

Refugees Welcome? A Discursive Analysis of German *Willkommenskultur* in Crisis

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## The “European” Refugee Crisis: An Introduction

A report released by the UN Human Rights Commission in June 2015 concluded that, largely because of “persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations,” forced human displacement has reached unprecedented levels and rates of growth worldwide in recent years (UNHCR, 2015, 2). Of the some 59.5 million and ballooning number of forcibly displaced persons around the globe, around seventy-seven percent of refugees come from source countries located in the Middle-East and throughout Africa, and a staggering fifty-three percent of all refugees come from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia (UNHRC, 2015, 13-14). Moreover, the majority of the global refugee population—in particular those originating from war torn and impoverished parts of the Middle East and Africa—have sought refuge in neighboring countries whose political and economic situations are often similarly unstable, leaving developing countries to bear the responsibility of sheltering some eighty-six percent of the total refugee population (UNHRC, 2015, 15). Considering the grim reality of contemporary global displacement trends, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres starkly proclaimed that “[the world is] witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before” (UNHRC, 2015, 3).

With the global scale and profundity of the refugee crisis in clear view, one may easily wonder: what exactly makes the modern crisis of global displacement a uniquely European concern? Why are news stories covering the crisis often classified under European headings and so frequently explained in reference to their European impacts? Clearly, the ongoing refugee crisis driven largely by social unrest and political turmoil in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa has consequently catalyzed polarizing debates over the responsibility of European

countries and their respective citizenries to cohesively and effectively respond to skyrocketing numbers of displaced migrants crossing their borders; the wave of exiled peoples seeking safe haven in European states has swelled to record highs and, so the narrative reads, has severely strained the institutional capacity of European countries and the European Union to accept and accommodate migrants. In 2015 alone, over one million migrants fled their home countries entrenched in boundless violent conflict and state insolvency and relocated into various European nation-states, with Germany being the top recipient (BBC, 2016). Being this far from the epicenter of the global migrant dilemma, contemporary Europe has declared itself to be mired in a refugee crisis of its own sorts, one that is deeply rooted in and inextricably linked to the global context of displacement but is nevertheless distinctly and categorically European. What accounts for this notable difference in analytical treatment of the refugee issue is precisely what I intend to call into question here.

In short, I propose that the so-called “European refugee crisis” is fundamentally a political one which is based in and reflective of a deeper crisis of European and, inversely, refugee identity. The media narratives tracing the contours of the crisis, the history of mass migration into and among European countries, and the debates such mass migration trends have provoked, serve as ideal case studies for scholars and students of European identity as it manifests in the realm of public discourse. In short, the double-edged sword of identity politics—defined as the large-scale mobilization of a group identity for public recognition—and notions of proper “Europeanness” are central to Europe’s treatment of the refugee question and, inversely, refugees’ attempts to “integrate” into their host countries, both at the level of mass public opinion and elite dialogue. The conflict playing out in the European public sphere revolves on one hand around the ways in which refugees are fighting to articulate their claims in a language

that enables them to be recognized and belong in Europe. On the other hand, opponents of immigration are similarly framing their disapproval of liberal immigration policy in identitarian language. The crisis therefore raises compelling questions for the European citizenry, political leaders, and media figures alike. At the most fundamental level, what does it mean to be European and, in the same vein, who has a right to belong in the shared sociocultural space that is collectively recognized as Europe? How are perceptions of incoming refugees and established migrant communities shaped and framed in transnational public discourses and interpreted through local, regional, and national lenses? Who claims agency in playing the game of boundary maintenance—constructing, interpreting, instrumentalizing and proliferating said identities? Is a countervailing discourse outside of the mainstream media emerging, one that is led by migrants themselves seeking to reassert, challenge, contradict, or otherwise engage with existing portrayals of “foreign” minorities in Europe and construct a sphere of belonging for themselves within the European fold? If so, what facets of migrant identity are migrants invoking, rebuking, re-interpreting, or otherwise addressing in their “fight to belong” in Europe today?

I have addressed such questions throughout the course of my research, which is both descriptive and explanatory in nature. To narrow my focus, I have exclusively considered the case study of Germany and conducted extensive discourse analysis of materials produced by German language media outlets. My intention therein is twofold: first, insofar as Germany is the leading recipient of refugees of all EU member states, I suspect that immigration policy and discourse surrounding refugees is a particularly salient political issue to the population; second, having been inundated with English language media coverage surrounding the refugee crisis, I believe that exclusively considering German language primary sources renders a sort of etic

“participant-observer” status more viable during the course of my research and enable a useful degree of academic distance from the media productions in consideration. While I incorporate some quantitative elements of research into my thesis, I have primarily conducted a qualitative study grounded in the methods of comparative intertextual interpretation. Texts, in the broadest possible sense meant to encompass written, spoken, and visual forms of media, serve as my units of analysis. By analyzing various modes of textual production in a literary sense, not as isolated objects existing in some apolitical, acultural vacuum of sorts, but rather as interactive, mutually constitutive, and dialogic instruments for social construction, I have endeavored to capture the rich, complex, layered meanings often present within the seemingly mundane, given aspects of language use in various sociocultural contexts.

I hope to situate my work both in the historical context of European migration and in the theoretical traditions of identitarian sociopolitical analysis undertaken by constructivist and poststructuralist thinkers; however, I aim to incorporate critical strands of thought that question the efficacy of identity-based sociopolitical analysis and propose alternative conceptual models for grappling with such questions as well. My hope is to construct an empirical case study which can further contribute to and clarify the ongoing debates in the social sciences surrounding the relevance and explanatory potential of “identity” and “identification” as analytical concepts (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). In doing so, I endeavored to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that relies on the theoretical and empirical findings of—among other academic backgrounds—anthropology, sociology, linguistics, political science, philosophy, international relations, and history. Insofar as critical discourse analysis is elaborated as a necessarily interdisciplinary method, cutting across classical academic distinctions will be formative in my research approach.

Using the theoretical roadmap provided by my secondary literature base, I constructed a case study that investigates the overlapping and interconnected discursive landscapes pertaining to migration and integration, nationalism and transnationalism, identity and identification, displacement and belonging, and the overarching notion of the refugee. In doing the so, I hope to capture the sheer complexity implicit in studies of European identity/identification and the illuminating diversity of perspectives relevant to the broader discussion of the refugee crisis while contributing to the existing literature pertaining to the overarching “Idea of Europe” and its migrant “other” as it becomes activated in the social consciousness through discursive construction and employed for sociopolitical purposes in the process.

I have condensed and presented my research over the course of three chapters. I begin with an introductory chapter surveying the historical roots of immigration and immigration policy in Germany. In the following chapter, I survey the contemporary theoretical landscape of identitarian sociological analysis. Therein, I review the keystone works in the history of the field and trace the contours of more recent literature pertaining to the issues of transnational identity, migration, nationalism, and the like. Thereafter, I extrapolate from the theoretical insights provided by my secondary literature base to conduct the bulk of my primary source analysis. Herein, I employ the tools of critical discourse analysis to interpret the discourse emerging from major media outlets in Germany. More specifically, I have structured my review around online newspaper coverage of widely-considered “ruptures” in social consciousness—noteworthy political events relevant to the refugee crisis covered in regional, national, and international press. Examples of ruptures in this sense will include, but certainly not be limited to, acts of political violence, passage of or debates over formal immigration policy, statewide or national elections or referendums, protests or collective actions carried out by politically salient

organizations, or even simple narratives of migrant integration into host countries. I will conclude with an overarching recapitulation of my research and an explication of its poignance to not only the broader academic community, demonstrating the vital importance and explanatory power of identity and discourse-based analyses to the question of Europe's response to the global refugee crisis.

Chapter 1: “The Federal Republic of Germany is not a country of immigration”<sup>1</sup>:

Historical trajectories of immigration in Germany

*“We must be clear on the matter that we cannot receive everyone who wants to come to our country. The Federal Republic of Germany is not a country of immigration. But the integration of those who remain in this country is something we wish to support.” - Helmut Kohl*

*“Everyone who is not German in the sense of Article 116 Paragraph 1 of the Basic Law is a foreigner.” -- Section 1 Foreigner’s Law*

Immigration has a deeply troubled, divisive, and at times contradictory history in the German collective consciousness, one which does not easily lend itself to analytical clarity. Denialist assertions resembling those of former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s—namely, that Germany is not a country of immigration—were anchored in official party platforms and elite rhetoric for the dominant political entities across the ideological spectrum up until the federal election in 1998 (Geddes, 2003: 78). Additionally, exclusive articulations of German citizenship were enshrined in the country’s foundational legal documents such as the Foreigner’s Law (*Ausländergesetz*) and notoriously constructed national belonging in opposition to “foreignness” (Green, 2004: 1). At odds with the demographic realities of steadily growing numbers of immigrants and their descendants living in Germany, such exclusivist formulations of German citizenship and the antagonistic social structures they imply can be viewed as what Thomas Faist (1994) has called the “counterfactual ideology of ‘kein *Einwanderungsland*’”—an ideology which has been proven deeply problematic in the postwar era of German history and

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<sup>1</sup> “*Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland*”



with which the blatantly contradictory ideals of the distinctly German brand of multiculturalism continue to reckon. In stark contrast to the corollary American political discourse surrounding ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, which traditionally portrays society as a “melting pot” or “salad bowl” of unique cultures blended into one harmonious national, civic whole and is therefore of necessity grounded in its immigration-based history, German narratives of belonging have a notorious tendency to ignore and exclude the role and place of immigrants altogether (Eriksen, 2010: 170-171).

Throughout recent history, questions of citizenship and group belonging have again risen to the forefront of German political life and rendered the question(s) of immigration—in its myriad legal, political, social, and cultural formulations—as paramount to understandings of supposed essential Germanness and, by extension, foreignness altogether (Peck, 1992: 484). The notorious “refugee crisis” of 2015 sparked by political and social unrest abroad and now unfolding in the European public sphere has once again turned the public eye squarely on the image of the re-settler, the refugee, and the foreigner<sup>2</sup>. Conversely, the attention given to incoming refugees has held a mirror to the European/German face, giving rise to questions of identity and belonging in the German fold. Given the precipitously rising numbers of immigrants and individuals with migration history living in Germany, the contemporary relationships between state, society, and immigrants, is presently growing ever more complex and, consequently, is expected to become ever more contentious and politically salient in the coming years. Understanding the historical, political, and sociocultural contexts driving the trends of increasing political salience surrounding the interlinked immigration and identity issue is

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<sup>2</sup> *Aussiedler*, *Fluechtling*, and *Fremde*, respectively; for a more extensive discussion on migrant categories in Germany, see: Geddes (2003)

indispensable to crafting a theoretical framework for studying the German case. In what follows, that is precisely what I endeavor to do.

*Migration and Belonging in the German 'Volksgemeinschaft'*<sup>3</sup>

Consulting the classificatory schema with which the German government has traditionally labeled and incorporated migrants in tandem with various discursive productions can yield some potentially insightful answers to the question. This classificatory schema and popular understandings of immigration politics (*Ausländerpolitik*) have their roots in philosophical elaborations of pre-statehood German identity and the institutionalized legal codes which later articulated the parameters thereof. Rooted in the works of German romanticism, precursors to German identity were founded in what Green (2004: 27) calls “an esoteric, almost mystical conception of the German people or *Volk*.” The modern iteration of *das Volk* is, essentially, a *Gemeinschaft* or community drawn together by ethno-cultural ties (Hailbronner, 1989:74); notions of ethnicity-based belonging have, unsurprisingly, shaped formal regulations of immigration and citizenship. Namely, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the German nationality law of 1913 played a central formative role in the development of integration practices and shaped immigration policy in immeasurable ways (Brubaker, 1992; Wilpert, 1993; Levy, 1999). As Geddes (2003: 93) explains:

*“The 1913 Nationality Law conceptualised the German nation as a community of of descent based on jus sanguinis. This placed formidable obstacles in the path of non-Germans because to become German was not simply a question of naturalisation or*

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<sup>3</sup> Literally, “peoples’ community”

*acquisition of nationality à la français but rather 'involved a social transubstantiation that immigrants have difficulty imagining, let alone desiring' (Brubaker, 1992: 78)."*

Because the foundations of the German community were and, to an extent, continue to be associated with the mental ideal of a people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), becoming German is rendered an ontological impossibility from the eyes of an asylum seeker. The elusive features of Germanness are, per such a formulation, not to be found in language proficiency or civic participation, but rather in blood and territory (*Blut und Boden*) alone. Naturalization is therein rendered a fantasy, from which migrants inevitably remain separated by the oppressive veil of territorial heritage. Later revisions and supplements to the nationality law have changed the naturalization process and opened windows of opportunities for migrants that were under no circumstances available for previous generations, rendering the German approach to migration a sort of hybrid civic model of naturalization (Geddes 2003: 94-96). Nonetheless, despite the "downplaying of national semantics linked to the imagined community of descent" in German society and politics, the lingering traces of ethnocentric nationality laws continue to be felt in contemporary treatment of foreigners and their descendants as well as in the discourse surrounding them, (Geddes 2003: 100).

### *Towards a Willkommenskultur?*

According to a report from the German Federal Statistical Office (2016), there were approximately 17.1 million individuals with "family histories of migration" living in Germany as of 2015, more than ever previously recorded. Despite historically unfavorable opinions toward

immigration in Germany, countervailing progressive cultural trends toward open borders and a more porous society has, in recent memory, emerged in the German public sphere and, consequently, fought for equal treatment and anti-discrimination measures to protect, recognize, and otherwise welcome migrants into the country for their economic, demographic, or otherwise perceive potential to benefit the German society at large. Whether because of the growing normalization of immigrant presence since the years of the postwar guestworker (*Gastarbeiter*) programs or of widening demographic shortages in the workforce requiring supplemental labor supply from abroad, German attitudes toward immigration may seem, at least at the level of policy, reflective of an emergent “welcome culture” (*Willkommenskultur*) paradigm moreso than the classic notion of Germany as an anti-immigrant nation-state. As Kober (2015: 2) points out, “It does, in fact, appear that something has changed in the peoples’ attitudes toward immigrants. Both positive attitudes toward a *Willkommenskultur* and expectations of immigrants have grown.”<sup>4</sup> Changes in attitude translated into changes in policy, as Merkel’s broadly embracing immigration program and the “we will succeed”<sup>5</sup> mentality indicates. Given the troubled legacy of discrimination and myriad forms of social exclusion in German society, the development and gradual acceptance of a national *Willkommenskultur* is hardly insignificant.

Yet, a comparative survey conducted by the German Institute for Interdisciplinary Conflict and Violence Research at the University of Bielefeld found that the open-armed *Willkommenskultur* which once characterized Germany’s response to the latest round of incoming refugees, has largely faded in enthusiasm. Support among respondents for *Willkommenskultur* fell from 39.5 percent in 2013/2014 to 32.3 percent in 2015/2016 and,

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<sup>4</sup> “Tatsächlich scheint sich in den Einstellungen der Menschen gegenüber Einwanderern etwas verändert zu haben. Gestiegen sind neben der Einschätzung der Willkommenskultur auch die Erwartungen an Einwanderer.”

<sup>5</sup> “Wir schaffen das,” referring to Merkel’s widely publicized proclamation upon her decision to open German borders to refugees from Budapest’s Keleti train station in September 2015

furthermore, 41 percent of respondents in 2015/2016 agreed that Germans should be more careful not to be ‘overrun’ by immigrants, compared to only 28 percent of respondents who said so in the 2013/2014 survey (Steinmetz, 2016). As a study conducted by the German Institute for Economic Research (Eisnecker & Schnupp, 2016) suggests, the majority of the German population now believe that the influx of refugees poses greater risks than it provides opportunities for the country; moreover, concerns of the German population are not restricted to economics alone: 53 percent of respondents in the same survey believed that cultural life would be further eroded by refugees and 57 percent went so far as to say that the presence of immigrants would make Germany an overall worse place to live. Furthermore, even in cases in which German tolerance towards migrants—refugees in particular—manifests, German citizens tend to believe in a *Willkommenskultur* hemmed in by short-term leases, effectively signaling that refugees are welcome, but only until conditions have improved enough for them to return home where they belong (Zeit Online, 2016).

Equally indicative of downward shifts in public attitudes against maintaining open German borders to further streams of immigrants are the public opinion polls taken in response to Chancellor Angela Merkel’s bold refugee policy (*Flüchtlingspolitik*). A definitive 82 percent of respondents in a survey conducted by *Der Spiegel* magazine in September 2016 expressed support for a change in direction from Merkel’s current approach which enabled nearly 500,000 new refugee status applications to be filed in 2015 alone (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016: 10). In opening German borders to skyrocketing numbers of asylum seekers, Merkel has, in a sense, reformulated the ideology of *kein Einwanderungsland*, even going so far as to explicitly refute the worn-out, denialist platitude (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2015). Yet, given the chasms between rhetoric like Merkel’s and plummeting public approval ratings thereof leads

us to wonder: Where does the source of growing mistrust and fear of incoming immigrants lie?

Why is Merkel's open-armed immigration policy failing in the eyes of the German people? The answer is, unsurprisingly, largely historically contingent and, I would argue, directs us to the theoretical contours of German identity. Discursive constructions of German identity in restrictive, ethno-national terms tend to reify the notion of an exclusive sphere of German cultural belonging that does not yield itself to diversification through migration. Such formulations portray immigration as a threat rather than as an asset and have become intertwined with narratives of the refugee crisis as a security threat rather than a humanitarian mission or demographic imperative for the German economy. In short, I would argue that the prevalence of nationalistic identity-driven discourse can explain the pervasive opposition to continuation or further expansion of Merkel's relatively liberal model of refugee policy.

#### *Historical roots of German Ausländerpolitik*<sup>6</sup>

Although, as Stephen Castles (2012: 201) points out, "a widespread discourse portrays Europe's newfound cultural and religious complexity as a challenge to historical models of national identity and citizenship," it is important to note that Germany's encounters with ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity are hardly modern occurrences. To the contrary, migration has shaped the social, economic, and political fabric of Europe for well over three centuries (Moch, 1992). With the rise of nationalism and the dawn of the 20th century, each country in Western Europe crafted distinctive national models with the explicit purposes of managing cultural diversity while still maintaining social harmony. As Castles (2012:204) points out, these

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<sup>6</sup> Foreigner policy

“differing national models...were to help to determine how states and the public reacted to immigrants after 1945.” Unlike the cultural pillars model of the Netherlands or the secular republican approach taken by the French, the German model for managing immigration was effectively centered on denying the existence thereof. Like its Western European counterparts, the German model of multiculturalism continues to be particularly unique and impactful on contemporary treatment and perception of refugees for several reasons.

Since well before its formal state unification in 1871, Germany has evolved largely with a historically shared understanding of nationhood and ethnicized sense of national belonging to *das Volk*—roughly equivalent to a populist notion of “the people” in English terms—that flies in the face of the demographic facts borne out by history. Yet, the highly exclusive, ethnicized portrayal of ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) lends itself to problematic treatments of ethnic minorities and perceived foreignness in German society as it has continually done so over the course of history; more contemporary trends of resurgent prioritizations of national identity as defensive responses to growing diversity and the apparent rise of multicultural society makes this all too apparent (Castles, 2012: 216). Antecedent cases in which narratives of cultural homogeneity serve as the basis for social cohesion which grounds national belonging are not difficult to identify over the course of German history. Given the spatial constraints of the present chapter, I will choose to exclusively focus on one historical period to illustrate the importance of national identity narratives in relation to fears over immigration which go above and beyond mere concerns over economic insecurity.

During the early 1990s, there was perhaps no greater trigger for the perception of a “migration crisis” than the end of the Cold War, the fall of communism, and the tangential effects both developments had on the world political order amidst a backdrop of rapid globalization (Castles, 2012: 201; Keely, 2006). It is for these reasons that the ‘migration crisis’ of the early 1990s is viewed by contemporary analysts as a pivotal turning point in Europe’s migration history (Weiner, 1995). The foreign population living in Germany ballooned, climbing from 4 million at the start of the 1990s to approximately 7.3 million at its close (Geddes, 2003: 79). The swelling numbers of immigrants crossing German borders were largely a result of policy hurdles from the early post-WWII years which hindered the government’s ability to place restraints on immigration. Essentially, as Dietrich Thränhardt (1999) has pointed out, 1990 marked the end of a provisional period during which the Federal Republic of Germany was unable to regulate international migration. Formalized restraints, coupled with a culture of guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) and re-settlers (*Aussiedler*) rendered the newly unified Germany as the de facto hub for immigrants arriving on European soil. The primary sources of these immigrants were twofold. First, ethnic Germans living in ex-communist countries began to exercise their certified “right to return” to their ethnic homeland upon the Cold War’s close. As Brubaker (1992:171) highlights, the legal provisions established in 1949 intended to restructure the German state in the postwar context created a climate in which there was, effectively “an open door to immigration and automatic citizenship for ethnic German immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.” Second, the surge in *Aussiedler* migratory patterns were coupled with the ballooning number of displaced asylum seekers coming into Germany. Germany



quickly became the most popular destination for asylum seekers in Western Europe given the country's legal provisions laid out in Articles 16 and 19 of the German Constitution which "recognized the right of the asylum-seeker to make an application rather than—as in other European countries—the responsibility of the state to make a claim" (Geddes, 2003: 85).

Unsurprisingly, Germany received a colossal 80 percent of all asylum applications in all Western Europe during the 1992 pinnacle of the "refugee crisis" in addition to the nearly 1 million ethnic Germans who had returned to their homeland (*Heimatland*) in the same year (Marshall, 2000: 40).

Between 1991 and 1995, around 1.3 million displaced people applied for asylum in Germany, many of whom, as Castles (2012: 209) points out, were "members of ethnic minorities (such as Roma) from Romania, Bulgaria, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe." The most prominent source regions of asylum seekers were, in addition to the countries, the war-torn remnants of ex-Yugoslavia during the conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Such figures would be striking for any one country during such a brief period; for a country proclaiming an explicitly anti-immigrant identity and nativist sociocultural heritage, they were downright revolutionary. The multifaceted migratory influxes of the 1990s stoked the fires of latent nationalist sentiment seared in the heart of the ethnic German collective remembrance. The arrival of "European others" into Germany and the subsequent reactions these migrants provoked culminated in an era which Stephen Castles (2012: 209) dubs a "period of politicization of asylum" in which far-right mobilization at the grassroots level combined with the emergence of anti-immigrant policy at the governmental level to create a radically hostile, fortress-like climate for incoming migrants, exemplified perhaps no better than by the notorious neo-nazi extremist riots in Hoyerswerda in September, 1991 (Krenz, 2016). The German government responded to popular backlash against

incoming refugees with a policy of appeasement toward the right-wing electoral base. Among other things, German policymakers amended the constitution to hem in the previously guaranteed constitutional right to seek asylum from political, religious, or other persecution in one's home country, instituted so-called "non-arrival policies" which mandated that refugees obtain visa documentation before entering the country, and established partnerships with fellow European governments and border states to re-route potential immigrants who would have otherwise landed on German soil (Castles, 2012: 209).

At the level of public opinion, the story could be read as similarly exclusionary. overall, Germans were virtually unanimously opposed to further immigration. Marshall (2000: 71) cites a 1991 national opinion poll in which a decisive 96 percent of respondents wanted to end economic migration into Germany and a full 73 percent said they would be in favor of amending the German Basic Law to restrict ethnic German migration as well. Public opinion coalesced around anti-immigrant sentiments, yielding electoral gains across the board for right-wing political parties which consequently pushed centrist governance to the right on issues of immigration, leading politicians like the CDU's Alfred Dregger to conclude that "Germany cannot become everyone's country" (Geddes, 2003: 87; quote cited in Joppke, 1999: 92). The debates sparked by inconsistencies in the German stance towards immigration were illuminating not only for their legal-political dimensions, but also for their sociocultural aspects.

Anecdotal as well as empirical evidence corroborate the idea that, somewhat ironically, in a short time following the German's own reunification (*Wiedervereinigung*)—which, it is worth noting, hearkens back again to the idea of an ethnic precursor to German statehood—foreign asylum seekers became the effective "other" which stood in stark opposition to the newfound sense of resurgent German nationalism. As Peck (1992: 481) summarizes:

*“The fall of the Wall (November 1989) and subsequent German unification that subsumed the German Democratic Republic eleven months later (October 1990) occurred at breakneck speed. Another year passed and attacks on foreigners...rose dramatically, notably in the eastern regions of new Germany. Racism and xenophobia (Ausländerfeindlichkeit) accompanied and in some cases, was encouraged by the nationalistic fervour of some Germans for their new-found unity and national identity.”*

The German experience with flows of migrants stemming largely from Central and Eastern Europe suggested that, despite increasingly progressive measures to integrate migrant communities and, despite the relative normalcy of intercultural contact during the time, there emerged a virulent mixture of “defensive” behaviors among certain segments of the German citizenry that could be characterized as outright xenophobic and racially-motivated (Bade & Oltmer, 2004).

Why, then, was immigration such an emboldening presence for far-right political posturing and outright extremist violence during the 1990s, especially on the heels of cultural unification marked by formal state reunification? What does the German response to the immigration crisis of the 1990s reveal about German conceptions of self and collective modes of civic identification in contemporary Germany?

*Historical processes, modern applications*

When viewed through a contemporary lens, the experiences of present migrant communities are analogous to those of the recent past. . Claims of preserving German state sovereignty remain inextricably linked to claims for cultural homogeneity that underlie the nationalist project and, judging by recent electoral success on the part of the far-right, anti-immigration *Alternative für Deutschland* party and widespread disapproval of Chancellor Merkel's immigration policy, popular right-wing movements like *Pegida* are both constitutive and representative of a harshly unwelcoming climate for refugees, even if they represent a statistical minority of Germans. Certainly, historical experiences with supposed "immigration crises" illuminate the heart of Germany's ongoing refugee crisis and offer potentially noteworthy insights into its prospects.

At its very core, the present refugee crisis and its antecedents revolve first and foremost around the nexus of German identity. Historical ties between ethnic Germanhood and civic belonging to the German state inform and pervade both official policy and, even more so, non-state, normative understandings of belonging and national identity. Who has a right to exist in the German territorial space and, furthermore, be integrated into the sociocultural fold of German life is heavily contingent on the ways in which such a space is socially constructed through political interaction, reified against the backdrop of the stereotypically foreign, anti-German "other" in daily life, mediated through elite discourse and commonplace linguistic reference alike, and interpreted by a diverse group of actors on the German stage. Before proceeding any further, however, a thorough look at the variegated meanings of "identity" is called for. Thereafter, a more focused, nuanced look at the elements of specifically German identity and its constituent parts and processes can be more fully appreciated, analyzed, and understood.

Chapter 2: *Wer Sind das Volk?*<sup>7</sup>

Theoretical Foundations of Identity and Discourse Analysis

Across academic disciplines, the concept of identity has played a prominent role in shaping analyses of literature, artwork, music, politics, and everything in between. Since the “identity crisis” of the 1950s and 60s, identity has been transformed into an increasingly relevant term and its analytical implications have proliferated in the decades since (Gleason, 1983). The sociological roots of identity lay much earlier in Durkheim’s “collective conscience,” Marx’s “class consciousness,” Weber’s “Understanding (*Verstehen*),” and Tonnies’s “Community (*Gemeinschaft*)” (Cerulo 1997: 386). Pioneering thinkers like WI Strauss, Erving Goffman, Howard Becker, and Peter Berger were largely responsible for reformulating and expounding upon the aforementioned, incorporating and articulating identity into the sociological fold; their respective work on reification and social construction of identity continues to pervade the field today.

Social scientific research surrounding the phenomena and processes of nationalism, ethnicity, and migration fall under the umbrella of identity research and derive critical theoretical as well as empirical insights that simply cannot be accounted for absent identity-based formulations. Questions regarding imagined communities of national belonging, contested and constructed meanings of ethnic group boundaries, and the complications raised by ever-shifting borders and dynamic population flows necessitate a certain attentiveness to conceptions of selfhood in relation to collectivity, aspects of shared existential conditions, and symbolic markers of unification that transcend spatial and temporal restrictions. Identity-based theories provide

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<sup>7</sup> “Who are ‘the people’?”

uniquely powerful analytical tools for understanding these and other issues by probing at the essence of the human condition itself, raising questions of what it means to be a self in relation to a greater whole, what characterizes the boundary maintenance processes for collective belonging, and what “stuff” of the external world can be mobilized in such a way as to appeal to selfhood as a basis for collective action.

The surface level appeals of generic inquiry into identity and its theoretical significance are obvious, but the pitfalls associated with unrefined, overly essentialist accounts of identity—theories which view identity as innate, primordial, and existing objectively in the “real world”—are numerous and well-documented. As Cerulo (1997: 386-387) summarizes, “Early literature approached these attributes as ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ characteristics... A collective’s members were believed to internalize these qualities, suggesting a unified, singular social experience.” Anti-essentialism and its offshoots tend to prevail in more contemporary treatments of identity, insofar as they negate the supposed essential or inborn nature of identity and instead turn to its constructed, variable, and contested nature. Rather than attributing identity to physiological, psychological, racial, regional, or other immutable characteristics, anti-essentialist approaches emphasize the transient, situational, and relative aspects of collective belonging. With all of this in mind, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that identities are highly elusive and profoundly complex. Of the myriad dimensions of identity, I choose to focus here on four key elements which together constitute the investigative grounds of my research approach and serve as the lens through which I view German and migrant identities in their contemporary setting. In short, I concentrate on the fact that social identities are constructed, multiple, fluid, and oppositional.

The central tenet to anti-essentialist accounts of identity is that social identities are socially constructed and mediated. Classic social constructionism holds that identities do not

simply embody innate characteristics or shared historical roots of a collective body of individuals; rather, they are constructed, reified, challenged, and redefined over time and under the force of real, existing social conditions (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Because constructionism has become relatively commonplace, it is important to take a step back and ask: what exactly do we mean when we say that an identity is socially constructed? What sorts of processes is social construction really made up of? As Cerulo (1997: 387) eloquently asserts of the constructionist approach to social interpretation, “every collective becomes a social artifact—an entity molded, refabricated, and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centers of power.” Construction can be best understood as the constitutive processes culminating in this so-called social artifact. Social construction of identity therefore occurs in virtually every nook and cranny of daily life: newspaper headlines declaring national victory in war, textbook titles sequestering off neatly pigeonholed annals of ethnic history, speeches honoring and memorializing national heroes all implicitly contribute to the artifact of a collective belonging—namely, the nation. Multiple categories of collective identity ranging from gender to ethnicity to nationalism exemplify typical ways in which social construction can take place, in which the social artifacts of collectivity manage to coalesce around certain endowed centers of cultural authority and produce tangible effects.

Of interest for my purposes here is the literature on national identity which collectively grapples with rhetorical and institutional processes of memorialization, narrative, symbolic representation to “chart the ways in which actors, particularly elites, create, manipulate, or dismantle the identities of nations, citizenships, allies, and enemies” (Cerulo, 1997: 390). National identities, though taken for granted at the level of everyday practice, must be formulated under distinct historical conditions for a perceivably restrictive community of

believers to imagine themselves as members and act accordingly (Anderson, 1991). For the concept of “German” or “American” or any other national identification marker to be compelling, in other words, the symbolic role of the nation must be constructed through processes of memorialization of past experiences, narrative recounting of historical tradition, establishment of shared linguistic norms, and the like. Germanness is thus a contingent property rather than an absolute feature ascribable to a certain racial group or historical community of descendants. Belief in the coherence of the community is the aim of the agents of social construction whether consciously pursued or not.

For this reason, it is of utmost importance to account for the roles of social positioning and power in the processes of identity construction through discursive action to pose the question: who are the actors and agents in social positions capable of articulating identities? Through what mediums of communication are identities constructed and with what evocative symbols? Post-structuralist and post-modernist accounts of identity lent a deconstructive bent to the search for identity analysis, highlighting the importance of power in the process of identification (Connell 1987; Gilman 1985). Power and knowledge are inextricably linked variables; discussing power dynamics in the construction of identity markers is by extension and epistemic conversation about the nature of knowledge and who has the authority to regulate, monitor, censor, and validate its production (Foucault, 1982). In the forthcoming analysis of German identity, I maintain a persistent focus on the dynamics of power in the ontological contestation of social reality set in what Calhoun (1995: 199) calls the “real, present day political reasons why essentialist identities continue to be invoked and often deeply felt” to account for post-modern critiques of overt constructionism as well as constructionism’s own critique of essentialism. In short, I seek to find middle ground between these two poles.



That identities are simultaneously multiple, overlapping, interchangeable, intersecting, and at times contradictory is interesting to the discussion of national belonging and identity questions surrounding trends of migration, movement, and resettlement for several reasons. Classic theories of nationalism focus on the ways in which national histories are constructed, commemorated, and maintained in “imagined communities” of individual citizens belonging together based on fictive kinship (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991). Such an idea of nationalism may explain facets of belonging, but it remains severely limited in its ability to modernize with contemporary political realities of transnationalism, especially regarding the presence of immigrant minorities in “pluralist” nation-states or what Giddens (1991) calls the “post-traditional society.” If national identity is shared amongst members of an imagined community, where do migrants fit in the picture—or do they fit at all? David Maybury-Lewis (1984) once defined the modern age of citizenship as equivalent to living in Leviathan insofar as every individual must ascribe to and project an identity in society. The identity categories projected onto migrants are particularly murky, complicating their place in political spheres defined around nation-state boundaries that are, as the present crisis illuminates, increasingly porous. Migrants, as Eriksen (2010: 159) notes, “are in several important respects different from indigenous peoples. They often lack citizenship in the host country and were often members of majorities in their country of origin.” Because migrants find themselves in flux amidst a multiplicity of available identity categories, their options are by necessity strictly limited. Alfred Hirschmann (1970) identifies three distinct responses that immigrants can take to remedy the identity conflict in host societies: “exit, voice, or loyalty.” Studies of immigrants that characterize their situation as simply “living in two cultures” miss the complexity and nuance implicit therein (Liebkind, 1989). Eriksen (2010:211) proposes that “we should stress...that multiple identities are not the

same as segmentary identities. Multiple identities cannot be placed in concentric circles in orderly ways; they can scarcely be represented graphically at all.”

Indeed, the diasporic and transnational character of the European and global landscapes requires more nuanced and variegated theoretical explication which I will not be able to provide here. However, that is certainly not to say that nationalism and classic theories of multiculturalism do not at least offer partial explanation and insightful observations of the discourse surrounding identities, belonging, and migration—it simply does not paint the full picture in all of its richness and complexity.

To say that identities are multiple and situationally determined implies the third critical dimension of identity which I aim to investigate in my analysis of media discourse in Germany. Namely, identities are fluid and highly malleable, pointing us to the reality of historical contingency and contextual significance in discursive utterances articulating identity. Collective identities neither exist nor subject themselves to analysis in an isolated scientific vacuum; rather, identity construction is constantly evolving in reference to historical realities and contemporary conditions. Discourse is a river of moments and utterances, being incessantly produced and reshaping the collective consciousness around its subjects. At best, social research can endeavor to explicate the historical and societal conditions in which strands of discourse are rooted, but it can make no claim to permanence or even enduring objective truth value. As Eriksen (1994: 168) highlights:

“The point is not, therefore, that culture and ‘real cultural differences’ are unimportant, but that it is the use to which they are put—by both groups in a contact situation—that give them social relevance. The cultural content of identities changes, as does the social

relevance of cultural content. The cultural resources...are put to new uses in the new context and thereby their social significance is changed.”

In other words, identity is a notoriously fickle beast whose interpretations and articulations can and do change incessantly. With this in mind,, I’ve chosen to focus on limited cross-sectional units of analysis or “critical junctures” to capture in whatever minimal sense possible a snapshot of power-dictated identity discourses surrounding distinctive historical moments in recent memory.

Finally, and no less importantly to the discussion at hand is the so-called oppositional aspect of identity construction. Identities never exist *an und fuer sich selbst*, but are rather articulated and formed in dichotomous opposition to a lingering external “other.” As Eriksen (1994: 134) summarizes: “Like other ethnic identities, national identities are constituted in relation to *others*; the very idea of the nation presupposes that there are other nations, or at least other peoples, who are not members of the nation. The “other” of Barth’s (1969) process of “boundary maintenance” changes according to political and social needs and aims related to the given context in which they arise. Moreover, the process of constructing an “other” whether in discourse or elsewhere can produce harmful consequences of discrimination and myriad forms of social exclusion based on (not) belonging. This process becomes uniquely problematic when one considers the remarkable difficulty in identifying rights of belonging in states with diverse demographic compositions. German identity is exemplary of the obfuscated and situational process of “othering” as described. Diana Forsythe (1989) has argued that, despite being one of the strongest and most unitary identities in Europe, defining who is German and to what degree any one individual belongs in German society is rather difficult, largely because of four key factors: the lack of uncontested geographical delineation of German borders after reunification,

historical shame associated with the country's Nazi past, discouragement of patriotism on cultural grounds, and historically complicated modes of ethnic categorization. All of this points to the necessity of constructing a fictive other in informal nationalistic ideology to account for and justify the existence of German national identity in its present form.

Critical treatments of identity and calls to abandon the term for alternative analytic concepts must also be acknowledged. Specifically, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) raise valid concerns about the analytical sufficiency of identity in social scientific and other domains of research. In the place of identity, Brubaker and Cooper aim to use terms like "identification processes," "self-understandings," and the like to avoid the pernicious connotations of analyzing concrete identities. Nonetheless, I do not perceive their foremost objections to be compelling enough to scrap the genre of identity and identification-based inquiry altogether. For starters, the continuity of a vast field of social scientific investigation depends on the maintenance of identity-driven analysis and abruptly abandoning its usage to go "beyond identity" would be neither intellectually productive nor necessary in contemporary academia. Rather than simply going beyond identity, I advocate an interdisciplinary approach of integrating it into alternative theoretical models for interpreting social phenomena. Debating whether identity should have been employed to discuss sociocultural and historical processes and features to begin with is one thing; but given the trajectory which the concept has taken since its inception in academic literature, there is more than adequate justification for its preservation and adaptation to present realities, so as not to potentially sever or otherwise hinder lines of investigation which exist today, the forthcoming analysis being a prime example thereof. Even if the authors are correct in positing that identity is not the end-all be-all of social and cultural organization and collective psychology, the ways in which identity is strategically employed for political ends, I maintain,

sufficiently justifies its relevance and explanatory place in the researcher's toolkit. To this end, I would add that for the present purposes, I am not so much concerned with "identity" as a real, concrete, quantifiable existential marker of character or group behavior in some objective sense; rather, I'm interested in the discursive productions which utilize identitarian concepts and language. The contents of identity frameworks do not so much interest me as the ways in which they are talked about, and talk about identities is at once undeniably profuse and analytically indispensable.

Using the four key components of identity outlined above, I consider the notion of German identity surrounding *Willkommenskultur* in response to the refugee crisis as a "social artifact" that is at once constructed, multiple, fluid, and dichotomous. With this in mind, I pose the question: what is the source concretely powerful yet ever elusive notions of Germanness? Of *Willkommenskultur*? Of the "refugee"? I concur with Morley and Robbins (1990) in arguing that "these questions—of identity, memory, and nostalgia—are inextricably linked with patterns and flows of communication." More specifically, mass media-driven cultural productions are at the root of the identity and memory story, particularly when it comes to articulating notions of the German "Volk" and its reciprocal other in the context of refugee crisis and contestation of "*Willkommenskultur*." Following the insights of Foucault (1972) and the research traditions he inspired surrounding discursive productions of meaning and knowledge—Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (Keller, 2003), Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak, 2009), etc.—I aim to analyze German media discourse as textual productions firmly situated in and constitutive of historical, social, economic, and cultural realities of refugees and the societies in which they live. In line with the work of Keller (2011), "Discourses are considered as historically situated 'real' social practices, not representing external objects but constituting

them. This implies looking at concrete data—oral and written texts, articles, books, discussions, institutions, disciplines—in order to analyse ‘bottom up’ how discourses are structured and how they are structuring knowledge domains” pertaining to the refugee crisis, German identity, and the interrelated notion of *Willkommenskultur*.”

Chapter 3: *Schaffen wir das wirklich?*<sup>8</sup>

Analyzing the evolving discourse surrounding German *Willkommenskultur*

Understanding that identities and their referents are constantly undergoing fluid transformation and contestation, I've based my analysis along three temporal cross-sections of sorts—critical junctures in recent history which serve as my points of reference and source of evaluation of the constructed meanings of *Willkommenskultur* as it relates to German identity and the refugee crisis. At each point, I collected and conducted close critical readings of an exhaustive collection of articles from the most widely distributed online newspaper in Germany: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Drawing on the theoretical framework traced in the previous chapter and especially the hybrid methodological tenets of discourse analysis which views textual productions as inextricably linked to and consequent of social conditions in which they are crafted and interpreted, I considered the following set of questions throughout my evaluations. First, how was *Willkommenskultur* discursively articulated in response to the refugee crisis? What agency was pivotal in defining the nature and boundaries of the German *Willkommenskultur* and how is this made evident in the data? Second, what other identity categories are manifested in conjunction with discourse surrounding *Willkommenskultur*? Third, in what fashion did *Willkommenskultur* evolve over the period? And finally, what became the “other” of German *Willkommenskultur* and what conclusions does this imply about German and migrant identities more broadly?

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<sup>8</sup> “Will we really succeed?”

In selecting turning points in the steadily evolving refugee crisis, I used Google Trends data to identify relative peaks in public interest as measured by search engine queries corresponding to “Willkommenskultur.” Google Trends (2017) measures cumulative public interest in search terms over time and calculates a standardized score for each term. Scores represent relative interest as measured by number of search inquiries. A numerical value of 100 is the peak for any particular term. In the case of “Willkommenskultur,” for instance, the 100-point maximum occurred in the week of September 6th, 2015 to September 12th, 2015. A 50-point value signifies half the maximum search interest and a flat-line score of zero similarly represents search interest that is less than one percent of the term’s maximum search interest value. The second and fourth most popular time periods for the term Willkommenskultur occurred during the weeks of January 10th, 2016 to January 16th, 2016 (score of 58) and July 31st to August 6th, 2016 (score of 46), respectively. I made the methodological choice to exclude the third peak in public search interest to maintain chronological continuity and trace the evolution of discourse over a consistent timeframe. Altogether, I considered approximately seventy-five articles tagged to the term “Willkommenskultur” published during each window. Reflecting the qualitative nature of this study, I chose to interpret articles from a range of different perspectives and agents at the time according to the theoretical framework laid out in the preceding chapter. While general trends in usage of the term “Willkommenskultur” can be observed, they should not be assumed to blur the underlying diversity implicit to discourse.



*Willkommenskultur as a Marker of Identity-Based Discourse*

While “Willkommenskultur” as a concept certainly does not exhaustively or uniquely comprise identity discourse, I maintain that it may be viewed as an effective bellwether, a reliable indicator of sorts of the trajectory and character of discourse on German identity and belonging today. Utilizing Willkommenskultur to define search and analysis parameters rather than terms like refugees, borders, integration, etc. offers a number of distinct advantages. First, Willkommenskultur is a self-reflexive and ascriptive term, pointing to its relevance as a measurement of identity formulations. To assert that Germany is home to a Willkommenskultur is necessarily to say something about Germanness itself, about the features of German statehood, character, ethical stance, and terms of belonging to the national community. Second, Willkommenskultur is a relatively recent development in the German speaking community that has evolved into a trans-European linguistic term of global significance (Rada, 2016). Because of its relatively recent emergence and consequent growing importance, the social scientific research available on media treatments of Willkommenskultur and its relevance to German identity is relatively sparse and thus ripe for ongoing inquiry. Finally, Willkommenskultur is at once broadly encompassing and, on the other hand, functionally limiting to enable fruitful examination of research materials for my purposes.

*Formal Articulations of Willkommenskultur*

Considering the growing popular significance and social relevance of Willkommenskultur, the Department for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und

Flüchtlinge, 2011) set out to explicitly define the term, reaching the following agreed-upon standards: Willkommenskultur means to “welcome recent immigrants in the form of attractive conditions and to recognize them in society. Willkommenskultur orients itself toward all recent immigrants of legal standing.”<sup>9</sup> Other governmental and economic organizations have since articulated their own working definitions of the term, which is of no small consequence for the German legal system and economy. In a summary of intercultural business climate amidst the age of German Willkommenskultur, BDA outlined the potential effects of a real, existing welcoming culture, suggesting that a Willkommenskultur in a business setting can, among other things:

“Ease the incorporation of coworkers into the workplace environment; make new markets and customer groups both domestic and foreign more accessible; create competitive advantages in acquisition of qualified companies; link employees to corporations in long-term positions; exercise a positive influence on both the workplace environment and the nature of work in a particular business; and improve the general public’s perception of companies (BDA, 2016: 5).”<sup>10</sup>

Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups have similarly asserted and framed their own conceptions of Willkommenskultur. Groups like “Kein Mensch ist illegal,” (No human is illegal) for instance, have argued not only for the legitimacy of welcoming refugees, but even for its necessity considering the humanitarian catastrophe that it presented (Frankfurter Rundschau, October 2014).

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<sup>9</sup> „Neu-Zuwandernde anhand attraktiver Rahmenbedingungen ‘Willkommen’ heißen und anerkennend in die Gesellschaft aufnehmen. Willkommenskultur richtet sich an alle legalen Neu-Zuwandernden.“

<sup>10</sup> “Die Eingliederung von Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern in den Arbeitsprozess zu erleichtern; neue Märkte und Kundengruppen im In- und Ausland zu erschließen; Vorteile beim Wettbewerb um qualifizierte Beschäftigte zu erlangen; Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter langfristig ans Unternehmen zu binden; Betriebsklima und Arbeitsweise der Beschäftigten positiv zu beeinflussen; Image und öffentliches Ansehen des Unternehmens zu erhöhen.”

*Willkommenskultur as a Media Construct*

While formal, institutionalized recognition of *Willkommenskultur* is fascinating in its own right, the polished, tailored conceptions thereof gloss over the contestations surrounding its interpretation. Media discourse as measured in what follows fills in those gaps and deepens the identitarian components inherent in *Willkommenskultur*.

The evolution of *Willkommenskultur* in the public eye and political imaginary took place virtually overnight in the grand scheme of media news cycles. As Hann (2015) has pointed out, reactions to the *Volkerwanderung* varied greatly even amidst the unfolding of the crisis itself. Ideas of the refugee crisis and attitudes toward *Willkommenskultur* are neither uniform nor consistent over time.; yet, general trends can be noted. The viability and staying power of *Willkommenskultur* as an identity marker will largely be determined by media actors who produce and shape the discourse surrounding the term. As Hann (2015: 1) points out, “Political outcomes will depend on what happens in the middle, with the media playing a vital role...Everyday conversations exhibit a confusing mixture of pragmatic argumentation, often grounded in economics, and appeals to ethical principles, such as the duty to alleviate suffering or to preserve a collective identity. This interplay is worth examining more closely.” A thorough close reading of this interplay is what my analysis consisted of. The resulting qualitative data suggests that *Willkommenskultur* in German media discourse revolved around five broad categories of meaning, each deeply tied to issues of German identity. The distinctive meanings reveal an ongoing process of what Antonio Gramsci (1971) dubs a “war of position,” in

contemporary Germany or, as Holmes and Casteñeda (2016) explain, “the ongoing struggle over symbols that legitimize and transform political-economic structures.”

*Critical Juncture 1: September 5th, 2015 and “We will succeed”*

Initially, *Willkommenskultur* was cited as a feature of a humane response to the refugee crisis. In this vein, early articles surrounding the first critical juncture in the refugee crisis mentioned refugee struggles in the context of their personal difficulties reaching Europe. One article entitled “An Altogether Exceptional Train” (*Ein ganz besonderer Zug*) published the day after Merkel’s decision to allow refugees to cross over the German border from Budapest’s main train station was announced exemplifies such early coverage of the refugee crisis and the German *Willkommenskultur* that was coalescing in response:

“Many refugees have just concluded a journey on foot from the Budapest train station, headed in the direction of Austria and are physically completely exhausted. Some exhibit discernible signs of pain upon movement. Yet, hardly having left their trains at platform 26 in the Sarnberg Train Station, they are led by friendly, hospitable police officers into the main lobby, where volunteers begin to offer them water, snacks, and fruits along with warm clothes to protect from the surprisingly cold Munich wind this weekend. Shortly thereafter, the arriving passengers headed to basic medical screenings held on site at the grounds just outside of the train station where emergency teams have set up tents in response. Even here, the refugees receive a warm and hearty welcome: Volunteer firefighters help unload their bags or carry fatigued individuals downstairs to the medical tents. The helpers smile at the arriving passengers, the Syrian refugees radiate, albeit

languidly at times, gratitude in return. Out of this “humanitarian challenge” has emerged a magnificent collective effort of cooperation and support” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 6, 2015).<sup>11</sup>

The focal points and imagery of the article’s description highlight the humanitarian bent of early media discourse surrounding the refugee crisis. Friendly greetings, welcoming authorities, willing volunteerism and broad-based solidarity is attributed to the warmly receptive German character. These sorts of descriptions, emphasizing the “warm welcome” of incoming refugees in the German sphere dominated early discourse in response to Merkel’s liberal immigration policy. It is also worth noting the multiplicity of identities and hierarchy of refugee identity that already shows signs of emerging at the outset of the crisis. The article, like many others, specifically refers to *Syrian refugees*, indicating differentiated degrees of inclusion afforded to arriving immigrants dependent on the social circumstances of their refugee status, national background, etc.

Another article entitled “Lollipops instead of incendiaries” (Bonbons statt Brandsätze) published on the same day conveyed a similarly exuberant mood:

“There is a festival-like atmosphere here, an event, that has already lasted hours for many. Every single refugee is being greeted with applause. One family reaches in a large bag and gives away a stuffed animal. Grins briefly dot the faces of many utterly exhausted children resting in the arms of their parents. Other refugees form heart-shaped

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<sup>11</sup> “Viele Flüchtlinge haben einen Fußmarsch von Budapest Richtung Österreich hinter sich und sind körperlich total erschöpft, manche haben erkennbar [Schmerzen](#) beim Gehen. Doch kaum verlassen Sie auf Gleis 26 am Sarnberger Flügelbahnhof ihre Züge, werden sie von freundlichen Polizisten in die Schalterhalle geleitet, wo ihnen Freiwillige erst einmal stilles Wasser, Snacks und Obst anbieten, ebenso wärmende Kleidung gegen den überraschend kalten Münchner Wind an diesem Wochenende. Danach geht es noch zum kurzen medizinischen Screening auf den Bahnhofsvorplatz in Zelte des Katastrophenschutzes - und auch da machen die Flüchtlinge wieder die Erfahrung, herzlich aufgenommen zu werden: Männer der Freiwilligen Feuerwehr nehmen ihnen Taschen ab oder tragen erschöpfte Menschen die Treppen hinunter zu den Zelten. Die Helfer lächeln die Ankömmlinge an, die syrischen Flüchtlinge strahlen manchmal matt, aber voller Dankbarkeit zurück. Aus der "humanitären Herausforderung" wird ein großartiges und menschliches Mit- und Füreinander.”

symbols with their hands as a symbol of thanks for the stunning gesture, for this *Willkommenskultur*. Then, dozens of refugees begin to sing chants of “thank you, Germany,” and “Germany, Germany, Germany” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 6, 2016).<sup>12</sup>

Germany is articulated as the collective hero of the refugee dilemma above, an achievement worth celebrating in the style of a traditional German street festival (Volksfest). Every single refugee is greeted not with protest, but with applause and teddy bears. The exhaustion of the children and their parents who have presumably journeyed from the depths of war-torn Syria or Afghanistan cannot overcome the resilient smiles and gestures of gratitude shown by the refugees. In short, Germany’s *Willkommenskultur* was, in the early phases of its articulation, shown as an essential feature of a newly hospitable German identity that was and could only emerge in response to such a profound crisis. Reading the literature of the time, it appeared certain from this angle that the ideology of an anti-immigration nation (*kein Einwanderungsland*) was dead.

### *Critical Juncture 2: “Paris Changes Everything”*

As the refugee crisis developed further, however, the initial jubilation among the German populace seemed to fade. Overall, negative attitudes of immigrants grew in the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, which were perceived by many to be connected to the refugee influx of the preceding year. As the Bavarian finance minister Markus Söder

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<sup>12</sup>*Es ist Volksfeststimmung hier. Ein Event, für manche schon seit Stunden. Jeder einzelne Flüchtling wird mit Klatschen begrüßt. Eine Familie verschenkt aus einem großen Sack Plüschtiere. Über die Gesichter vieler völlig erschöpfter Kinder in den Armen ihrer Eltern huscht ein Lächeln. Andere Flüchtlinge formen mit ihren Händen Herzen als Dank für diese umwerfende Geste, für diese Willkommenskultur. Dann stimmen Dutzende Flüchtlinge Gesänge an, rufen "Danke Germany", singen "Germany, Germany, Germany".*

summarized in response to the attacks, “Paris change[d] everything” (UK Guardian, November 16, 2015) Media reports centered less on the emotional narratives based on empathetic identity of German hospitality culture and increasingly focused on more practically-oriented questions of legal restrictions and economic effects of increased refugee presence in the country. Exemplary of this trend is an article published on January 17th, 2016 titled “Germany, Austria, and Slovenia test cooperative border controls.” Tellingly, the article is categorized no longer under the heading of refugee politics and does not make immediate reference to the personal narratives of individual refugee experiences. Rather, the piece takes a palpably more distant tone and concerns itself with “border questions” rather than refugees themselves, signaling a shift in concern away from German hospitality to maintenance of national border sovereignty amidst crisis. Solidarity and *Willkommenskultur* that were proudly celebrated in the initial aftermath of liberalization of German refugee policy are hardly evident; rather, there are indications of a potentially profound shift in policy and politics of the crisis:

“What sounds dry and theoretical could at the same time entail a fundamental change in the individual border regimes of Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. Namely, if refugees from multiple countries were to be inspected at the point of entry into the Schengen Zone along the north coast of Croatia” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, January 17, 2016) <sup>13</sup>

In an interview with SZ.de from January 15th, 2016, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble confirmed a shift in not only grassroots opinions of refugee policy at the federal level, but also a

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<sup>13</sup> “Was trocken klingt und theoretisch, könnte gleichwohl eine grundlegende Änderung der einzelnen Grenzregime in Deutschland, Österreich und Slowenien nach sich ziehen, wenn Flüchtlinge von mehreren Staaten gemeinsam bei ihrer Einreise in den Schengenraum an der Nordgrenze von *Kroatien* registriert und kontrolliert würden.”

shift in the attitudes in German elites as well, suggesting that “return should be the norm”

regarding refugee influx into Germany. Schäuble elaborated:

“The fact that the population demonstrated itself to be so prepared and receptive is of immense value. However, it is also the case that everything has borders/limits. So not in the sense of upper limits, but in the sense that capabilities/capacities are finite/limited” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, January 15, 2016).<sup>14</sup>

Schäuble’s utterance reflected a tempering in the idealism that grounded the enthusiastic response of *Willkommenskultur* and German immigration policy that flew in the face of its restrictive, heavily ethno-nationalist roots. And when asked to clarify what exactly was intended by the notion of carrying capacity or limitations in Germany, Schäuble argued:

“We will guarantee existing state protections in accord with the Geneva Convention protocol to those individuals who absolutely must evacuate a warzone, in particular Syria... Deeply interconnected therewith is a time-restricted right to residency. When the war in Syria has ended, returning home should be the norm. Also, to be able to provide protection for other refugees” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, January 15, 2016).<sup>15</sup>

Schäuble’s statement conveys a sense of hesitance under the guise of strict adherence only to the laws laid out in the Geneva Convention. His stance again constructs a symbol of a deserving refugee in nationalistic terms by exclusively focusing on Syrians and shifts the existing notions of refugee status to emphasize that refugees do not have a right to belong in Germany long-term,

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<sup>14</sup> “Dass sich die Bevölkerung so aufnahmebereit gezeigt hat, das ist ein großer Wert. Aber es ist auch so, dass alles Grenzen hat. Also, nicht im Sinne von Obergrenzen, sondern dass die Leistungsfähigkeit begrenzt ist.”

<sup>15</sup> Wir gewähren denjenigen, die aus einem Kriegsgebiet fliehen müssen, insbesondere Syrien, nach der Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention den vorläufigen Schutz. Damit verbunden ist ein Aufenthaltsrecht auf Zeit. Wenn der Krieg in Syrien beendet ist, sollte die Rückkehr der Normalfall sein. Auch, um anderen Flüchtlingen einmal Schutz gewähren zu können.



that they are not considered equal residents according to the German law, and that they are expected to effectively go back where they came from upon the civil war's close.

Thus, media representations shifted over the course of the later months of 2015 and early 2016 away from a collective discourse invoking empathetic response, preparedness to help, and celebration of newfound German identity rooted in hospitality to an assertively pragmatic discourse that emphasized feasibility, particular circumstances of refugees including overlapping categories of nationality and status as a persecuted person, and policies of restrictive inclusion of “deserving” individuals capable of integrating and belonging in German society rather than broad-based acceptance.

*Critical Juncture 3: “Finally, a farewell culture”*

The aforementioned trends tended to continue in the latter half of 2016. Paradigms of securitization and border control correspondingly largely overwhelmed humanitarian and ethical concerns in media discourse. Metaphoric narratives of the “closing door” were injected into references surrounding the fading *Willkommenskultur* that previously characterized the German response to the European refugee crisis as it had been framed. Although Angela Merkel maintained, defended, and strengthened her support of the notion of *Willkommenskultur*, invoking her now famous assertion that “we [Germany] will succeed... we will succeed, and when we face obstacles to our success, we must overcome them,” criticisms and tonal shifts were evident in the media discourse that I examined. In a July 28th article recapping a federal press conference in which Angela Merkel defended and insisted upon the necessity of her immigration policy, a range of anti-immigration perspectives seemed to loom over the Chancellor's position.

The article titled “Angela Merkel still is not changing course now” notes a multitude of dissenting voices:

“Armin Schuster, a rather cool-headed CDU politician, in a play on words on Merkel’s *Willkommenskultur*, is demanding that there must now finally be a ‘farewell culture.’ The mouthpiece of the CSU *Bayernkurier* writes that, now it is becoming evident, ‘which security risks the Chancellor has delivered to us in with her open borders and open arms.’ Frank Henkel, leading candidate for the Berlin CDU laments that Germany has ‘apparently imported entirely ruffian/vulgar/brutal people, who are capable of committing barbaric crimes that up until today were not a part of daily life.’ And Horst Seehofer threatens, he will no longer accept the ‘relativization of problems’—here, the leader of the CSU clearly is aiming at Merkel’s senior assistant communications adviser and minister of the interior Thomas de Mazière. Both explained, that refugees posed no more danger than any other group” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 28, 2016).<sup>16</sup>

Farewell-culture (*Abschiedskultur*) emerged in discourse as a critical re-evaluation and counterproposal to Merkel’s liberal immigration stance. The language, especially among Merkel’s opponents, shifted from humanitarian necessities of accepting refugees in Germany to questions of “security threats” resulting from open arms and open borders, thus reverting from a cosmopolitan, globalist orientation to an ethnocentric, nationalistic ideology of old: *kein Einwanderungsland* had, in short, resurfaced on the media playing field. Certain refugees were

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<sup>16</sup> Schuster, eigentlich ein besonnener CDU-Innenpolitiker, verlangt unter Anspielung auf Merkels *Willkommenskultur*, es müsse jetzt endlich auch eine "Abschiedskultur" geben. Das CSU-Organ *Bayernkurier* schreibt, nun werde deutlich, "welchen Sicherheitsrisiken uns die Kanzlerin mit ihren offenen Grenzen und Armen ausgeliefert hat". Frank Henkel, Berliner CDU-Spitzenkandidat, klagt, Deutschland habe "offenbar einige völlig verrohte Personen importiert, die zu barbarischen Verbrechen fähig sind, die in unserem Land bislang kein Alltag waren". Und Horst Seehofer droht, er werde die "Relativierung der Probleme" nicht mehr akzeptieren - der CSU-Chef zielt damit direkt auf Merkels Vize-Regierungssprecherin und auf Innenminister Thomas de Maizière. Beide hatten erklärt, dass von Flüchtlingen keine höhere Gefahr ausgehe als von anderen Gruppen.

depicted by certain elites as sub-human and vulgar, implying a contrast with German identity appropriate for belonging in the German national sphere. Altogether, refugees were thus increasingly viewed not as welcome elements in a diverse, multicultural German society, but rather as invasive risks undermining stability and safety of the “true” German people.

Further incidents of terrorist activity in Germany—including the widely publicized New Year’s Eve attack in Cologne—were attributed in press discourse to Merkel’s immigration policy and were discussed as a consequence of the refusal of the German government to implement and enforce stricter border controls. In this case, discourse shifted to an increasingly global scale of political significance. In an article from July 27th, 2016 titled “Right-wing populists blame Merkel for the surge in violence,” trans-European political critics ranging from the French Le Front National to the FPÖ in Austria dominate the discourse on refugee politics which centers around terrorism, religion, and national defense:

“Representative Marion Maréchal Le Pen, the 26-year old niece of [Front National] party leader Marine Le Pen, went even further: ‘How many Terrorists are there among Merkel’s million refugees? 10? 100? 1000? Irresponsible’ (Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 27, 2016).<sup>17</sup>

The article continues:

“In Hungary, the conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban turned the early discourse from [Geert] Wilders and Le Pen to his own words. Shortly after the attacks in Paris, he said: ‘Obviously, there is a relationship between immigration and terrorism. On the issue, there is no need for debate; that is a fact.’ After the attacks of the previous days, the right-wing populist wrote of a mass migration and a dangerous *Willkommenskultur*.

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<sup>17</sup> Die Abgeordnete Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, die 26-jährige Nichte von Parteichefin Marine Le Pen, ging noch weiter: "Wie viele Terroristen gibt es unter Merkels Million Flüchtlingen? 10? 100? 1000? Unverantwortlich."

‘Terror in Europe demonstrates that we need a different foreign politics (Ausländerpolitik). The policy/politics of open borders and false tolerance must be stopped’ (Süddeutsche Zeitung, July 27, 2016).<sup>18</sup>

Multiplicity of identities are utilized in the discursive productions of European populists in the media to wage a symbolic war against perceived covert terrorist operatives within apparent bands of refugees. Thus, Le Pen’s statement questions the very identity of the purported refugees and therefore delegitimizes not only their right to belong among Europeans, but also the safety of allowing them to enter the fortress of Europe to begin with. Terrorists are, in short, the other in the populist discursive construction of European identity seen above. Orban’s statements echo almost identical sentiments and represent similar facets in the identity construction process. The Hungarian prime minister shifts the interpretative lens around on *Willkommenskultur*, portraying what others have dubbed a humanitarian necessity and ethical obligation of a political project as a dangerous endeavor that “must be stopped.”

### *Conclusions and Implications for Future Research*

My findings largely corroborate those of Zaborowski and Georgiou (2016) whose research suggests that “articles in July and September featured sympathy towards the refugee plight and emphasised actions to assist asylum seekers.” The importance of culturally mediated symbolism

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<sup>18</sup> In Ungarn hat sich der rechtskonservative Ministerpräsident Viktor Orban den Diskurs von Wilders und Le Pen früh zu eigen gemacht. Schon nach den Anschlägen in Paris sagte er: "Offensichtlich gibt es einen Zusammenhang zwischen der Einwanderung und dem Terrorismus. Darüber braucht man nicht zu debattieren, das ist eine Tatsache." Nach den Attentaten der vergangenen Tage schreibt der Rechtspopulist von einer illegalen Masseneinwanderung und einer gefährlichen Willkommenskultur. "Der Terror in Europa zeigt, dass wir eine andere Ausländerpolitik brauchen. Die Politik der offenen Grenzen und der falschen Toleranz muss beendet werden."

in the Gramscian “war of position” cannot be overstated in this respect. Symbolic refugee figures and their German hosts were, at first, articulated in a symbiotic relationship, which rendered a tolerance implicit in German notions of national belonging possible and accessible to refugees in dire need of benevolent German assistance. German self-understandings, as indicated in the media discourse I considered, were based on self-praise and congratulatory spirit of overcoming biases implicit in perceptibly less tolerant European government policies. Thus, the construction of German and refugee identities were, at least initially, humanitarian-oriented and driven by apparent grassroots support for liberal immigration policy, implying a more tolerant, multicultural discursive frame for German identity and rights of belonging in Germany.

Examining the later points of critical juncture in the discursive sphere, it becomes evident that drastic shifts in political and social contexts enabled and indeed produced sea change evolving discourse surrounding *Willkommenskultur*. This dovetails again with the forthcoming research from Zaborowski and Georgiou (2016), which found:

“Generally, though, we observed a consistent move from humanitarianism towards securitisation. Despite a short, hopeful period of increased reporting on humanitarian measures in September... the militaristic frame was on the steady rise... Furthermore, the peak of the 'refugee/migration crisis' saw a gradual shift in emotional media narratives. Articles after the Paris terrorist attacks reported significantly fewer citizen emotions or refugee emotions than stories in July or September. This clearly underlines a move from emotional, humane narratives surrounding the refugees and national citizens to a distant, emotionless framing – a policy affair of action and reaction.”

*Willkommenskultur*, as both a political project and symbolic cultural orientation, was constructed less and less as a humanitarian obligation, and increasingly as a dangerous political

project tied to disconnected, anti-nationalist European leaders over the period considered.

Willkommenskultur has, in sum, increasingly been portrayed as aloof and idealistic, standing in contrast to the practical and realist concerns discussed by populist political figures and media voices alike.

The evolution of press discourse surround the idea of Willkommenskultur highlights the historically-rooted, theoretically confounding tension articulated between hospitality culture and xenophobia (Holmes and Casteñeda, 2016). This ongoing crisis illuminates and provides rich grounds for further research into issues of German and European identity, immigration policy and politics, discourse analysis, the rise and effects of far-right populism, belonging, and the intersections between them all. Here, I've sought to contribute in some small way to the broader academic discussion that, at its core, has profound implications not only for researchers and students of German identity and belonging in contemporary Europe, but more importantly for the people themselves fighting to belong and find refuge from violent conflict in a land of Willkommenskultur, wherever, if anywhere, it is to be found.

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