NATION AND REFUGE: MEDIA DISCOURSES IN CANADA AND GERMANY

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Media representations simultaneously represent discursive trends and influence social attitudes toward refugees and their integration. Our analysis of the representations of Syrian refugees in the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the Canadian *Globe and Mail* in the fall of 2015 confirms that both newspapers reflect the national traditions of their respective countries, i.e. Germany as a so-called ethnic nation and Canada as a multicultural society. However, our study also adds important nuances pertaining to an increasing acceptance of otherness within the German national imaginary and, to a certain degree, complacency surrounding refugee integration within a self-proclaimed "caring" Canadian nation.

*Les représentations médiatiques représentent des tendances discursives et, simultanément, influencent les attitudes sociales envers les réfugiés et leur intégration. Notre analyse des représentations des réfugiés syriens au sein d'un journal allemand (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) et au sein d'un journal canadien (*The Globe and Mail*) à l'automne 2015 souligne que les deux journaux reflètent les traditions nationales de leurs pays respectifs, à savoir l'Allemagne en tant que soi-disant nation ethnique et le Canada en tant que société multiculturelle. Cependant, notre étude témoigne également des nuances importantes, liées à une acceptation croissante de l'altérité dans l'imaginaire national allemand et, dans une certaine mesure, à la complaisance entourant l'intégration des réfugiés au sein d'une nation canadienne qui se veut « bienveillante ».*

INTRODUCTION

Between 2011 and 2017, approximately 5.5 million Syrians sought refuge internationally while 6.3 million became displaced within their own country (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2017). This paper is interested in national discourses responding to Syrians seeking refuge, particularly in Canada and Germany. Both countries experienced the arrival of a significant number of Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. In Canada a total of 41,595 Syrian refugees arrived in 2015 and 2016 (Government of Canada 2017), while in Germany a total of 424,907 Syrians asked for asylum during that time (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2017). While the initial reception of Syrian refugees in Canada and Germany was mainly positive, controversial representations about their integration and settlement remain. Considering that media representations simultaneously represent discursive trends and influence social attitudes toward refugees and their integration (Esses et al. 2017), we use these media representations to elucidate the integration trajectory of refugees in both countries and exemplify how these trajectories differ based on contextual differences.

Inspired by the work of Bauder (2011), this paper explores representations of refugees as potential members of the national community. Bauder (2011) analyses inclusion and exclusion in the national community through the theoretical lens of the nation-immigration dialectic, which employs two features of Hegelian philosophy. First, negation assumes that the nation can only be constructed if its members define who they are not. In negation, migrants are seen as a symbol of otherness and cannot be integrated. Second, sublation refers to a process that facilitiates integration into the national imagination, assuming that the "other" can become an integral part of "us." The nation-immigration dialectic is said to manifest itself differently within different national settings. Bauder (2011) maintains that within so-called ethnic nations like Germany, only negation takes place, while multicultural nations like Canada will experience both negation and sublation.

Comparing the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, our study explores the representations of Syrian refugees between September 2015 and January 2016. During this time, public perception of refugees changed from massive compassion after the drowning of Alan Kurdi, to reservation and suspicion after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 (which killed 130 individuals and where a fake Syrian passport was found next to the bodies of one of the alleged perpetrators) and the sexual assaults of 1,200 women in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16 (where the majority of perpetrators were identified as asylum seekers and refugees from North African countries). In both Germany and Canada, the latter two events resulted in the depiction of refugees as potential terrorists and criminals and, thus, increased suspicion against them. Although, arguably, the negative repercussions of these events were stronger in the European context. Overall, our results align with the well-documented relationship between media representations of immigration and asylum and fundamentally different types of national identities in Europe versus North America. However, our research also uncovers traces of sublation in German media representations, suggesting that German national identity may be becoming more open to the inclusion of migrant "others."

GERMANY AND CANADA: FACING THE "REFUGEE CRISIS"

Canada and Germany differ significantly with regard to their understanding of nationhood, their geographical location, and their approach to admitting refugees. To understand the media representations of refugees in both countries, it is thus necessary to take a closer look at these differences.

Canada is often described as a multicultural nation or a settler colonial society, which is associated with immigration, an ethnically diverse population, and political support for the expression of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. In September 2015, the story of the drowned Alan Kurdi catapulted the "refugee crisis" into the centre of the Canadian federal election (Ramos 2016). Canadians began to claim that the Conservative government was not doing enough to help Syrian refugees, and Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party promised to resettle 25,000 Syrians by the end of the year if elected. By 2019, more than 40,000 Syrians had arrived in Canada by means of three refugee resettlement programs, automatically recognizing them as refugees and granting them permanent residency (Government of Canada 2019).

Germany, by contrast, is often identified as an ethnic nation founded on the belief of shared language, culture, and ancestry, and characterized by the refusal to accept migrants and refugees into the national community. In 2015, Syrians fleeing civil war entered Germany as asylum seekers, entering the country by walking across land borders and not as resettled and legally recognized refugees. The arrival of refugees in Germany mobilized two opposing movements. On the one hand, it resulted in a wave of support from volunteers wishing to help the newcomers. On the other hand, and especially after the incidents in Cologne, there was an increase in support for right-wing anti-refugee movements such as "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the West" (PEGIDA) and the Eurosceptic political party "Alternative for Germany" (AfD).

NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS

Data for this study was collected through the electronic databases Factiva and Canadian Major Dailies using a combination of keywords. To account for changing representations over

time in two national newspapers – the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *The Globe and Mail* – articles published up to two weeks after the three major events mentioned above were analyzed, i.e. the death of Alan Kurdi on September 2nd, 2015, the terrorist attack in Paris on November 13th, 2015, and the sexual assaults perpetrated in Cologne during New Year's Eve 2015/16. We collected 74 articles from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and 94 from *The Globe and Mail*. Both newspapers are politically liberal, and while they may not perfectly reflect public opinion, they offer a window through which we can see how national identity and refugee reception were articulated in the German and Canadian media. Articles were examined using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which assumes that discourses reflect and reproduce concrete social realities and power inequalities (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Thus, the aim of CDA is to describe, explain, and understand how discourses construct and legitimize these social realities and inequalities. Newspaper articles are identified by the name of the newspaper, year, month, day and name of the journalist (for example, SZ20151119-Neshitov). All translations are ours.

TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF NATIONHOOD IMPACT REPRESENTATIONS OF REFUGEES

In Germany, discourses in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* demonstrate that there is opposition toward refugees among a large part of the German population, which is partly based on the fear of a "cultural or foreign infiltration." This is articulated through three different discursive trends. First, the challenge of integrating refugees arriving at the borders is a dominant theme in the newspaper representations. Articles often represent the arrival of refugees as "uncontrolled and illegal immigration" (SZ20151116-Gammelin) and highlight Germany's limited ability to host and integrate refugees. They also use pejorative language such as "waves of refugees" (SZ20151119-Neshitov) or "the refugee problem" (SZ20160111-Kanamüller). Second, following the events in Paris and Cologne the newspaper suggests a threat posed by male refugees as either terrorists or sexual predators. Articles often focus on the risk refugees may pose to German society and suggest that the Islamic State might "infiltrate" refugee groups (SZ20151116-Krüger). This discourse frames the arrival of refugees as a danger to public safety, warranting stricter border controls. Third, some articles represent refugees as being ignorant of German social norms and values, especially that of gender equality. This discourse is particularly present after the sexual assaults in Cologne and is expressed by the need to educate refugees on "how our [German] society functions" (SZ20160115-Setzwein).

Overall, otherness is constructed around two axes: (a) the language of risk, in which refugees ("others") threaten the perceived security of the nation ("us"); and, (b) social values and norms, where refugees are seen to adhere to foreign values and must learn German ("our") values to integrate. Based on these observations, the discourses in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reinforce the assertion by Bauder (2011, 197) that Germany, in contrast to Canada, has indeed not yet obtained the status of a "country of immigration."

In Canada, several articles in *The Globe and Mail* describe Syrian refugees as "new Canadians" (GM20150910-Hager) who will stay in Canada on a long-term basis and are "active contributors to Canada's success" (GM20151116-Curry). These representations are reflective of Canada's policy of refugees becoming permanent residents. They demonstrate that sublation, i.e. the integration of the "other" into the Canadian national imagination is possible. At the same time, many articles represent Canada as a "society of peace" (GM20151121-Editorial) and "a place of sanctuary and a place of welcome" (GM20151119-Mason) that is caring, generous, and culturally tolerant. These discourses reinforce the image of Canada as a country of immigration, confirming Bauder's (2011, 98) findings on the construction of Canada "as a liberal and compassionate nation."

TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF NATIONHOOD ARE CHANGING (ALBEIT SLOWLY)

While the aforementioned representations cannot be neglected, there are important nuances that pertain specifically to the context of (Syrian) refugee reception and perception in the fall of 2015. For example, it is noteworthy that the majority of articles in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* focus on the need to help refugees. These articles portray refugees as victims who are escaping the "murderous" (SZ20151116-Prantl) terrorism of the Islamic State and the violence of the Syrian civil war. In contrast, Germans are represented as human rights activists assisting refugees by volunteering, offering translation services, or medical care (see e.g. SZ20160111-Kanamüller). In this discourse, the negation (or "otherness") of Syrian refugees in German society manifests itself by their need for help and security. Germany is constructed through its ability to offer this help, with Germans ("us") being vital for refugee ("their") integration. Some articles in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* also give refugees an active voice and represent them as agents able and willing to integrate. These articles show the "good refugees" who are in the process of learning the German language (SZ20160114-Bielicki), finding employment (SZ20151117-Geschendtner), and sharing "the values of the population of this country [Germany]" (SZ20160112-Ludwig). Refugees are thus given the opportunity to be seen as a part of the German nation ("us"). Therefore, while inconsistent and often contested, there are nevertheless instances where the articles in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* demonstrate sublation, with refugees represented as (a potential) part of

German society. This may indicate a shift away from an ethnic conception of German national identity toward a more accepting society that is open to the integration of "others."

In Canada, several articles highlight the many initiatives to help refugees that were undertaken by local political actors, organizations, and citizens (see e.g. GM20150904-Sachgau-Chowdhry and GM20150904-Howlett). However, this positive representation is mainly used to emphasize and maybe even "celebrate" the "true" character of the Canadian nation, as generous and benevolent toward minority groups. Moreover, it implies that it is Canadian citizens who provide the possibility for integration, whereas refugees are not appointed agency in this process. Thus, the ability of refugees to transcend beyond representations as "others" is contingent on the generosity of Canadians. This precarious status of belonging is also reinforced by several articles demonstrating that the question of security (and "otherness") in Canada is profoundly gendered. After the violence in Paris and Cologne, some articles emphasize the perceived risks of resettling those from a "war zone in which multiple terrorist organizations are operating" (GM20151116-Curry). Others highlight that this risk could be lowered by excluding single male refugees from the resettlement process (e.g. GM20160114-Leblanc). Thus, male refugees ("them") represent a threat to Canadians ("us") and had to be excluded. Female refugees ("them") mitigate this risk and were thus deserving of sublation or becoming part of Canadian society. Consequently, even though processes of sublation can be identified in these articles of *The Globe and Mail*, belonging to Canadian society remains precarious as the "other" is so diminished that its integration depends on their gender and the goodwill of Canadians.

Although sublation remains precarious, it should be noted that the coverage of Syrian refugees in *The Globe and Mail* is less negative when compared with that of other refugee groups, specifically those not entering the country through resettlement programs. Depictions of a generous and multicultural Canada that is welcoming Syrian refugees are a distinctive feature of the Canadian media coverage. It seems to be prompted by the fact that the Syrians who arrived in 2015 and 2016 were not asylum seekers, but rather refugees in the legal sense of the word, i.e. individuals who were screened and recognized by the Canadian government prior to resettlement. Additionally, this positive depiction of Syrian refugees may be explained by the fact that, in comparison to the experience of Germany, Canada resettled a fairly small number of refugees. In fact, Syrian refugees represented 0.13 percent of the Canadian population compared to 1.2 percent of the German population. Lastly, in contrast to Germany, Canada also did not experience terrorist attacks or sexual assault cases associated with refugees (Amarasingam 2017). The representations of Syrian refugees in Canadian media were therefore impacted by international rather than national conflict.

THE WAY FORWARD

At first glance, our results confirm the widespread idea that Germany and Canada represent opposite national responses to immigration. However, a closer analysis demonstrates that the arrival of Syrian refugees allowed both Canadians and Germans to imagine their countries as generous and caring nations. In both newspapers, this imagination coexists with representations of Germany and Canada as adhering to superior cultural and civic values which are not shared by refugees, which then require the adoption of restrictive measures in response to newcomers and asylum seekers.

While traditional conceptions of the nation have a significant impact on the representations of refugees, national identities are neither static nor deterministic. In particular, they do not fundamentally prevent social change through civic engagement. One contribution to the national belonging of Syrian refugees in Canada has been the involvement of a broad settlement community within civil society. In fact, the interpersonal networks of refugees have been an important factor in the success of Syrian integration in Canada over the past three years (Fratzke and Dorst 2019, 9). Similarly, the German shift towards sublation may be partially explained by the widening of civil society networks. Newly formed and institutionalized organizations developed in response to the "refugee crisis" in Germany and seeking to influence public debates, these organizations were heterogeneous, but most could be characterized as activist, rather than simply as volunteer, organizations (Schmid et al. 2019, 169-70). The proliferation of networks linking civil society and the Syrian refugee communities in Germany, and the focus on steering public opinion, may have created an opportunity to shift the national response to immigration through engagement with refugees (Schmid et al. 2019). While more research is necessary to confirm this, we dare to suggest that civil society activism provides greater instances of refugee representation in public discourse, thereby building greater momentum toward sublation of immigrants into the national imagination.

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