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CHAPTER 36

FRAMING THE SYRIAN  
REFUGEE

*Divergent Discourses in Three National Contexts*

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THIS chapter provides an understanding of the social construction of the “refugee crisis,” particularly of Syrian refugees, in three countries.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on 2015, the year in which perceptions of the current refugee emergency came to the forefront of public discourse in many countries, the analysis provided here disentangles the crisis discourse and shows its contextual formulation. Through a systematic analysis of the two largest national newspapers in three countries, the argument presented here opposes the assumptions about the representation of a refugee crisis often popularized by politicians and international media. Instead, this chapter shows that contradiction and uncertainty are the main building blocks in the construction of the refugee crisis in 2015.

By 2015, many European countries were declared to have reached full capacity and unable to receive more refugees, a process culminating in border closures. As images of undifferentiated masses of Third World refugees arriving illegally to the shores of Europe became an almost daily banality, the “refugee crisis” became a source of concern and popular condemnation for policy and politics at the local, national, and EU levels (Dahlgren 2016). While some of these public criticisms stressed that refugees are better received and settled in hosting countries that share similar cultural and religious backgrounds, a similar problematic was observed in neighboring countries who see refugees as competitors for jobs and as sources of social and cultural conflict. This chapter looks at the specific ways the crisis is constructed, contested, and dealt with in two of the neighboring countries which act as transit points for many refugees (Turkey and Jordan) and one of Europe’s most popular destination for refugees (Sweden).<sup>2</sup>

While the aim of the three case studies is not comparative, given the disparate stage of media development and freedoms in the three settings, it is important to account for the differences and similarities in media discourses in order to understand the process of framing the current refugee crisis and the associated responses such processes

of framing evoked. By analyzing the three case studies simultaneously, this chapter highlights the public discourses that shape the environments in which many refugees may be assessing their onward migration to Europe (in Jordan and Turkey) alongside an analysis of the discourses that influence their settlement and integration in European societies (Sweden in this case). As the analysis that follows shows, the three case studies demonstrate that media representations of the refugee crisis in general and the Syrian refugee in particular are simultaneously contradictory and complementary. Uncertainty about the position of the refugee in society, and the added confusion the heightened awareness of refugee presence brings about, leads to a sense of crisis understood largely as a crisis in meaning or in the ability to make sense of current conditions. In the end the Syrian refugee is constructed as an undesirable other, who is at times tolerated but is mostly considered a threatening presence.

News media have an influential role in shaping attitudes, thoughts and perceptions about a given issue. With regards to migration, negative media coverage was found to foster similarly negative public attitudes toward immigration (Crawley 2005) and motivate anti-immigrant sentiments (Balch and Balabanova 2014; Innes 2010; Rasinger 2010). At the same time, news coverage of migration, or any topic for that matter, cannot be simply understood as negative or positive (Binder and Allen 2015). Instead, research increasingly shows that news media are sites of contestation and, at times, contradictions. For example, in analyzing French newspaper coverage of immigration, Clare and Abdelhady (2016) find that newspapers portray a complex reality that is neither simply pro- nor anti-immigration and immigrants. Rather, the same newspaper can present contradictory attitudes toward the same group of people depending on context or type of coverage.

In more recent years, social media and citizen journalism have expanded the range of stories and challenged the monopoly of “mainstream media” over forms of representation. At the same time, mainstream media continues to provide a central source of public discourse which government officials and members of the publics still rely on to make sense of and decide on courses of action as events unfold (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). In a comparative analysis of European media coverage of the “refugee crisis,” Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) argue that the scale and speed of events taking place in 2015 support the argument for the importance of mainstream media as a source for publics and policymakers who lacked familiarity with the newly arriving refugees as they attempted to understand the nature and scale of the “crisis.” More recent research on developing countries also points to the relevance of mainstream media in verifying and amplifying perceptions of crises (see for example Mare 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

The largest two national daily newspapers were selected for each country. Coincidentally, they can be described as centrist and center-right in each context. While labels such as right, center, or left cannot be easily compared across national contexts, they are intended

to provide rough representation of different views within the same national context. Understanding that such labels need to be contextualized within their specific political climate, it suffices to say that at least one of the newspapers in each context was not pro-government. In Jordan, *al Rai* newspaper presents the government's official rhetoric, and often cites officials in dealing with the coverage of Syrian refugees. Information is gathered from government reports, and studies conducted by international organizations. *Al Ghad*, on the other hand, is one of the largest and oldest independent Arabic-language newspapers in the region, and at times presents arguments opposing those of the Jordanian government. In Turkey, *Zaman* (the newspaper with the largest circulation in Turkey) was right-leaning; the newspaper was openly Gülenistic, pro-Islamic, and provided a major source of opposition to the AKP ruling party until its recent takeover by the government.<sup>3</sup> *Hürriyet* is the second largest newspaper in Turkey and is categorized as providing mainstream secular coverage that also opposes the Islamic government. In Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter* is described as liberal, while *Svenska Dagbladet* is characterized as moderate. Over the last few decades, however, political affiliations have been reduced and there has been a change toward more market-driven journalism that focuses on newsworthiness rather than political affiliation among Swedish newspapers. Strömbäck and Nord (2008) refer to this change as part of the mediatization process which is characterized by professional journalistic values and the adoption of a media logic (what is newsworthy) as opposed to a political logic in news coverage (see also Nord 2008).

In Sweden, newspaper articles were collected using search words (asylum, refugee, Middle East) in a database of archived newspapers. For Jordan and Turkey, electronic archives were provided on the newspapers' website allowing for the use of similar search terms. In one case (*Al Rai* in Jordan) no such archive was available for the time frame for this study, which was compensated for by reading through each daily issue (see Table 36.1).

The analysis that follows utilizes frames for understanding the ways the different articles communicate specific aspects of the refugee crisis. Understood as a more general form of categorizing stories, Entman (1993, 52) defines media framing:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Table 36.1 Newspaper Coverage of Syrian Refugees

	Center	Right
Jordan	Al Ghad	Al Rai
Turkey	Hürriyet	Zaman
Sweden	Dagens Nyheter	Svenska Dagbladet

**Table 36.2 Thematic distribution of articles analyzed**

	Conflict	Human Interest (includes moral responsibility)	Economic Strain	Institutional Responsibility	Total
Jordan	52 (19%)	60 (22%)	111 (40%)	52 (19%)	275
Turkey	82 (33%)	85 (34%)	56 (23%)	24 (10%)	247
Sweden	37 (12%)	109 (36%)	8 (3%)	149 (49%)	303
Total	171 (21%)	254 (31%)	175 (21%)	225 (27%)	825

Research into media frames has demonstrated that news coverage relies on a variety of specific frames to communicate news to audiences, and that different frames can influence readers' or viewers' perceptions of public issues (for reviews see McCombs and Ghanem 2001; McCombs et al. 1997; Scheufele 1999). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) assert that media reports (on diverse topics) tend to fall within five specific frames: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility. In analyzing the articles collected for this chapter, these same frames were found to be of great relevance. However, morality was merged with human interest as the two frames often fused in the coverage of Syrian refugees.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the responsibility frame was often mixed with narratives calling for institutional reform in order to better put forward solutions to the perceived crisis. Finally, the frame of economic consequences was taken to refer specifically to economic strain caused by the presence of large numbers of refugees.

In Jordan, the articles were distributed almost evenly across three themes (conflict and competition, human interest, and institutional responsibility) with a larger portion (twice as big) of the articles addressing the economic strain brought about by the reception of Syrian refugees. In Turkey, two-thirds of the articles dealt with conflict and human interest evenly, with a third dealing mostly with economic strain and institutional responsibility. In Sweden, half of the articles discussed institutional responsibility with a particular emphasis on civil society initiatives, a little more than a third depicted the humanization of refugees, and a much smaller portion (one-tenth) dealt with conflict. Being the country with the highest economic standards, it is perhaps not surprising that a minimal number of articles in Sweden raised the concern that refugees are straining the economy (3 percent). Table 36.2 shows the distribution of the articles by theme and country.

## FRAME ONE: COMPETITION AND CONFLICT

Conflict as a frame speaks the most to the perception of a "refugee crisis" as it emphasizes tensions between individuals, groups, or institutions while reducing complex social

and political problems to simple conflicts (d'Haenens and de Lange 2001). Research on immigrants in western media confirms the overwhelming focus on conflict-filled (or hostility-themed) stories (Leudar et al. 2008, 188) where immigrants and immigration are foremost presented as a threat (Benson 2013; van Dijk 2000). The threat frame portrays immigrants threatening wage systems or taking jobs from domestic workers, bringing diseases, draining the welfare system, and depleting national resources (Benson 2013; Greenberg and Hier 2001; Leudar et al. 2008). Often included is some sort of security frame which relates immigration (and especially refugees) with criminality (Bradimore and Bauder 2011; Greenberg and Hier 2001; Leudar et al. 2008; Steimel 2009; Threadgold 2009). While my data shows that conflict is not the largest frame used for portraying Syrian refugees in the wake of the refugee crisis, many of the narratives within this frame parallel findings of previous research on the portrayal of immigrants and refugees.


## Jordan

In addition to reporting on criminal activities committed by Syrians, Jordanian newspapers mostly reflect on conflict in economic terms. Unlike articles discussing the strain on economic resources, this set of articles emphasizes competition between Syrians and Jordanians and stresses the economic threat of Syrian labor and investments to the Jordanian economy. For example, Syrian investments in Jordan, mostly in the restaurant industry, are typically presented as a challenge to Jordanian restaurants. Contrasting the rapid rate of growth of Syrian restaurants to the slow growth of their Jordanian counterparts, these articles also stress the challenges faced by Jordanian restaurant owners: “the reduction of the profit rate in the last period because of the increasing rate of wages, plus the increasing number of new restaurants lately.” Moreover, Syrian restaurant owners who had to apply for investment licenses, as well as Syrian investors in general, are portrayed as obtaining their licenses through fraud and bribery and thus engaging in illegal activities.<sup>5</sup> Economic competition and rising unemployment are also sources of conflict as portrayed by the newspapers, while Jordanian authorities have to enforce labor laws on the Syrian refugee population which saw one article reporting the Ministry of Labour closing down 3000 Syrian factories.

More frequently than discussing investors, the articles focusing on economic conflict and competition stress unemployment as the major factor threatening the well-being of Jordanian society. Syrians are largely unemployed in Jordan, and until the end of 2015 had no legal right to employment. The newspapers, in turn, discuss the willingness of Syrian refugees to work under substandard conditions such as for low wages, longer hours, and with no days off. We are reminded that these are conditions that Jordanian workers would not agree to and consequently employers prefer to employ Syrian refugees illegally. In the process, the threat of Syrian refugees stealing Jordanian jobs is established. Importantly, whether the Syrian refugee is portrayed as a fraudulent

investor or cheap manual worker, the contradictory images are offset by stressing the threat both pose to the Jordanian economy.

Syrian illegal labor is also presented in the phenomena of the street beggars. Under the title “The Numbers of Beggars in *el-Zarqa* Increases . . . and 50% of Them Are Syrians,” one article mentions that they are “embarrassing” to Jordanian passers-by. Child beggars are considered by the newspapers to be particularly bothersome and “their numbers have obviously increased with Syrian refugees.” One official is cited saying that “a lot of the beggars are there from same category who inhabit the tents, and they were deported [back to the camps] eventually.” The ability of government officials to quickly and firmly address conflict is an important feature in this set of articles. This firmness, however, is indirectly perceived as an inability to confront more real threats posed by Syrian refugees who: “have pushed some alien values and traditions onto our local committees.” The alien values alluded to in the article are never clearly stated and are left to the readers’ imagination to perceive.

While throughout 2015 Syrian refugees did not have the legal right to work in Jordan, in 2016 the EU and Jordan came to a partnership agreement that promised the strengthening of Jordan’s economic resilience in dealing with the refugee issue through aid packages. In return, Jordan was to create economic opportunities for Syrian refugees (European Council 2016). These economic opportunities are intended to provide an incentive for Syrian refugees to stay in Jordan, instead of risking their lives at sea with hopes of crossing over to Europe. In building up to the change in Jordanian policy toward the employment of Syrians, a small number of articles published at the end of 2015 (November and December) prepare the way by arguing that Syrian refugees can be utilized in the economic development of the country. For example, an article entitled “Prime Minister Updated on the National Campaign for Employment,” which was published in  had on November 19, mentions that the minister of labor argued that Jordan is facing “an exceptional challenge” that requires finding alternative solutions. Different from previous rhetoric that portrays an image of the Syrian refugee stealing Jordanian jobs, the article states that Jordan is facing its lowest unemployment rates in a ten-year period. As a result, the article moves to discuss proposals to change the conditions for employment for Syrian refugees, arguing that they have skills that can be utilized in fields that are in need of them such as education and healthcare. Additionally, a discussion of working with investors and motivating them to create opportunities for vocational training for refugees is also mentioned.

In sum, while stressing the threat posed by Syrian refugees in Jordanian society, largely due to economic competition, newspaper articles in this theme establish the ambiguity of the position of the Syrian refugee in Jordanian society: Is the refugee a wealthy (yet fraudulent) investor, an embarrassing street beggar, or an exceptionally skillful resource? While the articles may argue that all three types may present areas of conflict and threat, the contradictory imagery and lack of a coherent narrative increase uncertainty about Syrian refugees leading to conclusions of an impending crisis.

## Turkey

Conflict is portrayed along a few different axes in Turkish newspapers. Crimes committed by or against Syrians are common. Prostitution, for instance, is often associated with Syrian women in need of money. Some Syrians also take part in organizing illegal boat trips to Greece. On the other hand, local people tricking Syrians into moving into apartments about to be demolished, taking money for rent, and then disappearing is another instance of crime involving Syrians.

Anti-Syrian protests and rallies are also reported, reflecting conflict between Syrians and Turks. Some protests would start with a Syrian child getting into a fight with a Turkish child, a Syrian home being suspected of housing ongoing prostitution, or simply because the Syrian lifestyle disturbs the neighborhood. Different lifestyles are often portrayed as a form of disruption. For instance, in a *Hürriyet* article it is claimed that members of a Syrian family “walk at home topless and dance to loud music while the curtains are open,” whereas Turks would not even sit in their living rooms with their pajamas on. Somewhat echoing the sentiment in the previous example is one that addressed conflict and competition facing women specifically. In an article entitled “Wrong Syria Policies Darkened the Lives of Turkish and Syrian Women” in *Zaman*, Turkish women are described to be losing to Syrian women in the competition over attractiveness to men.

Syrian beggars are often stressed as “creating an unpleasant view” or “not suiting a touristic season.” For instance, in *Zaman*’s article “The Beggars in Taksim Do Not Leave Citizens Alone until They Get Money,” Syrian children are shown as disturbingly and even physically insisting on passers-by to give them money. In other articles, it is noted that beggars evoke religious feelings and play with Turkish emotions. *Zaman*, for instance, claims that “the metropolis has become the beggars’ city,” that Syrian beggars “pollute streets and alleys,” and that even the beauty of Istanbul’s tulips cannot cover it. Syrian children collecting recyclable materials in the streets or selling things on the busy roads during red lights are also found somewhat disturbing for both the view and the fact that they should be studying instead of engaging in such dangerous activity.

More so than Jordanian newspapers, the discussion of conflict and competition in their Turkish counterparts stresses the moral differences found between Turks and Syrian refugees. In other words, the conflict takes place in the moral realm and, as a result, can be understood as more immutable. According to the Turkish newspapers, Syrian children pollute the streets of Turkish cities, and Syrian women steal Turkish men from their wives. The threat of visual and biological pollution is clearly established in the articles. By contrast, in Jordanian cities Syrian beggars are a problem that can be dealt with and the moral difference is not as stark, as it is mostly left to the reader to establish.

## Sweden

The threat of terrorism and radicalization is the main axis around which conflict was represented in Swedish newspapers when discussing the refugee stream. The risk that



“Sweden’s generous refugee policy may be abused by terrorist organizations” (*Dagens Nyheter*, April 18, 2015), is echoed in the majority of articles within the conflict frame for 2015. There are numerous warnings that terrorists may be mixing within the refugee stream and that the expedited review process for asylum applications may increase the security threat, as migration board employees do not have the adequate resources to properly investigate the applicants. The threat is presented in mostly general terms and refers to an undifferentiated mass of refugees. One article in *Dagens Nyheter* attempts to explain to the reader the foundations of the security threat presented to Sweden as the author writes that:

Someone is currently sitting and planning a new terrorist attack on France, Germany, or perhaps on Sweden . . . There are many more that should be on the IS list of targets. One of them may be Sweden, due to the presence of Swedish military forces in northern Iraq, which acts as an adviser to the Kurdish forces that are against IS. That is something that could increase the terrorist threat from IS to Sweden

(*Dagens Nyheter*, November 11, 2015).

A smaller number of articles in Swedish newspapers highlight the conflict among the refugees themselves, describing religious antagonisms between Muslim and Christian refugees in particular as a threat to the refugees themselves and Swedish cultural and moral values.

In a way that is comparable to the coverage in Jordanian newspapers, the portrayal of the threat of Syrian refugees in Swedish mainstream newspapers stresses uncertainty and lacks the coherence one observes in Turkish news coverage. Articles from Swedish newspapers in this theme describe a threat that is abstract and often imagined, built on the foreignness of the refugee culture. While foreignness is not discussed at any length, it is often equated with Islam and associated with radicalization and terrorism. This foreignness strengthens the perceived threat, and the uncertainty it generates is interpreted as a crisis.

## FRAME TWO: REFUGEES AS HUMAN

Neuman et al. (1992) find the human interest frame to be, next to conflict, the second most common frame across a variety of news content. Valkenburg et al. argue that the human-interest media frame “brings an individual’s story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem” (1999, 551). By doing so, a human-interest frame describes the news in terms that personalize, dramatize and emotionalize the news. D’Haenens and de Lange (2001) find the human interest frame to be the frame most commonly used in their analysis of refugee coverage in Dutch newspapers. Similarly,

the human interest frame is the largest used among the newspaper articles analyzed for this project. As such, an understanding of how the personalized, dramatized, and emotionalized human interest frame depicts refugees is an important area of study.

## Jordan

The humanization of Syrian refugees in Jordanian newspapers is often subtle to discern. The general tendency in *Al Rai* is one that addresses Syrian refugees as an undifferentiated mass, emphasizing numerical patterns and therefore dehumanizing the individual refugees. A few exceptions portray individual Syrians expressing their experiences with displacement and quoting their own words. These exceptions still quote anonymous refugees. In one example, an article titled “From the Syrian Hell to the Security of the Jordanian Desert,” an anonymous female refugee is quoted saying “We saw hell (*jihanam*) in Syria.” The article, however, spends more space humanizing the Jordanian security forces in contrast to the Syrian hell. A Jordanian brigadier explains that “dealing with the Syrian crisis is getting more and more complicated as time goes on because of the high number of refugees that we had to deal with.” The article is more focused on conveying the complications brought about by a lengthy border, faced by members of the security forces who perform the difficult task of keeping Jordan safe. Examples of a similar self-congratulatory approach in other articles includes references to the ways members of the security forces “secure refugees in the camps prepared for them,” and “offer medical services and the necessary treatment alongside the royal medical service staff.” Others emphasize that the refugees arrived after being wounded in Syria, and how therefore the security officers have to quickly transfer them to hospitals. Such articles often include photos of soldiers and refugees within the same frame, mostly as the soldiers are helping women and children. Extending a helping hand is not confined to security personnel but includes the general Jordanian population as well: “Jordanians Are Sharing Bread and Water with the Syrian Refugees” is an example presenting the friendly connection between Syrian refugees and the Jordanian people. It is noteworthy to mention that almost all the articles that are categorized under this frame also convey a sense of victimizing Syrian refugees.

While *Ghad* shared a similar approach of victimization of Syrian refugees that called for the benevolence of Jordanian citizens, the newspaper does not emphasize the heroic role played by the national guard and tends to highlight the human predicament faced by Syrian refugees instead. A discussion of the extreme poverty that many Syrians find themselves in, with vivid personal narratives, repeatedly features in this group of articles. In one example, a father has to tie the torsos of his children in their sleep so that they do not wake up hungry in the middle of the night due to the shortage of food. In another, an elderly woman’s narrative is discussed in detail showing how she fled Syria leaving behind all her belongings in order to avoid seeing her children getting radicalized and partaking in militia activities. The article stresses, however, that

seventy-year old Khalida can only survive financially given the donations provided by a Jordanian charity organization. At the same time, she commutes daily for an hour each way to attend basic literacy classes that are offered by a different NGO specifically for refugees in Jordan.

Similar to the trend in human interest stories observed by d’Haenens and de Lange (2001) in Dutch news coverage of refugees, the humanization of Syrian refugees in Jordanian newspapers relies on depictions of victimization, limited agency despite acts of endurance and perseverance, and moral responsibility on part of the host population toward their protection. While the stories make clear that Jordanians are stepping in to help their Syrian brothers and sisters, the articles quickly shift to stress that the moral responsibility is a global one—which is discussed later under the responsibility frame. While Syrian refugees are often referred to as neighbors or brothers and sisters who are requesting the help of Jordanians, the Jordanian citizen/culture/state that is capable of meeting its moral obligation toward the Syrian victim (whose morality was already put into question using the conflict frame) is positioned in hierarchical binary vis-à-vis the refugee. In short, victimization and othering are important features of the group of articles categorized under human interest in Jordanian newspapers. At the same time, a self-congratulatory attitude stressing the moral responsibility of Jordanian citizens/state/culture is stressed, which simultaneously alludes to a global moral crisis and a Jordanian economic crisis that is further depicted under the institutional responsibility theme.

## Turkey

Similar to Sweden, the humanization of refugees is the most dominant frame used in Turkish newspapers in 2015. Humanization features in most of the Turkish articles included in this analysis, including those which are eventually categorized under a different frame. These articles seem to evoke a sense of compassion and sympathy for Syrian refugees by putting their lives in a context of displacement and loss. Examples of humanization include featuring owners of successful Syrian restaurant chains or bookstores, and families struggling with the loss of their family members or poor life conditions. One interesting example focuses on as Syrian fathers [redacted] man’s “The War Hits Fathers the Most”). Generally, this set of articles tends to address Syrians as individuals, instead of a general mass which only leads to their dehumanization. While the example of fathers was only mentioned once, this set of articles seem to present a strong focus on the life conditions of children, especially on the streets, with the Syrian children featured needing to work instead of being able to go to school. In one example, an article in Zaman entitled “Seven Differences between a Turkish Beggar and a Syrian Refugee” calls on Turks to be more compassionate toward Syrians as they beg on the streets because they have no other choice. Turkish beggars, on the other hand, can get jobs, as unlike Syrians they do not need any additional documentation for the right to work.

Somewhat similar to Jordan's newspapers featuring the heroic role played by the security forces, humanization in Turkish newspapers features examples of locals who are getting involved with refugee issues and offering helping hands. Humanitarian gestures are stressed by Turkish newspaper coverage of groups of Turks who "take to their duty and host brothers not only coming from Syria but also from Iraq, regardless of their religion, language, ethnic roots, and sect" (*Hürriyet* "The Minister Nabi Avci: Syrian Children will Graduate Knowing Two Languages"). Of note is that such helping hands are presented "in the face of the so-called democracy of European states and the US, their misleading talks on human rights, we are doing the most humane/humanitarian help" (*Zaman*). Humanization of refugees goes hand in hand with the humanization of their saviors. Referring to border patrol officers, coast guard personnel, and doctors who save Syrians in various moments, many articles stress the importance of Turks in saving the lives of Syrian refugees. Many of these articles evoke the nationalist Turkish history thesis of 1932, placing the Turks into the center of world civilization and humanitarianism. As such, helping Syrian refugees is an act that is dictated not as a result of the predicament of the refugees themselves but more **as dictated** by the nationalist burden of greatness. In the process, the hierarchical relationship between the Syrian victim and Turkish savior is clearly established. Importantly, and similar to the discussion in Jordanian newspapers, the crisis is stressed as relating to the global order whereby wealthier countries are refusing to lend a helping hand in line with their moral ideals.

## Sweden

Articles within this frame, often including photos of women and children and interviews of individuals arriving to Sweden, describe the lives of people seeking refugee status, their stories of why they needed to escape, life in their homeland, their journey, where they want to go, hopes for the future, and their frustration with the Swedish bureaucracy. In an example:

After 20 days on the run from Syria, Ahmed Almufti has finally reached his goal. Together with his cousin Ahmed Idris, wife Suheila Mandil and their children Ather, 8 years, Hana 4 years and Sena 1 year, he has walked on foot, traveled with unregistered taxis and train. In Hungary, they lived one week in the forest surrounded by police, in Denmark they occupied the train tracks until the police let them continue into Sweden

("After 20 Days on the Run, Some Days without Water and Food,"

**Dagens** *Nyheter*, September 11, 2015).

In a similar vein, this group of articles describes the individuals behind the efforts made by civil society and private initiatives that work in assisting refugees, telling stories

about retirees, former refugees, and children of immigrants helping out. Here is one example:

Susanna Charboti was one of all the Swedish people who felt a growing frustration. Should she do something and in that case what? For her it fell into place one day when her eyes saw refugees arrive at Stockholm Central station. The need of simple medical care was evident

("Healthcare at Central Station: The Important Thing Is That We Do Not Get Stuck in Powerlessness," *Dagens Nyheter*, December 24, 2015).

This set of articles also debates and stresses the unfair and exclusive systems in place throughout Europe, emphasizing that legal and moral responsibility dictates focusing on refugees' international rights, the right to free movement, and human rights, as well as the moral responsibility of giving people the same dignity as citizens with a passport. This set of articles includes a number of testimonies and observations of the chaos and sadness in the central train stations in Malmö and Stockholm when the arriving numbers were at their highest. Many of these articles make historical comparisons, for example with 1930s Germany or refugees from the Balkans to Sweden in the 1990s. Here is an example:

Can we really stand for the democratic and compassionate values if we do not do something about the current situation? Is a Syrian and Eritrean life really worth so much less than Swedish in today's globalized world? We are already a hardened social climate, with winds reminiscent of Europe's worst history. Do we live in a society where human life has so little value, or where solidarity and compassion mean so little?

("We Need To Open Our Border—Also for Our Own Sake," *Dagens Nyheter*, September 15, 2015)

These articles try to counter the image of refugees as a cost and a strain for Swedish institutions by emphasizing the importance of seeing them as individuals with a right to a good life, and as a resource to Swedish society. Furthermore, these articles stress the importance of not seeing asylum-seekers as one undifferentiated group or dividing them into bad and good immigrants. At the same time, refugees are represented as utterly grateful for arriving to a place of safety for families and children: "Sweden is the paradise, even if it is difficult to find a place to live" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, December 9, 2015); because, as one refugee is quoted saying, "Swedes are truly kind and respect other people" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, December 31, 2015).

### FRAME THREE: ECONOMIC STRAIN

In discussing the framing of economic consequences, d'Haenens and de Lange (2001) explain that this frame is often used to clarify the economic consequences of an issue to the public and as a result involve the public more closely with the issue.

## Jordan

The straining of resources features in the majority of news articles in *Al Rai*, and the problem covers almost all institutions. The education of Syrian children is discussed in terms of numbers that are considered to be endlessly and rapidly increasing. References to the numbers of Jordanian schools that cater to Syrian children, numbers of night schools (or schools that have to offer a second shift specifically for Syrian children), and numbers of additional schools that need to be built all construct an image of unbearable strain on the educational system: “Governmental schools are facing unprecedented pressures due to the presence of 130 thousand Syrian students” (*Al Rai*, August 13, 2015), and two weeks later the number rises to 140 thousands (*Al Rai*, August 31, 2015). In addition to the overwhelming numbers, there are frequent references to schools as crowded, the quality of education as dropping, and violence as rising among the children. The sense of crisis is reflected in statements such as “the education provided in the governmental schools has become dangerous without the separation between the Syrian and the Jordanian students.” Occasionally, articles feature concern for the well-being of Syrian children by encouraging the education of girls and nutrition for schoolchildren in general.

Draining Jordanian resources and especially water is a recurrent theme in the articles included under this frame. Detailed statistics are provided to explain the amount of resources spent on Syrian refugees in terms of electricity, water supply, heating, gas consumption, winter clothes, and food subsidies. Syrian consumption rates of bread and water are often compared to those of Jordanians. A few articles stress that *Al Zaʿatari* camp has to be relocated given its location on a water reservoir. The articles generally depict Syrian refugees as overconsumers who often abuse Jordan’s limited resources. Almost every single discussion of economic strain mentions that the high cost of assisting Syrian refugees is being paid for by the Jordanian state despite its limited resources. Details of international aid and budgets of UNHCR and other organizations are provided in complicated ways leaving the reader with a simple conclusion that the budgets are limited and that Jordan is forced to pay the difference. The representation of the burdensome other, the Syrian refugee, is further strengthened when related to the humanitarian discourse of victimization and destitution, and the conflict frame of alien values.

In sum, the theme of economic strain, which is the largest within Jordanian news articles in 2015, stresses a sense of urgency through combining danger with complex statistical descriptions. Depicting a scene where institutions, budgets, and natural resources are all overwhelmed and overstretched, Jordanian mainstream newspapers accentuate a form of public anxiety toward the presence of Syrian refugees.

## Turkey

Syrian refugees are often cited as straining the Turkish economy by increasing unemployment and raising rents. Although rarely stated directly, articles dealing with

economic strain regularly mention that Syrian refugees “definitely have an impact” on the increasing economic stress. For example, an article by *Hürriyet* on February 2, 2015 argues that unemployment rates rouse as a result of Syrian residents. While increasing unemployment is repeated a few times with reference to statistics, Syrians’ needs for education and healthcare are often addressed by featuring the inauguration of new schools and healthcare facilities which also strain the government’s budget.

The ambiguity of Turkish news articles within this frame resembles the ambiguity of Jordanian articles in the conflict frame, both leaving the reader to establish their own version of truth based on incomplete information and passing remarks on the certainty of economic burden and moral corruption simultaneously. Similar to articles depicting conflict in the Jordanian mainstream press, articles citing economic strain in Turkish mainstream newspapers lack coherent narratives, which ultimately increase uncertainty about the presence of Syrian refugees, leading to conclusions of an impending crisis.

## Sweden

A very small number of articles within the Swedish newspapers tackle the economic problems associated with the refugee stream. Accounting for the fact that Sweden spends more than other European countries on each refugee due to large welfare programs and for the unprecedented number of unaccompanied minors shapes the contours of the debate within this frame. These arguments are often related to the need for an expedited track to labor market integration and, at times, the need to limit the number of refugees arriving in Sweden, concluding that “the committed migration policy will not be maintained for any length of time” (*Svenska Dagbladet*, October 2, 2015). As such the economic debate, while present in Swedish newspapers, ends up resembling the debate for the need for institutional reform, which is integral within Swedish discussions of refugee reception. At the same time, the sense of crisis is maintained through the conclusion that drastic measures need to be introduced in order to meet the challenges of the crisis.

## FRAME FOUR: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Referred to as the responsibility frame by other authors, this frame presents the issue “in such a way that the responsibility for causing or solving a problem lies with the government, an individual or group” (d’Haenens and de Lange 2001: 850). In the analysis provided here, much of the responsibility lies with the government(s) especially when it comes to causing the problem. The articles here often stress the need to share responsibility among the different members of the international community. Frequently however, civil society institutions are portrayed as sharing the responsibility for solving the problems.



## Jordan

Institutional focus in both Jordanian newspapers is often presented in a neutral voice, but still leads the reader to believe that the Jordanian government can do more to curb the refugee crisis and limit the negative influence on Jordanian society and economy. The demand for the government to do more refers to imposing more restrictions to curb the economic cost of Syrian refugees and their negative impact on Jordanian society. A small number of articles focuses on other countries, especially Turkey and the EU, and highlights their efforts to enforce more border controls and limit a further influx of Syrians. With regards to the focus on Turkey, the articles stress border controls and the lack of legal or refugee status for Syrians. For example, designating Syrians as guests in Turkey as opposed to legally recognized refugees is discussed in a number of articles, arguably justifying the denial of legal refugee status to Syrians in Jordan as well. Noteworthy is the emphasis on Turkey's budget for refugee efforts and the additional assistance the country receives from Europe in return for restricting their journey across the Mediterranean. Perhaps toward a more humanitarian end, some articles criticize the return of refugees from Turkey back to Syria despite the ongoing war. For example, "Hundreds of refugees are crossing the borders going back to Syria."

A large portion of articles discussing the responsibility for Syrian refugees focuses on how Jordan is carrying the burden on behalf of the international community and often makes explicit calls for other countries to share the cost. Specific aid packages are discussed in some detail and resettlement processes are highlighted to show exemplary incidents when other countries share the responsibility. As already mentioned, toward the end of 2015 and in preparation for the agreement with the EU, a handful of articles addressing institutional reform in Jordan more directly focused on the need to legalize Syrian workers in order to regularize (and tax) their wages and therefore limit their harm to Jordanian workers. Even discussions of child labor are reported from that perspective.

Overall, the discussion of responsibility stresses that Jordan is not backing down from its intent to help Syrian refugees already within its borders. A Muslim sense of responsibility to others in need, and specifically the concept of almsgiving, are sometimes mentioned to stress the importance of Jordanian benevolence in the face of God. Historical explanations of the way Jordan has constructed a self-image of being a safe haven for various groups of refugees in the region, and Palestinians in particular, are also used to stress the ways Jordan always extends a helping hand to their neighbors. Similar to the humanization frame, all of these draw attention to the moral high ground Jordan wishes to be placed in and strengthen the self-congratulatory narrative of acting responsibly even at times of crisis.

## Turkey

Bearing in mind that the two Turkish newspapers in this study held antigovernmental stances in 2015, the small number of articles categorized under the responsibility



frame use Syrian refugees in Turkey to criticize the government and its actions toward them and the Turkish people more generally. Employment concerns are featured in a few articles which provided criticism to the government for making the employment of foreigners (Syrians) easier, despite the increasing unemployment among Turkish citizens; there is also a need to tax them. Others provide a different kind of criticism, explaining that if designated as guests then Syrians should not be allowed to beg on the streets of Turkish cities, but instead should be offered more hospitality. References to specific cases of arrests of child beggars are highlighted to critique the AKP government. An interesting example refers to the use of Syrian camp refugees in political rallies where the government is criticized for leaving them stranded on the streets following a rally. In sum, this group of articles reports on Syrian refugees in a way that strengthened the existing opposition and perceptions of the government's lack of competence, which arguably augments a sense of crisis when discussing issues related to institutional responsibility.

## Sweden



While a major focus in the articles discussing refugees in relation to Swedish institutions concerns institutional exhaustion, especially during autumn 2015 when the numbers of arrivals peaked, the debate is mainly focused around the need for the integration of refugees into the Swedish system and the extent of responsibility that has been taken on by civil society organizations. On the need for integration, this group of articles deals with access to the labor market (minimum wages), and the refusal of some municipalities to take refugees. One article argues for the need to reduce the minimum wage in order to provide employment opportunities for refugees, and directly critiques the unions' strong protectionist discourse, stating:

Prerequisites for negotiations sprout and are interpreted fundamentally different by different actors. Sweden has labor shortages in skilled occupations. At the same time, many low-skilled, especially foreign-born, have no job. A growing economy is a precondition for increasing employment. If we fail in the integration of refugees, where the work is the key, this poses risk to the welfare and cohesion of the country

(“The Unions’ Blind Spot,” *Dagens Nyheter*, December 23, 2015).

Debating whether Sweden “has more room,” the focus of the article quickly shifts to the municipalities, county councils, and the Migration Board's concern over the lack of space in the asylum accommodation, long waiting periods in asylum cases, as well as criticism of the uneven distribution of asylum cases across the country.

A group of articles focuses on political reforms, decisions, and political turns from the government relating to budget changes to support the reception of refugees extracted from international aid budgets. Furthermore, there are discussions of the proposals to

 reform refugee policies such as  by reducing the number of permanent residence permits, instituting more restrictive family immigration policies, and imposing border controls (all of which were later implemented by the beginning of 2016). These reforms are intended to “create breathing space in the Swedish refugee reception,” after “Sweden undertook the largest refugee operation in its modern history during the autumn months” (*Dagens Nyheter*, November 25, 2015).

The articles relating to civil society (NGOs, new private initiatives, religious groups, etc.) discuss the role it took during the month when most people arrived into Sweden, coordinating and arranging the reception of people when they arrived in Sweden. For example, some articles discuss the organizations and individuals who helped in finding sleeping places for refugees when the Migration Board could not, and who helped in creating a meaningful life for the people waiting for asylum. There are articles that highlight how civil society makes up for the flaws in the Swedish bureaucratic system when it comes to integration in questions of language acquisition, building avenues to social integration, and learning about Swedish norms. One example relates to the inability of the Swedish bureaucracy to deal with those in transit:

Just a few days ago, there was a new spontaneous voluntary initiative, a key player for the newly arrived refugees and the hub of the reception of refugees in transit on the way to Finland and Norway. No one could imagine that Sweden would become a transit country. The entire organization of society is built for those who come here to seek asylum here and not travel on. When some refugees do not want it, it suddenly becomes illegal to stay here



Sweden Became a Transit Country—Then the Voluntary Stands for the Safety Net,” *Dagens Nyheter*, October 3, 2015).

In the Swedish context, the sense of crisis is most clearly detected through the discussion of institutions (which is also the largest theme among the articles for this study). These articles depict a situation where Sweden was largely unprepared to receive such large numbers of refugees arriving in a relatively short period of time. The institutions end up in a state of crisis, unable to cope with the demands of bureaucratically managing and assisting those who came to Sweden seeking help. The unprecedented numbers challenge the system in different ways (lack of available beds, shortage of personnel working with migration, absent systems that deal with special needs such as transit, among others). For example, labor unions being unwilling to negotiate minimum wages to facilitate integration to the labor market, or municipalities refusing to take on a fair share of asylum-seekers, only heightens the sense of crisis as it uncovers problems with Swedish institutions that are an integral part of Swedish identity and welfare. Calling for the closure of the border with Denmark (where most asylum-seekers travel through before reaching Sweden) is offered as the only solution to the crisis, and the absence of a strong public discourse challenging this conclusion speaks to the extent to which the Swedish public shares a view of an unprecedented crisis that requires such an extreme measure.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Competition and conflict is often understood as the most dominant frame in newspaper coverage of refugees. In this analysis, alongside the economic consequences and strain frame, it is taken to be the frame most closely portraying the crisis discourse. While a popular frame in the articles analyzed, it is important to observe the different ways conflict is represented. In Jordan, conflict is based on Syrian illegal activity that gives them an unfair economic advantage when compared to Jordanians. In Turkey, conflict is similarly based on criminal or illegal activities, but different cultural traditions are also used to highlight the distance between Turks and Syrians. In Sweden, the discourse shifts completely to address looming fears of terrorism and radicalization within the refugee stream. Importantly, the evidence found here suggests that while significant, this frame is not the most dominant in news coverage of refugees at the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015. At the same time, the ambiguities of unfair economic competition, cultural differences, or pending terror attacks (the dominant arguments in Jordan, Turkey, and Sweden respectively) depict a situation of uncertainty and contribute to a sense of crisis as one is left unable to make sense of the unfolding events.

Human interest stories feature prominently in all three contexts, albeit with different meanings. In Jordan, the strategy is used to highlight the concern of government institutions and interest in dealing with the crisis in a more humane way. In Turkey, the humanization of Syrian refugees quickly gives way to their victimization and the humanization of the Turkish saviors. Emphasis is drawn on the greatness of the Turkish civilization and the importance of living up to the expectations that come with such greatness. In Sweden, the centrist newspapers utilize humanization to set themselves apart from the ultra-right unpopular (yet gaining in popularity) discourse. In itself, this theme does not necessarily convey a crisis discourse, but when analyzed in a context of conflict or threat or both and economic strain, articles in this group add to the sense of uncertainty and inability to discern a stance toward the presence of Syrian refugees in increasing numbers. Such uncertainty leads the way in constructing a sense of crisis that urgently needs to be interpreted and dealt with.

Economic strain is the frame most clearly communicated in Jordan. As the country received the equivalent of 10 percent of its population as arriving refugees in the span of four years—in addition to the existing refugee populations from Iraq, Palestine, and to lesser extents Sudan and Eritrea—it is understandable that the burden is substantial especially when taking Jordan's limited natural resources into consideration. Besides the financial burden, emphasis is placed on depicting cultural differences that shape wasteful consumption of food and water, thereby contributing to making Syrian refugees less desirable and more othered. In the Turkish context, refugees are considered to be straining the economy by aggravating unemployment and rents. In Sweden, the economic strain is largely debated with an interest in institutional reform and a call to limit the number of refugees arriving in the country. The ambiguities in which the argument

for economic strain is made in the three contexts, however, directly relate to a sense of crisis in meaning that is similar to the one observed within the conflict theme. Jordanian and Turkish newspapers do not explain the actual processes of economic strain. Instead, they allude to consumption habits or claim obscure co-relationships that only communicate the need to act urgently to address the impending crisis.

Finally, the fourth frame addressing institutional responsibility or reform reflects the similar divide between the newspapers. In Jordan, the government is portrayed as more efficient and humane in dealing with Syrian refugees than the wealthier Turkey. In Turkey, the newspapers criticize the government for abusing Syrian refugees and inadequately meeting their needs. Civil society organizations are represented as stepping in and filling the gaps in meeting the needs of refugees. The role of civil society organizations is also emphasized in the Swedish newspapers. Institutional responsibility is the theme most clearly depicting the discussions around crisis in the Swedish context, with remarks to a suffocating social pressure (and hence the need for a breathing space on the border) stressing the need for urgent and extreme forms of action.

The analysis of the four frames in the three countries highlights some important aspects of media representation of the refugee crisis of 2015. Swedish newspapers are less concerned with the economic strain brought about with the arrival of refugees, and more emphasis is placed on the need to integrate them into the job market. Jordanian and Turkish newspapers, however, emphasize the cost and economic competition presented by the large masses of cheap refugee labor. Instead of conflict and competition, Swedish newspapers are more focused on the threat of terrorism increased by the reception of refugees. At the same time, Swedish coverage contributes a large proportion toward the humanization of refugees in ways that counter the economic strain and, at times, cultural threat. Human interest stories are by far a more regular feature within the two Swedish newspapers than Jordanian and Turkish ones. When utilized, human interest stories in Jordanian and Turkish newspapers often stress the role played by locals (individual heroes or a national great civilization) in face of a global human crisis.

Importantly, in comparing the discourses in the three contexts, despite their disparate media institutions, state of economic development, proportion of Syrian refugees received, and general attitudes toward them, the analysis provided here highlights that the “refugee crisis” of 2015 is constructed around uncertainties and inability to fathom the demands and consequences of such inflows of large numbers of people. Arguments presenting conflicts and economic strains are either contradictory or unsupported but stress the need for urgent interventions. Similarly, discussions of institutional responsibility underscore that society in general, and governments in specific, were caught unprepared to deal with the groups of people who were flowing in seeking asylum. The humanization of refugees, while providing a strong basis for supporting the refugees, can contribute to a sense of crisis as it strengthens the uncertainty and ambiguities toward refugees who are still constructed as both an abstract and concrete threatening other.

## NOTES

1. Following the Syrian popular uprisings in 2011, the subsequent civil war and the rise of the Islamic State, large numbers of refugees, mostly from Syria and Iraq, sought asylum in neighboring countries and many made their way to Europe leading to a public debate on what was termed the refugee crisis. I use the term refugee crisis to denote the construction of a sense of urgency within the receiving countries as a result of the influx of a large number of refugees.
2. Jordan and Turkey are not countries of settlement for Syrian refugees and do not legally recognize them as refugees. In Turkey, Syrians have temporary protection status, which grants them access to work, health care, and education. In Jordan, educational and health care services are provided to Syrian refugees based on a memorandum of understanding signed between UNHCR and the government, but access constitutes a major challenge (Achilli 2016).
3. As a result of the newspaper's anti-government stance, it was taken over by the government in March 2016 and was later closed by decree four months later (Cunningham 2016).
4. d'Haenens and de Lange (2001, 850) explain that "the morality frame adds a religious or moral charge to an event, problem or subject." The religious charge was seldom observed in the articles referred to in this analysis, perhaps because all but one of the newspapers (Zaman) are secular in nature. The moral charge, whenever strong, was often used in human interest stories.
5. Syrian investors are also considered to have lied about the amount of capital they invest. The newspaper cited a member in the *Mafreq* chamber of commerce: "The real capital for those investors is between 4–10 thousand dinars, despite that the investment law stated that the capital should be not less than 50 thousand dinars minimum."

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