence against asylum seekers intensified throughout the period under study. The efforts of political elites to curb the number of arrivals mainly focused on the externalization of refugee flows as well as on the limitation of stays and arrivals for those deemed to flee economic hardship. Restrictive measures gradually widened the scope of undeservingness, notably by suspending family reunification for those granted subsidiary protection.

¹²⁶ Contestation among political elites generally remained centred on state capacities rather than on the representations and perceptions of the displaced. Although Merkel did continue to highlight the suffering of the displaced in the winter of 2016, her calls to solidarity were not as prevalent as in other periods. It is possible that the Chancellor limited such discourses as they would have been out of synch with the loss of optimism the German public experienced following the events in Cologne.

Vollmer and Karakayali (2018, 129) had described the philanthropic relationship between hosts and displaced people as “highly precarious since it depends entirely on the constant repetition of an asymmetric pattern in which refugees need to act according to the needs of the emotional investment of the providers of help.” Ticktin (2017, 584) had argued that such relationship was ultimately bound to fail, considering that “the innocent sufferer can never be isolated for long enough to keep it uncorrupted by history or context.” In the case of Germany, the assaults in Cologne were seemingly perpetrated by the very group that had been the object of assistance. Public and media responses to the assaults suggest that such events disrupted the perceived deservingness of the displaced.¹²⁷ It is likely that the perceived virtue of the German nation upon which political elites and media actors had capitalized further fed perceptions of ingratitude and betrayal. As Reicher et al. (2008, 1335) had warned, “protestations of ingroup virtue can sometimes generate generosity to outgroups. But under conditions where the outgroup is construed as sinful, such protestations can have more paradoxical effects. When ‘we’ are held to be virtuous, then, [...] the more serious the outgroup threat becomes.” Future research should analyze these reactions and dynamics into further detail.

The implications of these findings are important, as they highlight that although policy-makers have the potential to (re)shape the political context in which they are in, they still remain bound by perceived and real electoral constraints.¹²⁸ In line with the conclusions of Objective 1 and 2, such results highlight the importance of assessing the ways in which societal representations and perceptions may be nurtured towards greater openness and inclusiveness to newcomers. Such changes may then provide more leeway to political elites in their responses to certain refugee situations. They may also create more opportunities for responsibility-sharing, and as such relieve some pressure from those states that receive the most refugees.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Negative representations and perceptions were accompanied by a representational shift from families and children to young male adults (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). Nonetheless, perceived undeservingness spanned beyond age and gender categories: refugee children were often framed as future potential perpetrators, while refugee women were frequently depicted as passing along misogyny and sexual violence to their sons (Holzberg et al. 2018).

¹²⁸ Electoral costs for the CDU/CSU were particularly salient in the winter of 2016 and persisted beyond the time frame of this present study, notably with the growth of the AfD (see Dostal 2017).

¹²⁹ In his analysis of Germany’s restrictive turn in the nineties, Gibney (2004, 105) argues that “if one wishes to find a culprit for the Federal Republic’s 1992/3 imbroglio, one could do worse than to look at the actions of other European states which, by effectively ‘opting out’ of providing refuge for the new wave of asylum seekers, collectively created an environment that imposed enormous costs on states that recognize broad rights of entry for refugees.” These observations also apply to the 2015-2016 situation, and as such highlight the need for other states to join in openness.

Alternative hypothesized processes

As discussed above, regional politics and the agency of the displaced significantly shaped policy-making processes towards openness, and are likely to have affected the discourses policy-makers chose to adopt. In contrast, domestic political opponents had a more limited impact on the sequence of events. The main point of contention among political elites – and most particularly within the CSU – pertained to the capacity of the country to face the influx and whether or not an upper limit to the number of arrivals should be established. The Chancellor persisted in refusing to set such an upper limit. The effects of elite pressures seem to have been most salient in the area of family reunification, as its suspension for individuals granted subsidiary protection seems to have emerged as a compromise between the CDU and the CSU.¹³⁰ Likewise, decision-making evidence suggests that international norms did not significantly shape the sequence of events as more robust border controls were deemed legally possible. Nevertheless, additional data on decision-making processes would increase the confidence of these conclusions. These variables also remain important to consider in future cases.

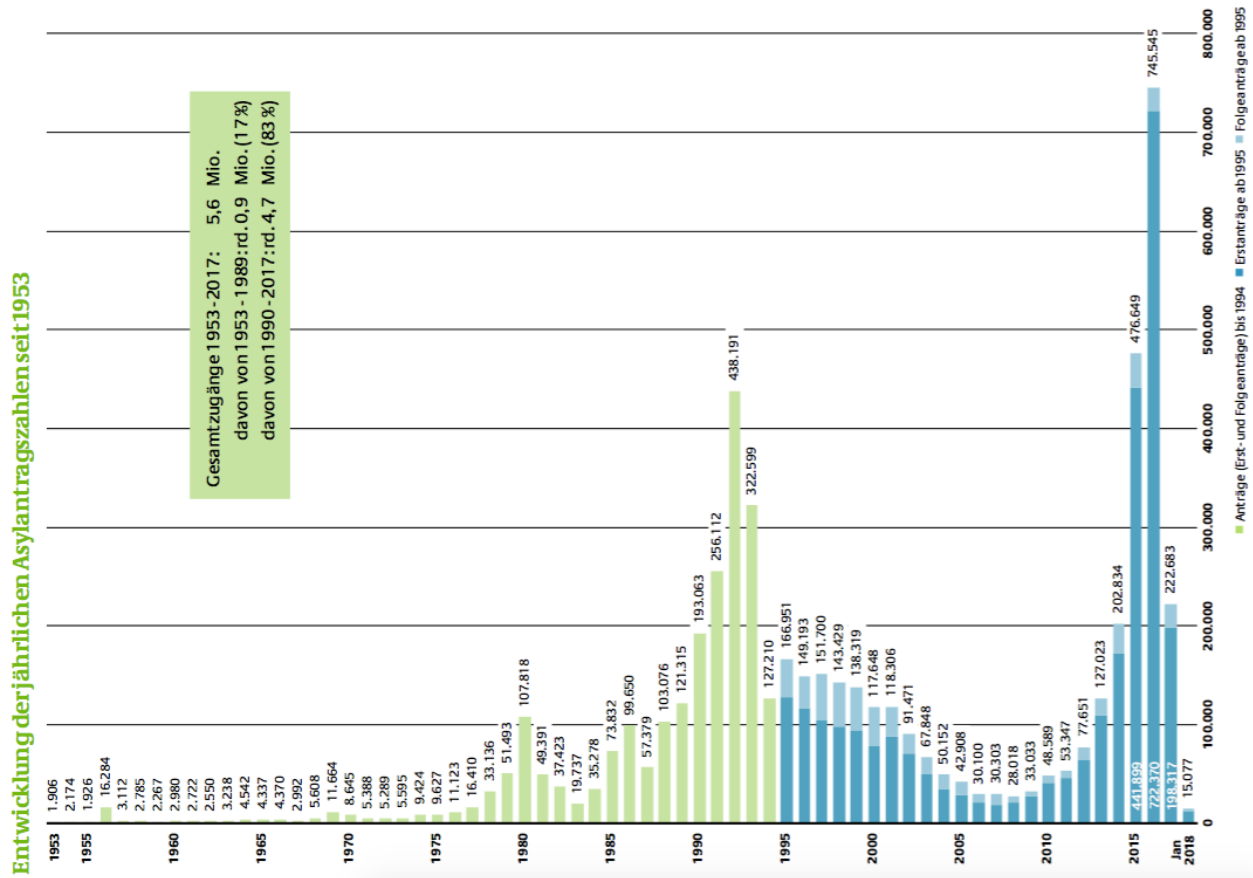
Towards a typological theory of movements of openness

The response of Germany during the 2015-2016 refugee ‘crisis’ thus provided the opportunity to explore the ways in which representations and perceptions of the displaced may influence policy-making towards openness. These rare, yet possible movements of openness have seldom been analyzed. Their further study is nonetheless called for, as a better understanding of their mechanisms and the roles of representations and perceptions therein may open new insight into how inclusiveness and openness towards refugees may be cultivated in the Global North. This project has suggested that both elites and societal actors may offer traction towards openness by (re)producing welcoming representations and perceptions of the displaced. Future research is needed to deepen the types and mixes of representations and perceptions involved in these contexts, and further assess the roles and effects of different actors in these processes. This project therefore sets the stage for a broader research agenda on the emergence and decline of movements of sympathy in the Global North.

¹³⁰ The discourses of domestic political opponents may have had negative effects on public opinion, although public support towards the displaced did not significantly erode until the events in Cologne. Support for the AfD grew during the fall of 2015, but the concerns of governing elites over social acceptance preceded the party’s breakthrough.

Appendix – Figures

Figure 1: Number of asylum applications in Germany since 1953



Source: BAMF 2018.

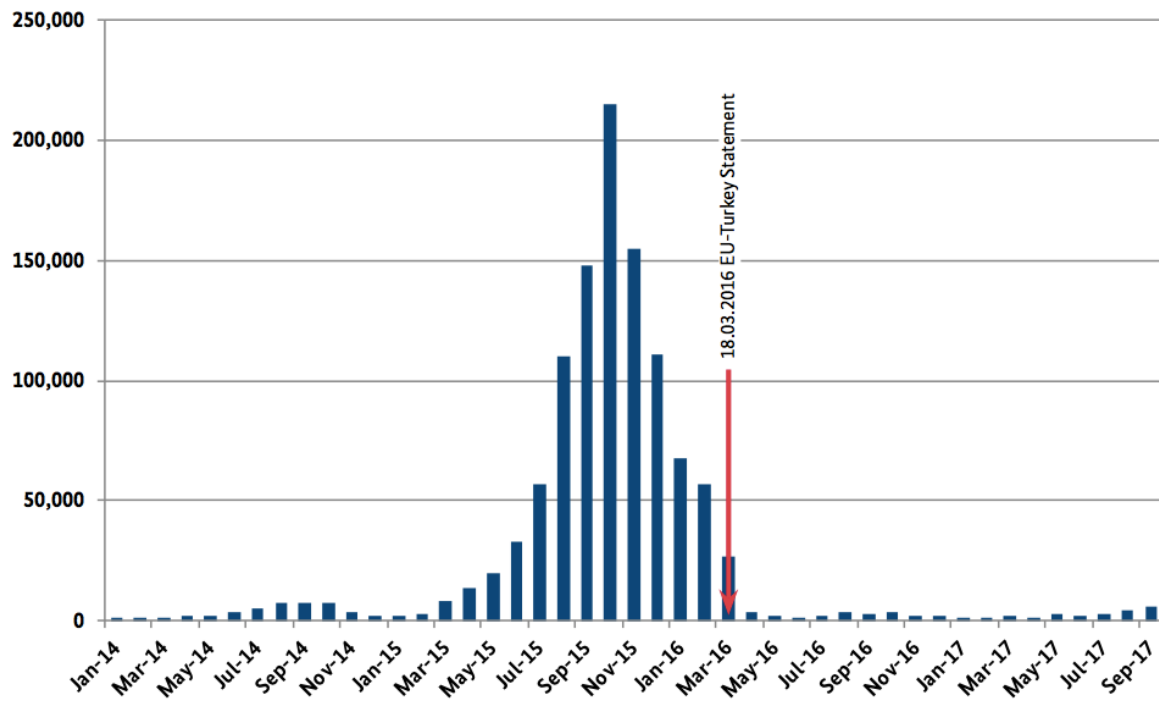
In green: Initial and follow-up applications until 1994

In dark blue: Initial applications since 1995

In light blue: Follow-up applications since 1995

Note: Considering backlogs in the processing of asylum applications in 2015 and 2016, the data presented in this figure should be read in conjunction with Figure 3.

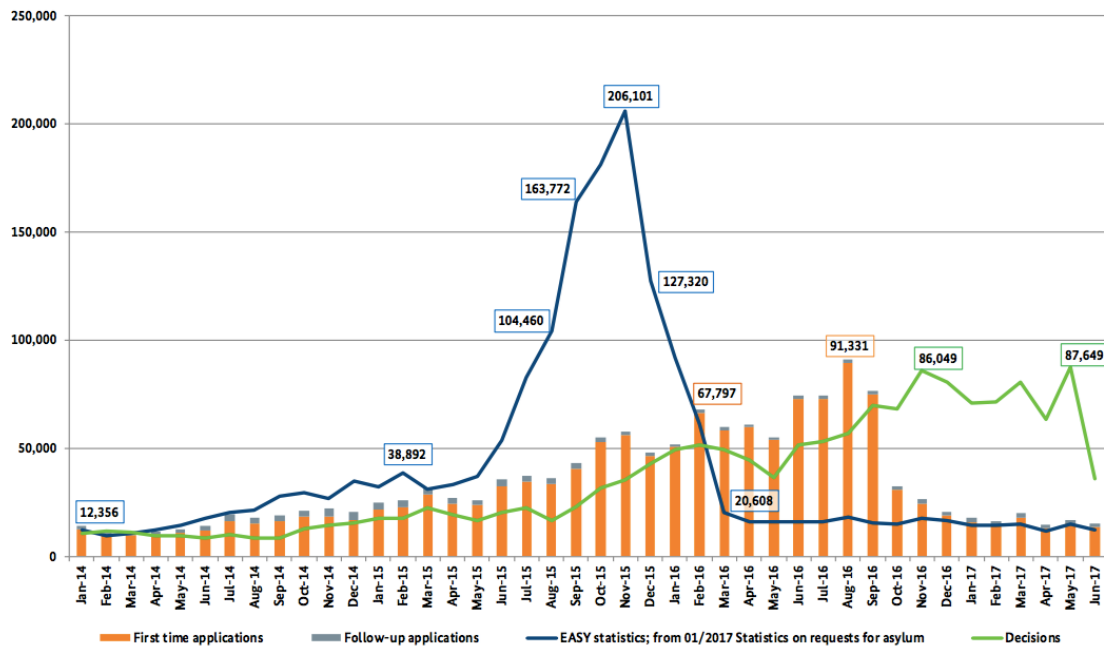
Figure 2: Arrivals to the Greek islands from Turkey, 2014-2017



Source: Frontex 2017 - Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics; see also COM 2017b: 3; *Eastern Mediterranean Route by sea covers Cyprus and Greece, the data refer to detections rather than the number of persons, as the same person may cross the external border several times.

Source: Grote 2018.

Figure 3: Monthly requests for asylum, asylum applications and decisions in Germany, 2014-2017



Source: Grote 2018.

Note: The EASY statistics refer to the number of individuals who expressed to the competent public authorities an intention to file an application for asylum (Grote 2018, 15). The discrepancy between the ‘first time applications’ (in orange) and the EASY statistics represent the backlog in processing asylum applications (Grote 2018, 17).

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