

On the Border of the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Views From Two Different Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract

Since the Syrian refugee crisis represents the worst humanitarian crisis in modern history, it is critical to examine how global media covered this issue. Focusing on two nations significantly affected by the refugee crisis—Bulgaria and Turkey, this study employs a content analysis to examine differences in refugee portrayals in national media. The results show that Turkish media coverage was more personalized and more likely to emphasize the victim frame. In contrast, Bulgarian coverage was less personalized and more likely to emphasize the administrative frame. The findings are placed within national context and their implications for media framing of refugees are discussed.

Keywords

Syrian refugees, news framing, Bulgarian press, Turkish press, media representation of refugees

Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis is the worst humanitarian crisis in modern history. As a result of the internal conflicts that started in April 2011 in Syria, 12 million Syrians have been internally or externally displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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[UNHCR], 2015). A significant proportion of those Syrian citizens had to migrate to other countries as refugees. This study is a comparative content analysis of the news media coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis in two countries affected early and deeply by it: Bulgaria and Turkey. The analysis identifies the dominant media portrayals of Syrian refugees to understand the prevailing societal discourse around refugees and immigration in both countries.

News media portrayal of refugees is an important issue to study, as these portrayals influence perceptions of refugees by the public and prevalent attitudes toward them. This analysis can help scholars and policy makers better understand the definition and problematization of refugees by the media and perhaps reveal competing social and political discourses at the national level. In addition, as Kolukırk (2009) argues, the “symbiotic relationship between the media and public opinion is effective in determining the decisions of governments and the public regarding the issue” (p. 20). Thus, the analysis can also help illuminate how news coverage may have influenced national policies regarding the refugees in both countries.

Scholars have long asserted that language may help challenge or subvert power (Entman, 1993; Wodak, 2001). In line with this argument, this study utilizes a frame analysis to examine the language used in news media portrayals of refugees. Following the approach used by Nickels (2007), the authors analyze media content to identify the variety of frames embedded in refugee news coverage in Turkey and Bulgaria.

Literature Review

Media Framing

Media framing has become an increasingly popular approach to media and journalism studies, especially when it comes to international news events (e.g., Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007). Rooted in framing theory as conceptualized by Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980), Gamson (1992), and Entman (1993), the argument made is that journalists and politicians “frame” phenomena according to their own cognitive schemas, which in turn are bound by the external political and media context. Frames organize reality for individuals and help people understand phenomena (Goffman, 1974). Media frames can be understood as the “central organizing idea” in media texts (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). As Entman (1993) suggested, framing involves highlighting certain aspects of issues “to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” for the issue discussed (p. 52). In addition, the context in which the phenomena take place, normative factors and other constraints also influence this framing process (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Thus, the news media help construct reality by using certain frames at the expense of others and presenting phenomena through a specific cultural perspective.

Refugee Representations in News Coverage

Refugees and their representation in mass media have been an important research area as mass media can shape societal discourse, public opinion, and policy surrounding

controversial social issues such as immigration. It comes as no surprise then that framing analysis has been used extensively to understand the media representations of refugees and immigrants around the world (Baker & McEnery, 2005; Chavez, 2001; Cisneros, 2008; Kaleda, 2014; Khosravini, 2009; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Mahtani & Mountz, 2002; White, 2015). Analyzing frames within their national context allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena at hand and how it has evolved over time. The following section provides a brief review of media analyses on this topic.

In the American media context, Chavez (2001) studied publication covers and revealed a high sense of threat regarding immigration in general. Cisneros (2008) analyzed U.S. television news and found that immigrants are typically portrayed as dangerous and threatening. In their analysis of asylum seekers in Australia, Klocker and Dunn (2003) asserted that media representations were mainly negative and highlighted potential threat. Henry and Tator's (2002) media analysis revealed a critical tone in media representations of refugees and immigrants. In addition, the portrayals often contained a sense of panic and anxiety through the use of metaphors describing immigration and refugees as a helpless mass (Kaleda, 2014), and referred to in the plural and homogeneous forms (Khosravini, 2009). Refugees were often described as "flooding" or "invading" the country (Mahtani & Mountz, 2002), by "overwhelming" numbers (van Dijk, 1988), and in a state of desperation and horror (Beattie, Miller, Miller, & Philo, 1999).

Baker and McEnery (2005) stated that refugees are often referred to in terms of their high numbers, movements, and tragic plight in news media representations. Esses, Medianu, and Lawson (2013) argued that news media further support these negative perceptions via a single-sided approach, portraying refugees as both "tangible threats to physical and economic well-being and potential cultural threats to society" (p. 522). Wilson (2008) argued that portrayals of immigrants' criminality in news media tend to be misleading and divergent. Looking at headlines and news content in Turkish media, Kolukırk (2009) observed some common labels used to describe refugees, such as "fugitive," "stranger," and "immigrant."

In a study focusing on the refugee and asylum issues in Luxembourg, Nickels (2007) identified four context-sensitive frames: *administrative frame*, which focuses on bureaucratic aspects, *genuineness frame*, which discusses potential benefits of immigrants, *human dignity frame*, which involves a humanistic/humanitarian approach to the refugee issue, and *return home frame*, which focused on the need to stop immigration and allow people to go back. In their discourse analysis, Guilfoyle and Hancock (2009) argued that refugees were positioned as different from "us," and presented as "criminals, illegal, competitors for scarce resources," which ensured "certain actions were warranted over others" (p. 126).

The Context: Syrian Refugees in Bulgaria and Turkey

According to the Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees (2016) administered under the National Council of Ministers, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Bulgaria has

steadily continued to grow from less than 1,000 applicants in 2011 to 20,391 in 2015. In addition to those seeking asylum, Bulgaria has experienced a steep increase in the total number of people entering the country, sometimes without border processing, so exact numbers of the total number of refugees are not available. According to Amnesty International, as of September 2015, close to 7,000 refugees had entered Bulgaria illegally, while at the same time about 5,000 have left illegally without border processing (Amnesty International, 2016). According to the UNHCR, the number of refugees residing in Bulgaria is 11,406 as of June 2015. In all, the per capita number of refugees in Bulgaria is one of highest in Europe and rivaling that of Sweden.

The largest number of refugees in Bulgaria come from Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq (*Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees, 2016*). Those refugees processed at the border and seeking legal status in Bulgaria are placed in what are called refugee camps around the country. The camps are typically located in remodeled military barracks or dormitory style residences with limited amenities and services. The living conditions for refugees have improved over time, largely thanks to European Union funds provided to the Bulgarian government, although there is still room for improvement (UNHCR, 2015).

Turkey as a nation bordering Syria has been housing the highest number of Syrian refugees. As a result of the Syrian civil war, more than 380,000 Syrian nationals had arrived in Turkey as of September 2013 according to the Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, AFAD in Turkish (AFAD, 2013). The UNHCR estimated the total number of Syrians in Turkey in May 2014 to be around 750,000 (Eskinat, 2014), and in July 2015 the number had already risen to almost two million (UNHCR, 2015). Related ministries, state institutions, and organizations such as the Turkish Red Cross provide services such as shelter, food, health, security, social activities, education, religious and translation services, telecommunication, and banking to the displaced population.

To address the humanitarian needs of Syrian citizens, the Turkish government has provided temporary housing in 21 camps (tent cities as they are referred to in Turkish) located in 10 Turkish provinces. All tent cities and container cities include a school, mosque, trade center, police station, health center, press meeting room, playground, television room, grocery, sewing course, water tank, purifying center, power distribution unit, and a generator (AFAD, 2013). As a result of the services provided, 45,696 Syrian students have studied in 693 classrooms and 6,051 babies were born in the camps (AFAD, 2013).

Public opinion polls in each country reflect concerns about the refugees, the government response to the refugee crisis and its effects on the local culture, economy, and society. According to an Alpha Research (2013) survey in Bulgaria, the number one concern among the public is that refugees may drain financial resources from the nation (78%), followed by concerns about increasing crime rates in refugee areas (68%). Health (63%) and national security (59%) are also among the top concerns among Bulgarian public. Another opinion poll showed that the majority of Bulgarians see the refugee crisis as a European problem and only 9% believe the refugees can help their host nation in any way (Gallup, 2015). Most Syrian refugees are Muslim, while the predominant religion in Bulgaria is Christianity.

The Turkish public reports different attitudes toward the Syrian refugees. A public opinion survey conducted by the HUGO Research Centre in Turkey's 18 provinces in October 2014 revealed that despite the effects on daily life and risks posed by over 1,5 million Syrian nationals, almost 65% of the Turkish public agree that Syrians should be accepted into the country, have a high acceptance of Syrian nationals, and have internalized a rights-based approach toward them (Erdoğan, 2014). The dominant religion in Turkey is Islam, so the refugees may be perceived as culturally similar in this regard. The major concern about Syrian refugees is the view that they have moved to Turkey permanently and will not be going back to Syria (Erdoğan, 2014).

Cultural Proximity and Public Attitudes Toward the Syrian Refugees

Due to the different cultural proximity to Syria and diverging public attitudes about the refugees in Bulgaria and Turkey, we expect to observe some differences in the way the media framed the refugees. In particular, Turkey has a closer geographic and cultural proximity to Syria than Bulgaria. Public opinion polls also show more resistance and concerns among the Bulgarian public compared with Turkish public opinion data. Considering the influence of cultural context as well as the external political environment on media framing, the study advances the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Turkish news coverage of the refugees will exhibit higher level of personalization than Bulgarian news coverage.

Hypothesis 2: The victim frame and humanitarian frame will be more common in Turkish than Bulgarian news coverage.

Hypothesis 3: The administrative frame and threat frame will be more common in Bulgarian than Turkish news coverage.

Methodology

This study utilizes a content analysis of media coverage of daily newspapers in each country. Content analysis has been described as a useful method for identifying media message patterns and trends in media content over time (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). The goal of this study is to reveal how mainstream news media portrayed the Syrian refugees in Turkey and Bulgaria, so the focus was on the national press in each country. We selected two daily newspapers per country that had (a) high readership, (b) good reputation, and (c) represented different ideological orientations. The newspapers (described below) are expected to be functional equivalents (Wirth & Kolb, 2004).

Sample

Hürriyet ("Freedom" in Turkish) is one of the mainstream Turkish newspapers; it was founded in 1948 and has a liberal outlook. The newspaper is associated with Doğan News Agency, which primarily serves newspapers and television channels that are

under the management of Doğan Media Group (Doğan Yayın Holding). With a circulation of around 1,200,000 in February 2014, *Hürriyet* has a wide readership in Turkey. The slogan of *Hürriyet* is “Turkey belongs to the Turks.”

The second Turkish newspaper selected for analysis is *Cumhuriyet* (“Republic” in Turkish). It can be described as a center-left daily, founded on 7 May, 1924, by journalist Yunus Nadi Abaloğlu; after November 2001, its ownership moved to the Cumhuriyet Foundation. The newspaper has a strongly secularist and antigovernmental stance and a circulation around 160,000 (Barış, 2016).

The Bulgarian sample consists of two similar daily newspapers. For the purposes on this analysis, we selected *Dneven Trud* (“Daily Labor” in Bulgarian) as the largest circulation daily outside of the yellow press. *Dneven Trud* is one of the oldest Bulgarian newspapers and despite the lack of exact circulations figures its circulation is estimated to be between 60,000 and 100,000 copies (E-vestnik, 2008). *Dneven Trud*'s ownership has changed over the past few years, but its ideological bent may be described as center-right and closer in alignment to dominant business interests.

The second Bulgarian newspaper selected in this analysis is *Standart* (“Standard” in Bulgarian). Similarly to *Dneven Trud*, exact circulation numbers are hard to come by, but it is estimated to have a weekly circulation between 35,000 and 40,000, making it one of the top five largest dailies in the country (E-vestnik, 2008). In terms of ideological bent it may be described as center-left with good reputation for general news reporting.

Sampling Strategy. The goal was to capture a multiyear time period starting with 2011 when the Syrian civil war began. Based on the sampling recommendations suggested by Riffe et al. (2005), we decided to use two constructed weeks per year as an initial sampling strategy for the following time frame: 2011-2014. The dates were randomly selected using an online random numbers generator and provided to the research assistants. Since there was a relatively low number of articles on the topic, especially in the earlier time frame, we followed research recommendation to expand sample size beyond two constructed weeks per year (see Connolly-Ahern, Ahern, & Bortree, 2009; also Riffe et al., 2005) so the study uses three constructed weeks per year and adding a ± 2 days sampling criteria.

Variables

Frames. After a comprehensive literature review, five main frames used to portray refugees in media coverage worldwide were identified as follows: *threat frame*, *victim frame*, *administrative frame*, *humanitarian frame*, and *diversity frame*. Frames were defined as overarching themes or storylines presented in the text and were coded on presence/absence basis per article (0/1). This coding scheme allowed capturing more than one frame within the article while also coding for which frame was mentioned first.

An article was coded as containing a *threat frame* if there was discussion of economic burden (taking away jobs or local resources, for instance), cultural identity threat because of different religion, language, and so on, or a threat to public order or

national security. The *victim frame* involved coverage of social suffering (poor living conditions, poor educational opportunities, amenities in camps, or medical problems), crimes committed against refugees, including actions of smugglers or accidents suffered by immigrants or societal discrimination. The *administrative frame* included coverage focusing on local bureaucracy, handling of the refugees, border crossing, or focusing on national bureaucracy, including legal status, paperwork, and lawyers working with the refugees. The *humanitarian frame* involved discussion of humanitarian ideals relevant to refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, such as tolerance, understanding, and solidarity due to war suffering and displacement. Finally, the *diversity frame* included discussion of either cultural or economic contributions that the refugees can make toward a more diverse society.

Additionally, we also coded whether the story offered personalization of the refugees, such as telling a personal story about a specific individual or naming a specific family and their personal background as part of the narrative. This variable was coded on a presence/absence basis. Finally, we added two items on refugee characterization: whether religion was mentioned within the article and whether the refugees were referred to as “illegal.”

Coding Process

Based on this deductive approach, a predefined coding scheme was followed by the coders who were native speakers of either Bulgarian or Turkish with English-language fluency. Coders were specifically hired on this research project and underwent extensive training, which involved reading several articles in the local language, identifying the frames in the news stories and debriefing with the lead principal investigators. Several variables that remained too open to interpretation were dropped. Coder agreement was tested on English-language newspaper content, using 42 articles about refugees from *The Guardian*. Intercoder reliability was established at 82% across all coding categories, which is acceptable for this type of media analysis (Riffe et al., 2005), particularly given the need for coders to work in their second language.

Results

The content analysis included a total of 148 articles, with a gradual increase in the number of articles over time. The Bulgarian sample was composed of 83 articles and the Turkish sample included 65 articles.

Personalization

The first hypothesis predicted that Turkish news coverage would be more likely to include personalization of refugees than the Bulgarian news coverage. Looking at Table 1 below, one can observe that 23.4% of the Turkish articles offered some level of personalization, while only 6% of the Bulgarian articles did. This difference is statistically significant, which indicates support for the first hypothesis.

Table 1. Refugee Portrayals by Country.

Country variable	Bulgaria (<i>n</i> = 83), %	Turkey (<i>n</i> = 65), %	Total sample (<i>N</i> = 148), %	Chi-square statistic
Personalization	6	23.4	13.6	9.32**
Religion mentioned	2.4	12.3	6.8	5.67 ^a
Refugees called “illegal”	26.5	3.1	16.2	14.73 ^a

^aRaw count lower than 5 per cell. Table displays percentage of articles containing variable per country.

** $p < .01$

Table 2. News Frames by Country.

Frame variables	Bulgaria (<i>n</i> = 83), %	Turkey (<i>n</i> = 65), %	Total sample (<i>N</i> = 148), %	Chi-square statistic
Administrative frame	55.4	13.8	37.2	26.98***
Victim frame	21.7	33.8	27.0	2.73 ^a
Threat frame	27.7	18.5	23.6	1.73, n.s.
Humanitarian frame	36.1	43.1	39.2	0.74, n.s.
Diversity frame	0	3	1.3	n.s.

^aSignificant at $p < .1$. Table displays percentage of articles containing variable per country.

*** $p < .001$

As shown in Table 1, Turkish coverage did a better job in providing relevant background information on the refugee crisis and also portraying the refugees as individuals, frequently including information about a person’s story and details of their journey across the border. While personalization of the refugees in the Bulgarian coverage was rather rare, more than a quarter of the Bulgarian articles characterized the refugees “illegal” (see Table 1). This may have inadvertently portrayed them as outsiders and contributed to framing them as a threat (more on that below). Perhaps not surprisingly, Turkish news articles were more likely to mention the religious affiliation of the refugees, although religion in general was not a common topic in the coverage. This finding could be related to the geographic and cultural proximity of Syria to Turkey, or could be also a reflection of the tepid public opinion of the refugees in Bulgaria.

News Frames

Next, we examined the relative use of news frames in each country, focusing on five specific frames: administrative, humanitarian, diversity, threat, and victim frame. First taking a look at the sample as a whole, we note that the humanitarian frame is the most frequently used frame, appearing in 39.2% of all articles examined here (see Table 2). A different picture emerges, however, when looking at frame use by country.

As shown in Table 2, the most common frame in the Bulgarian coverage is the administrative frame (55.4%), which focused on discussion about logistical issues

such as refugee paperwork, legal status, transportation, and housing availability. In contrast, the humanitarian frame is most frequently employed (43.1%) in the Turkish sample, followed by the victim frame (33.8%). The diversity frame was least common and almost nonexistent in both countries' coverage.

Cross tabulations show only two statistically significant differences between the news framing of the refugees in each country, namely the frequency of use of the administrative frame and victim frame. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the victim frame was more frequently used in the Turkish (33.8%) news coverage than in the Bulgarian (21.7%) news coverage ($\chi^2 = 2.73, p < .1$). Conversely, and consistent with Hypothesis 3, the administrative frame was significantly more common in the Bulgarian (55.4%) news coverage compared with the Turkish (13.8%) news coverage ($\chi^2 = 26.98, p < .001$). The differences in the use of the threat frame and the humanitarian frame were not statistically significant between the two countries. Thus, we conclude that both Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 are only partially supported.

While the threat frame was not significantly more common in the Bulgarian refugee coverage, it appeared in close to 28% of the articles and offered some powerful narratives. As we know, dominant keywords, metaphors, headlines, and catch phrases serve as the building blocks of overarching media frames and have a memorable impact (Entman, 1993). Therefore, it might be useful to provide a few examples to demonstrate how refugee framing was achieved. In the Bulgarian coverage, in addition to often being labeled as "illegal," the refugees were often covered in the crime section and referred to as potential criminals or murderers. An April 29, 2014, headline from the *Trud* newspaper reads: "The people who kicked out the refugees from the village of Rosovo say they are scared of robberies and murders." References to "waves" of refugees "flooding" the country were also typical.

Turkish newspapers, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to portray the refugees as victims, as suggested by the following headlines: "Fear and starvation beyond the Syrian border" (*Hurriyet*, June 12, 2011), "My daughter is dead, my sons are with the Free Syrian Army" (*Hurriyet*, July 26, 2013), and "Life and death struggle at camps" (*Cumhuriyet*, February 19, 2014). The victim frame was utilized in about a third of the Turkish coverage and goes hand in hand with the higher level of personalization found in that country. Overall, these headlines illustrate how the media framing of the refugee crisis differed across the two nations.

The results of the content analysis also show that the humanitarian frame was more common than the victim frame in the Turkish coverage. This finding indicates that Turkish journalists often referenced the Syrian refugees as part of a larger humanitarian crisis and were willing to incorporate discussion of humanitarian ideals such as tolerance, understanding, and acceptance in the aftermath of civil war and displacement.

Discussion

News media in any country help construct meaning, create a dominant social discourse, and shape public opinion via the frames they utilize (Gamson & Modigliani,

1989; Gitlin, 1980). This content analysis aimed to demonstrate how national media framed the Syrian refugee crisis in two neighboring countries, Turkey and Bulgaria. Our goal was to reveal possible linkages between national-level news reporting on the refugee crisis and the different cultural and political context in each country.

Turkey, which is a major transition route for refugees, has been hosting immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa for decades. Although the issue of refugees is not new, the news coverage of refugees in the Turkish media often portrayed them as victims but was far from offering meaningful solutions. Over time, the refugee crisis became a routine media event in the Turkish coverage. Gradually, the local coverage of refugees shifted from providing background to the refugee crisis toward a description of the daily struggles they encounter in the process of setting down in the camps, which was consistent with early work in this area (Kolukirik, 2009). That may have led to higher levels of personalization in the news coverage.

The Syrian refugee crisis has been on the Turkish media agenda for various issues such as granting citizenship/voting rights, providing privileges during university entrance exam, and resistance to Syrians who no longer live within the camps but have relocated to different cities around Turkey. Although the coverage seemed mostly positive, there were a few more negative news reports about Syrian nationals moving to large cities, such as Istanbul and Ankara, and trying to survive by begging on the streets with their children beside them. Another issue covered in the news was about Turkish men taking young Syrian women as their second or third wives. Such stories may have contributed to more negative public perceptions, especially among local women living in Hatay and Kilis, border cities between Turkey and Syria.

Other possible reasons for the higher levels of personalization in the Turkish coverage might have been easier access to refugees or working knowledge of Arabic by at least some local Turkish journalists, it may have been easier for them to interview refugees, leading to the more common use of personalization in the Turkish stories. It is tempting to consider the common religion of Islam as a factor in the tendency to personalize stories in Turkey. However, it is important to note that not all of the Syrian refugees were Muslims and acknowledge that common religion does not in itself explain the different coverage.

Looking at neighboring Bulgaria, it is important to note the country has had less experience with refugees and was caught unprepared financially and administratively by the Syrian crisis. The public as a whole was also inexperienced in accepting foreign nationals within its borders with public opinion polls showing fears and concerns about increasing crime, national security, and the negative financial impact of the refugee crisis (Alpha Research, 2013). The dominant public opinion seemed to mirror the media coverage. There were a number of articles that discussed crimes committed by refugees, potential security threats or fears about increasing crime rates among local residents, sensationalizing the issue (Bosev & Cheresheva, 2015). Refugees were often referred to as “illegal” although in order to be settled in a refugee camp all had to complete necessary paperwork and establish legal status in the country. Despite the presence of crime stories, the dominant frame in the Bulgarian coverage was the administrative frame, which included coverage of border crossing challenges, legal

paperwork, logistical issues at the campsites, and applying for legal status. A few articles talked about the role of the European Union in resolving the crisis and the need for more European Union funding to assist the Bulgarian government with the crisis. Coverage as a whole lacked background information and did not report on individual stories of personal struggles. Not surprisingly, less than a fifth of the Bulgarian public perceived the news coverage of the refugees to be complete and objective (Alpha Research, 2013). While it is beyond the scope of this research to assess the effects of news framing, it is reasonable to assume that the tenor of the Bulgarian coverage did little to help the Bulgarian public empathize with the plight of the refugees.

To sum up our findings: Turkish media coverage was more personalized in nature and more likely to emphasize the victim frame. In contrast, Bulgarian coverage was less personal and significantly more likely to emphasize the administrative frame. The differences in refugee portrayals in Bulgaria and Turkey point to the need for research in critical areas. First, what are the reasons behind the construction of this different media reality in each country? Second, what is the impact of the coverage on audiences, particularly with regard to support or lack of support for public policies involving refugees? While comparative media scholars rarely find consensus on the exact factors that influence the frame-building process, most include the national political environment and cultural context as key predictors.

Although journalism research necessarily focuses on differences in coverage, it is important to note there were some similarities across the two countries when it comes to the humanitarian frame and the threat frame, both of which were used with the same frequency by Bulgarian and Turkish national media. These similarities suggest the existence of some universal trends in the media constructions of refugees permeating coverage on this politically charged topic, regardless of geographic region or national culture (Chavez, 2001; Cisneros, 2008; Kaleda, 2014; White, 2015). The relatively frequent use of the humanitarian frame, in particular, speaks to the possibility of a common journalistic norm of giving voice to the otherwise voiceless.

Limitations

This study relied on a content analysis methodology to document the trends in media coverage of the refugee crisis in two different countries. Like any study that utilizes content analysis, one of the major limitations is focusing only on media content, which does not reveal why certain frames made it into the news reports. Future studies could include public opinion surveys or in-depth interviews with local experts such as journalists, NGOs, and government officials to complement the content analysis data. Integrating personal accounts of news reporters as well as key external constituencies will allow us to better understand the specific framing of the issue and also can potentially provide refugees, experts, and local populations an outlet to express their opinions and feelings on the issue.

Another limitation of this study is its focus on only two countries when the issue of Syrian refugees has affected many more in Europe and around the world. Future research could be expanded to integrate more European countries to compare the

dominant discourse in their media coverage of the issue and try to connect media frames with the external political environment in those nations.

Furthermore, this study examines only two newspapers from each country. A wider range of newspapers with differing political perspectives could be integrated into the analysis in future studies in order to see whether different frames would emerge as a result of different editorial perspectives.

Conclusion

There is little doubt the dramatic influx of refugees into Turkey and Bulgaria beginning in 2011 caused considerable upheaval for governments in both countries, unexpectedly stretching administrative and financial resources. It also forced local populations in both nations to confront the humanitarian crisis in Syria personally, rather than from the “safe” distance provided by mediated coverage alone. Thus, the news coverage examined in this study is both reflective of the cultural contexts of the countries that produced it, and one possible driver of the public policies ultimately impacting refugees within each country.

Content analysis necessarily provides a snapshot of a particular issue at a particular time. The ongoing nature of the Syrian conflict means that the news coverage of refugees is bound to continue. In fact, the sheer scale of the crisis demands coverage from reputable news outlets. It is therefore important to continue examining coverage of refugees. The extent to which the coverage continues to portray refugees in a negative light will speak to the ongoing difficulties of local populations in coming to terms with the aftermath of the crisis, increasing the vulnerability of refugee populations. On the other hand, the emergence of coverage focused on the potential of refugee populations to reshape the areas in which they settle, either temporarily or permanently, should auger better conditions for refugees.

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