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German Welcome Culture Then and Now

How Crisis Narration Can Foster (Contested) Solidarity with Refugees

The initial response of German civil society to the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015/2016 is often framed as a welcome culture. How does this narrative of solidarity relate to the narrative of crisis which dominated European migration policy at the time, giving rise to right-wing populism in several member states of the European Union? And how does it differ from the narrative of solidarity we have been recently witnessing in the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has caused new refugee movements toward Europe? This article sets out to investigate the dynamics of narratives of public solidarity with refugees in Germany by juxtaposing what is now often called the "long summer of migration" with representations of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing on insights from crisis research and interdisciplinary narrative research, I will first argue that framing of historical conditions as crisis situations is based on the interplay of retrospective and prospective worldmaking – a key concept in the philosophy of mind and cognitive narrative theory – which sets in motion a complex (counter-) narrative dynamics. I will then proceed to investigate how such dynamics played out in the periods under investigation: Public debates of the refugee 'crisis' of 2015/2016, I will show, produced diverging counter-narratives (i.e., pro-migration vs. anti-refugee narratives) that competed for discursive hegemony, whereas representations of the war in Ukraine generated a widely shared narrative of solidarity with refugees.

1. Introduction

The so-called European refugee crisis is often said to have put the European Union to the test. While some countries (e.g., Germany, Austria, and Sweden) allowed an unrestricted number of refugees to seek asylum, others (e.g., Hungary and Macedonia) quickly closed their borders, hindering refugees from crossing the country to find shelter in another member state of the European Union. During the "border spectacle" (De Genova 2013) that unfolded between late summer 2015, initiated by the "march of hope" (Hess et al. 2017, 20) on September 4, 2015, and the signing of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, Germany in particular led the way by taking a pro-migration stance: At the time chancellor Angela Merkel was the only head of a EU member state who consistently refused to close national borders despite the fact that the growing numbers of daily refugee arrivals pushed the country to its breaking point (Becker 2022, 8). Still, Germany managed to master the situation, as members of civil society started to engage in voluntary refugee assistance, helping the new arrivals to find shelter in temporary reception centers, learn German, and submit asylum

applications. The nation's solidarity with migrants was celebrated as "welcome culture" by the national media; a term which even made it into international newspapers (see, e.g., Akrap 2015).

As this brief synopsis demonstrates, the initial response of German civil society to the refugee 'crisis' was framed by journalists, politicians, members of civil society, German authorities, and other stakeholders as a new culture of welcome which had the potential to transform Germany into a more inclusive society. From a narratological perspective, one can conceptualize this framing as a form of crisis narration, i.e., as a set of narrative patterns and genres we resort to in order to process, make sense of, and come to terms with crisis situations. The prospective narratives that were produced back in 2015 (e.g., in newspaper articles, political speeches, or interviews) form a contrast to research on German welcome culture in the humanities and social sciences which reconstructs the refugee 'crisis' with the benefit of hindsight, thus producing retrospective narratives which seek to explain, remodel, and reinterpret the events of 2015/2016. A narratological approach allows us to examine the "narrative dynamics" (Sommer 2023) of German welcome culture by taking both these temporal dimensions of crisis narration into account. As it hones in on examples of event modeling at different points in time, a narratologically informed analysis serves to uncover the processes of crisis narration that were operative in the ongoing 'crisis' as well as at a later stage when the crisis had already been resolved.

Setting out to investigate the dynamics of narratives of solidarity with refugees in the German public since the European refugee 'crisis' of 2015/2016, this article juxtaposes what has often been framed as the "long summer of migration" (Hess et al. 2017) with public accounts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. My argument proceeds in two steps. I will first demonstrate, with reference to approaches from both crisis research and interdisciplinary narrative theory, that the notion of crisis is the result of an interplay between processes of both retrospective and prospective worldmaking that generates a complex narrative dynamics which is best characterized as divergent narratives competing for discursive hegemony (section 2). In a second step, I will show how these narrative contests (are said to have) played out during the so-called European refugee crisis of 2015/2016, giving shape to what has become known as German welcome culture (section 3), before I move on to explore how, in the aftermath of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the narrative of solidarity with refugees has been revived and extended from a national to a European level (section 4). The article will close with some thoughts on the relevance of narrative analysis for critical engagements with crisis situations (section 5).

2. Modeling the Narrative Dynamics of Crisis Situations

In today's media ecology, the notion of crisis has become a popular trope (Nünning and Nünning 2020b). Resorting to the notion of worldmaking, a central

concept in the philosophy of mind and cognitive narrative theory, one can argue that crises are no givens in the real world, but rather the result of narrative and discursive practices. Situations of crisis are constructed by "thought collectives" ("Denkkollektive"; Habscheid and Koch 2014, 5) engaging in "sense- and worldmaking" (Nünning 2010, 204), cultural processes which, in turn, determine how we perceive and think about events and occurrences such as the arrival of large numbers of Syrian refugees in Europe in 2015/2016 or the ongoing war in Ukraine. In light of this, it comes as no surprise that quite a number of studies discuss the concept of crisis through the lens of narrative; yet the majority of these approaches refrain from engaging more extensively with narratological debates on the topic.[1] In order to understand the complex narrative dynamics of crisis situations, however, we need to examine both how crisis research forges the concept and how these conceptualizations translate into the analytical categories of a "narratology of crisis" (Nünning 2009).

2.1 Crisis Narration as Worldmaking: Retrospective and Prospective Event Modeling

In her 2014 monograph *Anti-Crisis*, anthropologist Janet Roitman contends that the concept of crisis serves as "the noun-formation of contemporary historical narrative" which enables critics "to claim access to both history and knowledge of history" (3). Her understanding of crisis resonates with the narratological view that crisis can function as a form of mini-narration to which we resort when trying to come to terms with situations that drastically disrupt social life, culture, or politics (Nünning and Sicks 2012). Such situations represent "moments of truth" which "are often defined as turning points in history, when decisions are taken or events are decided, thus establishing a particular teleology" (Roitman 2014, 3). Crisis-claims, Roitman maintains, "evoke a moral demand for a difference between the past and the future" (8), and this difference has to be a turn for the better, given that crisis is always "posited as a protracted and potentially persistent state of ailment and demise" (16). Crisis narratives consequently seek to trace the reasons why events have led to a current status quo, searching for an answer to the question of "*what went wrong?*" (9; italics in the original). In Roitman's understanding, then, the notion of crisis typically entails a narrative framing which serves to explain – and at the same time criticize – a given historical situation which deviates from some norm established in the past (4). Her considerations, moreover, suggest that such an interpretative and evaluative act is only possible with the benefit of hindsight (10).

Since Roitman's main objective is to show that crisis narration as "a diagnostic of the present" (4) serves to create specific kinds of narrative, while foreclosing others (41),[2] her discussion of popular and academic framing of the so-called subprime mortgage crisis of 2007–2009 focuses primarily on narrative content rather than narrative form.[3] Of primary interest from a narratological point of view, however, is the question of how such processes of retrospective crisis

narration work on a structural and formal level. Ansgar Nünning (2012a, 73) explains that, once a historical condition has been interpreted as a situation of crisis, this diagnosis "automatically implies and immediately activates certain frames and narrative schemata" as well as "development patterns and plots." Given that events constitute the most basic components of any form of narrative, one can argue that processes of crisis narration engage first and foremost in practices of "event modeling" and "event management" (Sommer 2023, 499–501). According to Nünning (2010, 195–196), events – just like any situation of crisis – should not be "understood as something given or natural, but rather as something made or constructed" (196). They only come into existence through narrativization, a process involving a complex set of procedures, such as selection and deletion as well as abstraction and prioritization (197), at the end of which selected moments, occurrences, and actions are "transferred into a limited, structured form which is enriched with meaning" (201–202).

Narrative theory has identified different types of events with regard to the genre of crisis narrative. More specifically, crisis narration stages primarily those events which lead up to the core of crisis: the turning point. In narrative, Nünning (2012b, 40) argues, turning points indicate "occurrences which are accredited with a high degree of relevance, importance and the potential to change the direction of the plot," thus exhibiting a high degree of tellability. They are usually preceded by one or several events of similar importance (44), and designate moments in which it becomes clear that something has indeed gone wrong. Other important events are tipping points and points of no return. The former refer to situations in which a development gathers such strong momentum that changes no longer occur gradually, but exponentially, with the unexpected assuming predominance, whereas the latter describe situations in which a development has progressed so far in one direction that a return to the status quo ante is no longer possible (Sommer 2019, 309). A further event type which can be added to the narratological toolbox is the Black Swan, an unexpected and allegedly unforeseeable event with extreme impact, whose occurrence, albeit being highly improbable, is framed as explainable and predictable in retrospect (Taleb 2010 [2007], xxii).[4] It is thanks to its unexpectedness and improbability that the Black Swan displays even a higher degree of tellability than turning points, tipping points, and points of no return.

Linking these narratological considerations back to Roitman's (2014) definition of crisis narration as a "post hoc determination" (10), one may conclude that processes of event modeling and event management must happen after the events causing a crisis have already occurred. While Roitman is by no means wrong to assume that diagnosing a given situation as a moment of crisis entails processes of what narratologists refer to as retrospective worldmaking (Nünning 2012b), her discussion of crisis narration does not recognize the full potential of the prospective quality of narrative. As Roy Sommer (2019) has shown, practices of event modeling and event management do not only serve to reconstruct the past, but they can also function as a productive means to anticipating the future. Drawing on the concept of "future narrative" – i.e., that type of narrative which

acknowledges "the idea that every 'now' contains a multitude of possible continuations," while at the same time "staging the fact that the future is a space of yet unrealized potentiality" (Bode and Dietrich 2013, 1) – Sommer maintains that narratives dealing with current social and cultural situations may be "at least as much about the future as [they are] about the past" (2019, 311). To illustrate this claim, he holds that "[i]n real life we tend to mark not only past events, but also future happenings as turning points, anticipating an event's significance and discussing its possible consequence(s) before things actually happen" (309). Some future events, he continues, are even "so eagerly anticipated that we imagine them as 'hyperevents' that will change everything" (313). From the vantage point of prospective worldmaking, then, turning points are envisaged as exhibiting the highest degree of tellability; it is only in retrospect – i.e., after the actual course of events has become clear and after other events such as the point of no return or a Black Swan have turned out to be more transformative – that they may lose this characteristic.

Sommer's argument enables us to see that, if we want to fully grasp the temporal complexity of the worldmaking processes involved in crisis narration, it is not sufficient to focus exclusively on narratives whose underlying "tense structure" (Currie 2013, 1) is the preterite. Instead, we also need to account for those instances of crisis narration whose temporal structure is best described with the present or the future tense. I therefore propose to redefine Roitman's understanding of crisis narration as a form of narration which engages in processes of both retrospection and prospection. For the purposes of a narratological analysis, such a reconceptualization of the notion of crisis is highly beneficial in that it enables us not only to investigate past developments that led to crisis situations, but also to examine current tendencies and trends that shape the present and future of the cultural lives of these narratives. It is within this temporal dialectic between retrospection and prospection that the narrative dynamics of crisis situations unfold, generating "narratives in contest" (Phelan 2008) which compete with each other for discursive sovereignty.

2.2 The (Counter-)Narrative Dynamics of Crisis: Narrative Aggregation and Narratives in Contest

Just as with any other kind of narrative represented in the social world, crisis narratives never exist in a discursive vacuum, but they always interact with other stories, forming clusters that either support and substantiate or challenge and undermine dominant discourses. From a narrative dynamics perspective, one can distinguish two processes that generate such cluster formations: narrative aggregation and counter-narrative-dynamics. The term "narrative aggregation" was introduced by Sommer (2023, 502–503) to describe the accumulation and synergy of "narrative elements into a full story, of small stories into one big story, of individual accounts into group narrative or generational biography, of similar stories into a powerful masterplot" (502). Processes of narrative aggregation may

fulfill various functions: They can serve as practices of normalization, determining what is considered a social or cultural taboo as well as socially or culturally acceptable behavior; they can function as a means to "negotiate the shifting boundaries of tellability, which are continuously challenged through strategic framing and narrative realignment" (503); or they can serve to generate new narratives emerging from stories that have not yet been in the center of attention – in such cases narrative aggregation leads to narrative redirection.

All these effects contribute to forming a complex "storied network of myths, masterplots, and cultural models" (503) which is constantly changing as long as stories – and thus the storytellers producing these stories – deploy different frames, genres, and plots to make sense of conflicts, disruptions, or moments of uncertainty. One of the central questions that need to be addressed when analyzing instances of crisis narration is that of narrative voice: Who functions as the storyteller – that is, who defines a given situation as a moment of crisis and accordingly interprets specific incidents as turning points, tipping points, points of no return, or Black Swan events? The power of shaping crisis narratives resides predominantly with political elites (Montgomery et al. 2023, 663).[5] Yet research on the impact of media coverage on public opinion on migration has shown that narrative authority also lies with mass media which strongly influence how their consumers think about situations such as the migration 'crisis' (De Coninck et al. 2021). A further aspect which a narrative analysis of crisis narration should focus on is the description and distinction of narrative templates for crisis representation and event modeling. Competing crisis narratives that serve to frame the same historical condition may, for example, choose to depict the situation as an economic crisis, a political crisis, a humanitarian crisis, or a legal crisis,[6] and they can do so by drawing on different generic templates such as blame narratives, renewal narratives, victim and hero narratives, or memorial narratives (Seeger and Sellnow 2016). In the same vein, crisis accounts may deviate with respect to who or what is made responsible for the current situation, who is best trusted with the role of active crisis manager, or which crisis management plans and target-oriented actions will probably turn out to be most successful (Nünning 2012a, 74).

The second process of cluster formation can be described as "narratives in contest" (Phelan 2008) – a concept which, in the social sciences, is better known as the dynamics between master- and counter-narratives. The distinction between the two types of narrative is founded on the assumption that narratives are always embedded in power relations that enable some narratives to be produced, received, and perpetuated more frequently than others (Lueg et al. 2021, 4). Within this power constellation, master-narratives emerge from discourses which produce "cultural canonicity" (Hyvärinen 2021, 20); they "can be understood as a sequence of culturally expected events" (20) that "suffer from a kind of dullness" (21) and in most cases present nothing more than an abstract idea (21). Counter-narratives, on the other hand, resist such powerful narratives, as they typically showcase marginalized positions and views that challenge or reject

canonical expectations, thus displaying a high degree of tellability (Hyvärinen 2021, 21; see also Lueg et al. 2021, 4).

However, recent studies have cautioned against construing the distinction between master- and counter-narratives in terms of a simplistic binary divide. Hanna Meretoja (2021, 38), for example, stresses the fact that counter-narratives do not necessarily have to be entirely "emancipatory, progressive, or liberating," but may also reinforce some aspects of a given power structure. Matti Hyvärinen (2021, 27) likewise advises against taking counternarrativity to be "an essential, abstract, and totalizing feature of any narrative," considering that individual narratives may well "counter a particular dominant discourse while at the same time drawing on some other cultural canonicity." And according to Yannis Gabriel (2017, 211), counter-narratives even "can and often do turn into master narratives, once they have started to spawn counter-narratives of their own." Counternarrativity, consequently, ought to be seen not as a binary but a contextual category.

Gabriel furthermore contends that, since counter-narratives, by definition, strive to "challenge established regimes of power," one can assume that they become particularly effective during "periods of intense uncertainty, confusion or crisis when many narrative lines compete for ascendancy with no overall narrative hegemony" (212). Setting Gabriel's argument in dialogue with Roitman's notion of crisis, we can thus maintain that the disruptive and uncertain moments of crisis, which mark some deviation from a given social norm, give rise to instances of narrative realignment, as they serve to produce new narratives which aim at refuting previous master-narratives as well as the power structures underlying these discourses. Following the critique of construing the counter-master distinction as a binary opposition presented above, we can, moreover, add that counter-narratives evolving from crisis narration do not necessarily have to rise 'from below,' but can also originate from within the power regime itself (as will be shown in section 3, a government, for example, can also criticize a given status quo). If these newly emerging narratives contradict each other, they may engage in "discursive struggles" (Rehnberg and Grafström 2021) or even more severe "story wars" (Sachs 2012) which bear the risk of social disintegration.

In light of these findings, then, one can surmise that the different narratives that stem from crisis situations can develop either centripetal or centrifugal forces. Sommer (2023, 504) has adopted this distinction from physics in order to differentiate between narrative dynamics of crisis that have socially unifying or disintegrating effects: Centripetal narratives, which typically emerge from processes of narrative aggregation, succeed in containing the crisis, whereas centrifugal narratives, which usually contest each other and compete for public attention, fail to do so. As the following analysis of representations of a culture of welcome in German public discourse in 2015/2016 and 2022 will show, the narrative dynamics of the European refugee 'crisis' can be characterized as an instance of a complex discursive struggle whose centrifugal impact served to split the nation (section 3). By contrast, the unified movements of solidarity for refugees in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have, at least so far,

led to the formation of a widely accepted narrative which has strong centripetal effects even beyond national borders (section 4).

3. The Narrative Dynamics of the Refugee 'Crisis' of 2015/2016: The Rise of German Welcome Culture as a Counter-Narrative against Anti-Refugee Discourse

Public discourse about the European refugee 'crisis' presents a perfect example of event modeling and narrative aggregation that set in motion a complex (counter-)narrative dynamics. Whereas journalists, politicians, members of civil society, and other stakeholders tried to frame and steer the events as they unfolded, studies within the humanities and social sciences which analyze the events from a second-order perspective approach the situation from a retrospective vantage point, reinterpreting and reevaluating the events. This section will first discuss some retrospective meta-accounts of public discourse during the refugee 'crisis' before focusing on selected examples of prospective event modeling and event management from within the crisis situation.

3.1 Challenging Past Practices of Crisis Narration: The Retrospective Meta-Narrative of the "Long Summer of Migration"

As the events of the summer of 2015 took its stride, public discourse depicted the situation as a 'crisis' that would have to be overcome (see, e.g., Becker 2022, 7–10; Fábián 2023; Georgiou and Zaborowksi 2017). The term *crisis* was used in this context not to refer to the suffering of those on the move but to describe the political situation within Germany and Europe caused by the large numbers of refugee arrivals. Rather than focusing on the violent, political conflicts and the resulting inhumane living conditions in the countries of origins which endangered the lives of the refugees, public debates identified the refugees themselves as the root of the problem, with their arrival in Germany and Europe being presented as a threat to national sovereignty and European cohesion (Becker 2022, 7–8).

In order to acknowledge the problematic implications of the term *crisis*, which ignores humanitarian issues, or to mark a critical distance to political framings of events as crises, research in the humanities and the social sciences either uses qualifications (e.g., inverted commas or adjectives like "so-called" and "alleged") or alternative expressions such as "long summer of migration" or "long summer of flight."[7] The adjective *long* in the title of one such "anti-crisis" accounts (Roitman 2014) points to two key events that are said to have marked the beginning and ending of the narrative of refugee movements in 2015/2016: It started with the march of hope on September 4, 2015, when a large group of refugees decided to walk from Budapest toward the Austrian border (more on that later) and

ended with the signing of the EU-Turkey deal on March 18, 2016, which terminated the refugee movements toward Europe.[8]

Although scholars and scientists usually try to avoid framing the summer of migration as a crisis for the reasons outlined above, they are well aware of the fact that representations of the events brought about a counter-narrative dynamics typically associated with crisis narration. Uwe Becker's (2022) discourse analysis of news coverage of the refugee 'crisis' in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* and *Zeit Online*, for example, characterizes the situation as "a rollercoaster of discourses" ("Wechselbad der Diskurse"), which clearly is a pun on the contradicting emotions and attitudes toward migration that dominated public debates at the time (in German, as in English, the idiom of the rollercoaster ride usually refers to emotions). Retrospective meta-accounts of this kind suggest that public discourse of migration in 2015 is best conceived as an antagonistic scenario that led to the formation of two conflicting narratives which have since been competing for discursive hegemony up until today (Buckel et al. 2017, 8; see also Rheindorf 2023, 5): The anti-refugee narrative, on the one hand, construes the period as a moment of the government's "loss of control" ("Kontrollverlust"; Buckel et al. 2017, 7) which played into the hands of populist anti-Islamic movements and eventually allowed the AfD, Germany's right-wing party, to make considerable electoral gains in various federal states (Bartholomae et al. 2022). The narrative of German welcome culture, on the other hand, models the events as a "symbol of progressive social change" ("Symbol progressiver gesellschaftlicher Veränderung"; Buckel et al. 2021, 7) which bore the potential to transform Germany into a more diverse and inclusive society. From a narratological point of view, one can argue that both narratives seek to explain the (counter-) narrative dynamics of the long summer of migration through processes of narrative realignment and redirection. The reason for this is that both accounts draw on previous discourses that gained new momentum during the refugee 'crisis' and eventually began to fuel each other, leading to a deep conflict within German society (Schwiertz and Ratfisch 2016, 5).

Views which present the events of 2015 as giving the nation a political shift to the right were grounded in developments which had already begun to take shape over the previous years. Since October 20, 2014, the political movement PEGIDA had been organizing weekly demonstrations against the alleged Islamization of the Western world.[9] During these Monday walks, which initially took place in Dresden but soon spread to other German cities, demonstrators disseminated inflammatory sentiments against the government's reception of war refugees and politically or religiously persecuted groups (Pfahl-Traughber 2015). At the same time, Germany's new right-wing party AfD, which had been founded in 2013 as an anti-Euro party, began to shift the main focus of its electoral program from economic liberalism to national conservatism after having received a significant number of votes during three elections in eastern federal states in the previous year (Decker 2022). Since the anti-refugee narrative generated by the dynamics of crisis narration in 2015/2016 clearly feeds on these

tendencies, it can be thought of as an instance of narrative realignment which served to fuel an already toxic debate.

The narrative of German welcome culture, by contrast, has antecedents in developments during the mid-2000s, when members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) called for better treatment of Palestinian and Bosnian refugees living in Berlin. A few years later, in the early 2010s, it was associated with new government measures to tackle the shortage of skilled workers in Germany, which included not only the improvement of educational and employment opportunities for the population already resident in the country, but also the immigration management of skilled workers from abroad who should meet the need for employable people (Schäfer 2023, 329–331). It was only in the years to follow that welcome culture would become an established term in German official and legal contexts (331–334; see also Trauner and Turton 2017, 35–36). In light of these findings, the welcome culture or narrative of solidarity that came to prevail in German public discourse during the refugee 'crisis' should best be understood as a discursive shift or – to use narratological terminology – narrative redirection which was brought about by a series of events in the late summer of 2015 (Schäfer 2023, 335–336). This (seemingly) new narrative of German welcome culture only had an impending expiry date, however, and was soon supplanted by an anti-refugee counter-narrative (337).

In the following two sections, I will trace the progression of the German welcome culture narrative by honing in on specific moments of the summer of migration in 2015 to examine how politicians, journalists, members of civil society, and German authorities contributed to forms of crisis narration. In doing so, I will focus on three key narratives: firstly, chancellor Merkel's framing of the situation in public statements and the Federal Press Conference in August 2015, next, German civil society's response to the march of hope in September 2015, and finally, German authorities' depiction of the sexual assaults of women by a group of migrants at Cologne central station on New Year's Eve 2015/2016. As I will show, all these instances of crisis narration constitute important turning points in the contest between the anti-refugee and pro-migration counter-narratives which are said to have dominated public discourse at the time.

3.2 On Racist Mobs, the March of Hope, and the Need for a Crisis Manager

In order to trace the beginning of the German welcome culture narrative of 2015, it is first necessary to identify what Roitman would refer to as the violation of an existing norm which caused the dynamics of crisis narration to unfold in the first place. According to investigative journalists who have reconstructed the events of 2015, there is no doubt that the so-called march of hope on September 4 marked a crucial moment of the refugee 'crisis' (Alexander 2017, ch. 3; Blume et al. 2016): When more than 1,000 refugees, finding themselves stuck at Keleti train station in Budapest because Hungarian authorities barred their onward

journey without a valid passport and Schengen visa, decided to set off on foot toward the Austrian border, Hungarian president Victor Orbán escalated the situation by sending about 100 busses to convey the refugees to their destination. In response to these developments, Merkel decided, in consultation with her Austrian counterpart, chancellor Werner Faymann, to keep the German borders open. Upon their arrival in Austria, the refugees could thus either ask for asylum or continue onward to Germany. By keeping the borders open, Germany – as well as all the other EU member states that followed suit (e.g., Austria and Sweden) – had overruled the Dublin regulation.[10] Within only one day, the narrative of a strict border regime was replaced with a new narrative of open borders.

With the benefit of hindsight, investigative journalism has construed the events of September 4 as a Black Swan, i.e., an unforeseen historical moment in which Merkel was urged by the Hungarian president to make a fast decision which had serious implications for Germany's self-image as an inclusive society. If we analyze the events from a perspective from within the 'crisis,' however, the tipping point which caused the narrative of German welcome culture to gain momentum was achieved a little earlier. In the second chapter of his book-length analysis of the decision-making processes of the Federal Government during the refugee 'crisis,' Robin Alexander (2017) argues that, after Merkel had long been criticized for avoiding the topic of refugees in public debates, a series of events which took place in the summer months of 2015 eventually forced the then chancellor to take a clear stand. Since it is not possible to summarize Alexander's detailed account of these developments here, I would like to restrict my focus to the two events which best serve to illustrate how Merkel's actions and decisions helped spin the narrative of German welcome culture at the peak of the refugee 'crisis.'

The first event is Merkel's visit to a refugee camp in Heidenau, a municipality in Eastern Germany, on August 26, which marks the turning point that caused the then chancellor to change her political course. When Merkel arrived on the scene, she was received by a mob of anti-refugee demonstrators shouting hate slogans and insults (Alexander 2017, 38–41). As the situation was about to escalate, Merkel spontaneously decided to deviate from the script of her prepared speech so as to oppose the racist and xenophobic behavior she was confronted with. "There is no tolerance toward those who question the dignity of other people," she stated and continued: "There is no tolerance toward those who are not prepared to help where aid is legally and humanly required." (Merkel qtd. in Alexander 2017, 41; my translation)[11] According to Alexander, Merkel's statement reveals that, even though she seems convinced that supporting refugees is the right thing to do, the actual motivation for her actions is the urge to confront racism (41). Rephrasing Alexander's argument in narratological terms, we can say that Merkel here engages in prospective worldmaking, as she tries to overcome the hate speech of the right-wing mob by evoking a counter-narrative to xenophobia and racism.

The second event is the Federal Press conference on August 31. After Merkel had consistently refused to adopt the framing of the refugee movements as a

'crisis' (Sommer 2023, 505), the speech she gave on this occasion was, to my knowledge, the first time that she publicly described the present historical condition as a "multitude of catastrophic situations" ("eine Vielzahl katastrophaler Situationen"), acknowledging that an "infinite number of tragedies are currently taking place" in Europe ("Es spielen sich unendlich viele Tragödien ab […]"; Merkel qtd. in Bundesregierung 2015, n. pag.). In contrast to affective media reports which put the upsetting images of such tragedies center stage, however, Merkel's statement presents a rational argument which is structured in a clear and purposeful manner, focusing on two principles: First, she explains that, in Germany, "the fundamental right to asylum of politically persecuted persons applies" ("Es gilt das Grundrecht politisch Verfolgter auf Asyl"). Second, she stresses that the German people should, in accordance with the German constitution, respect "the human dignity of every individual […] regardless of whether they are a citizen or not, regardless of where and why they come to us and with what prospect of being recognized as an asylum seeker at the end of a procedure" (my translation).[12] She then continues to exhort those who might be drawn to participate in "demonstrations with chants of hatred" ("Demonstrationen mit […] Hassgesängen"): "Do not follow those who call for such demonstrations! Too often there is prejudice, too often there is coldness, even hatred, in their hearts. Keep your distance!"[13] After revisiting and sternly condemning neonationalist and racist movements that have been flaring up within the nation over the last few months, Merkel again draws on prospective worldmaking to envisage Germany as an inclusive society: She praises the high numbers of German citizens who have started to help refugees during these testing times, and she even encourages the media to continue reporting about these new developments within civil society in order to inspire the good citizens who clearly outweigh the minority of "agitators and xenophobes" ("Hetzer und Fremdenfeinde") with role models and positive examples.

After appealing to the moral sensibility of her audience, Merkel fully embraces the master narrative of the refugee 'crisis' after all – not to foreground problems, though, but to discuss the nation's way forward. Germany, she explains, is facing a "huge challenge" ("riesige Herausforderung") that needs to be tackled in the coming months. Taking on the role of crisis manager, she presents a long list of measures that the government is planning to implement in the short term to master the task, ranging from financial support to special arrangements for asylum application procedures to integration work. As befits a persuasive head of state, Merkel finally closes with an optimistic prognosis: "Germany is a strong country. The motive with which we approach these things must be: We have overcome so much – we can manage this!" (my translation)[14] What we can see here is prospective event modeling at its best: Besides giving her audience courage and hope, Merkel's statement serves to stress the government's new strategy of crisis management. For Merkel, there is no doubt that Germany will receive as many refugees as necessary, which is why the country now has to find a way to deal with the given circumstances.

For many observers, "We can manage this!" has turned into the most important signifier of Merkel's refugee policy, which has even been compared to Barack Obama's election campaign slogan "Yes, we can!" (Alexander 2017, 72; Driessen 2020, n. pag.). Nonetheless, experts assume that, unlike the carefully chosen words of US presidential candidates, Merkel's statement was not scripted, but rather uttered spontaneously in the heat of the moment and for mere pragmatic reasons (as chancellor she could not possibly have said "We have no other choice but to manage this!"). And indeed, the public did not seem to take further notice of the sentence at first. It was only when Merkel repeated it at a press conference with Austrian then chancellor Faymann on September 15 that it was picked up in the media and began to develop a momentum of its own.[15] Politicians and journalists alike suddenly integrated "We can manage this!" in their own versions of crisis narration, both to support or criticize Merkel's refugee policy.[16]

The examples discussed in this section serve to demonstrate that retrospective accounts of the march of hope often take Merkel's decision to keep German borders open as the Black Swan that actually initiated German welcome culture. If we approach the events from the perspective of prospective worldmaking, however, we notice that the formation of this narrative actually set in a little earlier, namely when the then chancellor decided to curb the rise of anti-refugee sentiments among the German population. Although Merkel's version of the German welcome culture narrative arose primarily out of necessity, it was, in the aftermath of the events of September 4, often instrumentalized and reappropriated for the ideological purposes of either strengthening or challenging civil society's solidarity with refugees.

3.3 Narratives in Contest: Voluntary Refugee Support vs. Anti-Immigration Sentiments

Merkel's actions in the late summer of 2015 brought about a narrative of open borders and solidarity with asylum seekers which turned Germany into a safe haven for refugees.[17] At home, however, the events began to split the nation, transforming the German public into a polarized narrative environment, where two opposing narratives (i.e., pro-migrant vs. anti-refugee positions) struggled over discursive hegemony. In the autumn months of 2015, it seemed at first that the new narrative of German welcome culture would prevail: Particularly in the weeks that followed the march of hope, Germany witnessed an unprecedented surge of willingness to help among members of civil society. During the night from September 5 to 6, thousands of Munich residents spontaneously gathered in front of the city's central train station to welcome the refugees who finally arrived in Germany after their long journey. They brought clothing, water bottles, and food, as well as stuffed animals and toys for children (Alexander 2017, 63–64). Pictures and videos of German cheering crowds greeting the refugees traveled the world,[18] while German media almost consistently deployed a

rhetoric of welcome glorifying the overwhelming commitment of refugee volunteers nationwide (Schäfer 2023, 335). Even the German tabloid *Bild*, whose news coverage often tends to draw on racist fear campaigns and threat scenarios,[19] started the campaign "Wir helfen #refugeeswelcome," collecting pictures and videos of celebrities who were either active in refugee assistance themselves or had already donated money to support refugees with the aim of motivating readers to do the same (Huke 2022, 301; Trauner and Turton 2017, 37).[20] All of a sudden, it seemed that everyone contributed to the same version of prospective event modeling, celebrating the beginning of a new inclusive Germany.

Zooming in on the moment of the crisis situation, though, it becomes clear that, just like Merkel's narrative, the public's version of German welcome culture, too, primarily evolved as an aggregate of specific kinds of counter-narratives. In her monograph *Contested Solidarity: Practices of Refugee Support between Humanitarian Help and Political Activism* (2018), Larissa Fleischman investigates the practices of refugee support that emerged in Germany during the summer of 2015.[21] The findings of her empirical research, which is mainly based on interviews she conducted with refugee helpers, suggest that the practices of solidarity she could observe during her study largely oscillated between notions of "humanitarian volunteering" and "political activism" (14). She therefore argues that practices of refugee support never "take place in an 'apolitical' vacuum," for those who intend to help are always "entangled with governmental actors in different and ambivalent ways and embedded in a context marked by discriminating migration and border policies" (13). The result of this, she continues, is that, even if refugee helpers "describe their actions as purely 'apolitical,'" they might – if only unintentionally – reproduce or challenge "structural exclusions and discriminations" (13; see also Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Schiffauer 2019).

Fleischman's argument enables us to construe German civil society's solidarity with refugees as a response to the hate speech spread by the emergent right-wing movements. This manifests itself in an interview with a female refugee helper Fleischmann discusses in her monograph:

> For her [i.e., the helper], volunteering with refugees served as a means to take a stand *against* nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes […]. She decided to get involved as a volunteer in response to the hostile attitudes that emerged among established residents in her neighbourhood when local authorities announced the decision to accommodate 200 asylum seekers in an untenanted building in the area. (Fleischmann 2020, 12; italics in the original; see also Hamann and Karakayali 2016, 82–84; Karakayali 2017, 22–23)

The excerpt illustrates that, even though Fleischmann analyzes the interviews with her study participants from a retrospective point of view (i.e., she summarizes the interview and presents her interlocutor's statement through indirect speech), her presentation of the interviewee's answer reveals that those who voluntarily engaged in refugee help considered their action not only as spontaneous humanitarian aid but explained and justified their support in a broader context with a prospective narrative aiming at political change – that is, they decided to support refugees because they aspired to counteract nationalistic and xenophobic tendencies within the nation. Other empirical studies, by contrast, have

shown that the humanitarian attitude observed among large parts of the German population mainly resulted from an urge to compensate for a feeling that the state was losing control (Hamann and Karakayali 2016, 80) as well as the wish to help shape society in this moment of crisis (Schiffauer 2019). Despite the fact that such findings foreground slightly different motives for refugee help, they nevertheless substantiate the idea that volunteers became active primarily because they hoped to change society. Again, the aspiration to create a Germany which would be more open to migrants seems to be the most important reason for the emergence of these forms of crisis narration.

The nation's newly discovered culture of welcome did not sit well with everyone, though. In his careful reconstruction of the events of the summer of migration, Alexander (2017, 106) points out that, while legacy media praised the solidarity of German civil society with refugees in the highest terms, there soon emerged countless fake news stories on social media which stirred up fears that the current mass immigration would cause an Islamization of the nation – for the majority of refugees who had been arriving in Germany were Muslim men.[22] The situation came to a climax in early January 2016, when the media started to report about incidents at Cologne central station on New Year's Eve 2015/2016, during which over 600 women were sexually harassed, and in some cases even raped, mainly by young men from North African and Arabic backgrounds (Wigger et al. 2022).

Cologne chief of police Wolfgang Albers first tried to downplay the incidents, stating in a press release on January 1 that most celebrations had proceeded peacefully. Only four days later, after rumors circulating on social media and local media had started to report about the incidents, did he publicly confirm that women had allegedly been robbed and sexually assaulted on New Year's Eve. Since it took another four days before he conceded that most suspects who had been controlled on the night of the crime were actually asylum seekers, the Minister of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia eventually relieved Albers of his duties (Nebelung et al. 2016). Why did the chief of police withhold this information for so long? Could Albers' framing of the incidents on New Year's Eve be interpreted as an attempt to conceal the identity and status of the perpetrators because he suspected that the incidents could give rise to a renewed round of xenophobic hate speech? Did he deliberately engage in an act of prospective worldmaking because he wished to prevent a new wave of anti-refugee sentiments within the country?

As research in the field of communication studies has shown, the incidents in Cologne on New Year's Eve did bring about a discursive shift in media coverage of migration which caused racist and anti-immigration sentiments to flare up again among the public (Arendt et al. 2017; Wigger et al. 2022). Two much debated examples in this context are the cover pages of the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the news magazine *Focus*, both published on January 9, 2016: A picture on the cover of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which refers to the events of New Year's Eve in Cologne, shows the white silhouette of a pair of women's legs against a black backdrop with a black hand reaching up toward her crotch,

while the cover of *Focus* shows a photograph of the naked body of a white woman covered with black handprints; her private parts are covered with the headline "Women's accusation – after the sex attacks by migrants: Are we still tolerant or have we already turned blind?" ("Frauen klagen an – Nach den Sex-Attacken von Migranten: Sind wir noch tolerant oder schon blind?"). After users on social media had criticized the fact that both covers draw on racist and sexist connotations to illustrate the events in Cologne,[23] the editor-in-chief of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* publicly apologized, while the editor-in-chief of *Focus* dismissed all criticism, insisting that the magazine would only depict the "truth" (Rondinella 2016). Irrespective of whether the racist implications had been intended or not, the fact that mainstream media had framed the event of New Year's Eve in Cologne as a crime committed by asylum seekers certainly contributed to firing up anti-refugee narratives again. This time, their impact was even so strong that they eventually managed to push back the narrative of solidarity, which, up to this point, had dominated public discourse and thus contained the crisis by fostering national cohesion.

All these examples serve to illustrate that the events of the summer of migration of 2015 elicited narrative struggles, during which centripetal pro-migration and centrifugal anti-refugee narratives each challenged the other's supremacy. But how was this contest possible in the first place? Media scientist Kai Hafez (2016, 7) argues that the refugee 'crisis' unfolded against the backdrop of a "political vacuum" ("politisches Vakuum"), which was first caused by the then chancellor's long hesitation to implement a clear refugee policy and afterwards by the fact that not all members of the government went along with Merkel's decisions (see also Alexander 2017, ch. 10). Hafez's narrative seeks to establish a causal link between the government's crisis management and the rise and fall of solidarity with refugees among the German population. By his account, the criticism of Merkel from within her own political party in particular may have been one of the main reasons why her rhetoric of welcome failed to maintain its centripetal effects and was eventually replaced by its anti-refugee counter-narrative in the aftermath of the incidents in Cologne on New Year's Eve.[24] Hafez's retrospective event modeling thus draws attention to the potential influence of political consensus on the dynamics of crisis narration. This aspect will be further addressed in the next section, which explores solidarity with refugees in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

4. The Uncontested Narrative of #StandWithUkraine: (German) Welcome Culture Today

After the events of 2015/2016, the migration debate long continued to be prevalent in German media, with anti-immigration discourse belonging to the favorite repertoire of right-wing movements and the AfD. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, however, these groups found a more urgent

topic, namely the legitimacy of lock-down measures and vaccine mandates. Despite the topical absence of migration from the media, the pandemic generated change in public attitudes toward migrants, as the latest population survey by the Bertelsmann Foundation suggests (Kösemen and Wieland 2022, 8): On the one hand, the number of immigrants to Germany decreased due to worldwide travel restrictions; on the other hand, the pandemic revealed that a large number of the staff that prevented the service industries and the national health-care sector from collapsing during the pandemic were themselves migrants settled in Germany. Even though these developments led to a sharp decline in migration skepticism, they failed to reestablish a welcome culture as the nation had witnessed it in 2015.

This situation changed abruptly on February 24, 2022, when Russian troops invaded Ukraine, causing millions of Ukrainians to flee to EU member states.[25] Just like the march of hope in 2015, this event constituted a turning point, initiating another dynamics of crisis narration involving refugees, one which has remained current down to the time of writing. Unlike the refugees from the Middle East who came to Europe in 2015/2016, however, the Ukrainians who have been displaced due to the Russian attacks on their home country, have not been depicted as a potential threat to EU member states by the media. Quite the contrary: Since public discourse has been construing the war in Ukraine as the crisis, not the refugee movements (Bahtić-Kunrath and Gebauer 2023, 56–58), Ukrainian refugees have so far been seen not as the cause but as the victims of the current situation.

Against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that the large number of Ukrainians fleeing to Europe in 2022 set in motion a completely different narrative dynamics than the refugee movements of 2015. In fact, the events gave rise to a new narrative of welcome culture, which now seemed to be adopted not only by Germany, but by all EU member states. A few days after Russia's first attacks, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen stressed in an interview with Euronews that the EU fully supported Ukraine and its people: "There's a strong solidarity with Ukraine. They share our values. They defend our principles. They are the ones who want to have a peaceful democracy, and Russia is attacking that, and therefore they deserve our full solidarity and they have it." (Euronews 02:05–02:21) On March 4, 2022, then, the European Council unanimously decided to enact a special statutory regulation guaranteeing temporary protection for persons fleeing the war in Ukraine.[26] European solidarity with refugees manifested itself, moreover, in an overwhelmingly large number of refugee helpers as well as numerous peace demonstrations which were organized by the movement #StandWithUkraine all around the world. All these examples serve to illustrate that, in comparison to the 2015 narrative of German welcome culture, the 2022 narrative of solidarity with refugees seems to have undergone a shift in scale from a national to the EU level.[27]

The rise of a new narrative of *European* welcome culture has changed public debates on migration, at least for the time being. This certainly begs the question of the differences between 2015 and 2022 that triggered such diverging narrative

dynamics. I would like to argue that, just like its 2015 version, the 2022 narrative of a culture of welcome first emerged as a counter-narrative – this time, however, not against right-wing movements, but against Russia's attack against Ukraine as a sovereign, democratic state and thus – as von der Leyen clarifies in her interview quoted above – against European values. Unlike in 2015, the 2022 counter-narrative of welcome culture therefore quickly entered the mainstream and turned into a dominant master-narrative that even transcends national boundaries. As the slogan of the global movement #StandWithUkraine – "Save Ukraine. Restore peace. Save democracy." – reveals, the 2022 version of welcome culture entails prospective worldmaking which seeks not only to create a more inclusive society for migrants on a national level, but also to defend European values such as democracy and peaceful coexistence on an international level.

Against this backdrop, then, one can conclude that, in 2022, the support for migrants again represented an act of "contested solidarity" (Fleischmann 2020) which oscillated between notions of humanitarian volunteering and political activism. Yet from a European perspective, there seemed to be more at stake than in 2015, for, as von der Leyen points out in her interview with Euronews, the Ukrainian people belong to Europe: "They are one of us and we want them in [the European Union]." (02:50) Unlike the refugees who had been arriving in 2015, the displaced Ukrainians were not considered foreign 'others,' but members of the European community.[28] This is probably the main reason why, up to the present, the new narrative of welcome culture has been much more effective and sustainable, and has even been able to develop strong centripetal forces which have fostered European cohesion and integration.[29]

Having said that, we should not forget that, while the narrative dynamics of the refugee 'crisis' in 2015/2016 could be reconstructed with the benefit of hindsight, the war in Ukraine is not over yet. It remains to be seen how this crisis narrative, which for the time being still qualifies as a "future narrative" (Bode and Dietrich 2013), will continue to unfold: Will the new narrative of solidarity with refugees prevail or will it be countered by other anti-refugee narratives as the economic consequences of the war become increasingly palpable for the population of EU member states? What will happen after the regulation of temporary protection expires with refugees not yet able to return to their home country? How will the war continue and which side will win? Will peace be restored at the end or will the outcome lead to a frozen conflict? At this juncture, crisis narration still offers a multiplicity of nodes that can be anticipated as potential turning points, thus allowing us to imagine various alternative scenarios. Only time will tell which of these expectations and apprehensions will ultimately materialize.

5. Conclusion

Despite wide-spread reluctance to frame the events of 2015/2016 as a crisis situation in retrospect, research in the humanities and social sciences has acknowledged the fact that German welcome culture evolved from a counter-narrative dynamics typically associated with crisis narration. That is to say, civil society's initial solidarity with refugees arose as a strong counter-movement against anti-refugee discourses that had started to polarize national public debates on migration since the previous year. As my analysis in section 3 has shown, this form of crisis narration initially had strong integrating effects, given that politicians and members of civil society both resorted to forms of prospective event modeling, all of which contributed to a pro-migration narrative: Chancellor Merkel, after an initial period of hesitation, cast herself in the role of crisis manager and established a humanitarian refugee and asylum policy, while at the same time expressly condemning the racist and xenophobic narratives that aimed to spread anti-refugee sentiments across the nation. Qualitative studies of civil society's responses to refugees at the time suggest that those who voluntarily engaged in refugee support activity felt a similar urge to challenge the resurgent right-wing tendencies in the country by countering them with practices of solidarity that bore the potential to transform Germany into a more diverse and inclusive society. Yet these humanitarian forms of crisis narration were constantly challenged by forms of event modeling that served to uphold racist and xenophobic views. This anti-refugee narrative eventually prevailed as the events of New Year's Eve 2015/2016 in Cologne prompted the media, which, up to this point, had strongly supported German welcome culture, to also propagate anti-refugee sentiments.

While, in Germany, the narrative of welcome culture had at least a short centripetal effect, this form of crisis narration remained an exclusively national phenomenon which is even said to have caused European disintegration over the refugee debate. This situation has changed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. As my discussion of the #StandwithUkraine movement in section 4 has illustrated, the narrative of solidarity with Ukrainian migrants who have been displaced due to the war has, so far, developed strong centripetal forces not only on national, but also on European levels. One of the main reasons for this upscaling of the notion of welcome culture to a new mainstream narrative in the European public is the fact that the cause of the current crisis has shifted from refugees to the war itself, which is seen as a threat to European values and strategic interests by a vast majority of political actors in Europe. At this point in time, however, it is unclear what happens next. Unlike the narrative of German welcome culture in 2015, the future narrative #StandWithUkraine can still have several endings.

In summary, then, my juxtaposition of the narratives of solidarity with refugees in 2015 and in 2022 has demonstrated that crisis narration can generate different dynamics in which different (counter-)narratives interact with each

other, aggregating into one or several clusters. The examples discussed in this article specifically focused on two different types of dynamics: an antagonistic counter-narrative dynamics, or narrative contest, where opposing counter-narratives compete for discursive hegemony, thus causing social disintegration; and an inclusive narrative dynamics where all narratives aggregate into a mainstream narrative with strong centripetal effects on social cohesion.

To further explore the (counter-)narrative dynamics of crisis, it would be useful to analyze even more examples of crisis narratives as results of prospective and/or retrospective event modeling and to set the findings of these analyses in relation to existent research on counter-master-narrative dynamics. My considerations have revealed, for example, that narrative theory has not yet paid sufficient attention to the differences between prospective and retrospective event modeling in crisis narration – that is, between processes of agenda setting and controlling a crisis and processes of evaluating and interpreting a crisis, respectively. Since this article has focused exclusively on crisis narration with a view to German (and European) migration discourses, it would, moreover, be worthwhile to expand the considerations presented here by also taking into account the narrative dynamics of crisis in different national and global debates on migration, as well as in different thematic contexts. As I hope to have shown in my discussion of (German) narratives of solidarity with refugees during the European refugee 'crisis' and the war in Ukraine, critical engagements with crisis narration can benefit greatly from narratological insights. The productive exchange between crisis research and interdisciplinary narrative research should therefore be continued and developed further.

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[1] See, e.g., Boletsi et al. 2020; Boletsi et al. 2021; Lagios et al. 2018; Roitman 2014; and Seeger and Sellnow 2016. The work by Boletsi et al. and Seeger and Sellnow draws on a few scattered studies from narrative theory.

[2] Roitman's understanding of narrative is best described as what Matti Hyvärinen (2021, 18) would identify as "metonymic narratives," i.e. it refers to hypotheses, assumptions, theories, argumentation, or other forms of discourse which, from a literary studies perspective, would not necessarily qualify as narrative.

[3] More specifically, her analysis juxtaposes different narratives which construe the events as an example of crisis or anti-crisis.

[4] The term goes back to an ancient conviction that all swans were white. This belief had remained undisputed for a long time until the first black swan was sighted in Australia (Taleb 2010 [2007], xxi).

[5] See Montgomery et al. (2023, 663): "The question of who defines an event is a well-established avenue for inquiry among those examining the influence of particular actors who use the media to set the agenda. Moreover, debate surrounding who has agenda setting power in the field of migration and asylum has been a source of contestation and political claims analysis by scholars in the UK in the past decades […]."

[6] A perfect example in this respect is the COVID-19 pandemic, which was depicted not only as a medical crisis, but also as a crisis of society, politics, education, and science as well as of the economy (Nünning and Nünning 2020a).

[7] Both phrases are translations of the German titles of two book-length publications on the refugee 'crisis' of 2015/2016: the 2017 collected volume *Der lange Sommer der Migration: Grenzregime III*, edited by Sabine Hess et al., and Uwe Becker's 2022 monograph *Deutschland und seine Flüchtlinge: Das Wechselbad der Diskurse im langen Sommer der Flucht 2015*. Hess et al.'s term in particular is frequently quoted and adopted in other publications on the topic within the social sciences (see, e.g., Buckel et al. 2021; Fleischmann 2010; Schäfer 2023, 334–337; Schwiertz and Ratfisch 2016, 17–19; as well as the contributions in Dinkelaker et al. 2021).

[8] For further detailed accounts of the events of the summer of migration 2015, see Buckel et al. 2021, 7–12; Hess et al. 2017; as well as Schwiertz and Ratfisch 2016.

[9] The acronym PEGIDA stands for the German phrase *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, which translates as "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West."

[10] It is important to note, however, that in July 2017 the European Court of Justice decided that Merkel was allowed to act as she did when keeping the borders open, for she made use of her right of self-entry (Prantl 2017).

[11] The original quote reads as follows: "Es gibt keine Toleranz gegenüber denen, die die Würde anderer Menschen in Frage stellen. Es gibt keine Toleranz gegenüber denen, die nicht bereit sind zu helfen, wo rechtlich und menschlich Hilfe geboten ist."

[12] "Der zweite Grundsatz ist die Menschenwürde eines jeden. Das ist ein Grundsatz, den uns schon der Artikel 1 des Grundgesetzes aufgibt. Gleichgültig, ob er Staatsbürger ist oder nicht, gleichgültig, woher und warum er zu uns kommt und mit welcher Aussicht darauf, am Ende eines Verfahrens als Asylbewerber anerkannt zu sein." (Merkel qtd. in Bundesregierung 2015, n. pag.)

[13] "Folgen Sie denen nicht, die zu solchen Demonstrationen aufrufen! Zu oft sind Vorurteile, zu oft ist Kälte, ja sogar Hass in deren Herzen. Halten Sie Abstand!" (Merkel qtd. in Bundesregierung 2015, n. pag.)

[14] "Deutschland ist ein starkes Land. Das Motiv, mit dem wir an diese Dinge herangehen, muss sein: Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das!" (Merkel qtd. in Bundesregierung 2015, n. pag.)

[15] See Merkel qtd. in Driessen 2020, n. pag: "Ich sage wieder und wieder: Wir können das schaffen und wir schaffen das." ("I keep saying again and again: We can manage this, and we will manage this." [my translation])
[16] For a more detailed discussion of how Merkel's sentence was adopted by other politicians and the media, see Driessen 2020.
[17] For example, international media broadcasted videos of migrants at Budapest main train station chanting „Germany, Germany!" (see https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/sep/01/migrants-stranded-in-hungary-train-station-chant-germany-germany-video; date of access: 8/19/2023).
[18] See, e.g., the video under the following link: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/05/refugee-crisis-warm-welcome-for-people-bussed-from-budapest (date of access: 8/14/2023).
[19] This may be due not least to *Bild*'s political leaning and orientation to the right (Rheindorf and Vollmer 2023, 5).
[20] See https://www.bild.de/news/inland/fluechtlingshilfe/so-funktioniert-die-grosse-hilfs-aktion-von-bild-42369204.bild.html (date of access: 8/14/2023).
[21] For a discussion of pro-migration movements, organisations, and civil society initiatives that resulted from and developed after the events of the summer of migration in 2015, see also Rheindorf 2023.
[22] For a more detailed analysis of the extent to which migrants' origin, gender, and ethnicity influence the narrative framing of migration in the media, see Bahtić-Kunrath and Gebauer 2023, especially 46–52.
[23] For a detailed analysis of the cover page of *Focus*, see Dietze (2016).
[24] Indeed, the findings of a population survey regarding attitudes toward migration conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation reveals that in 2017 the German public no longer attributed positive effects to immigration as frequently as they did in previous surveys conducted in early 2015 (i.e., before the refugee 'crisis') and 2012 (Kober 2017).
[25] As of June 2023, about 22.6 million refugees have left Ukraine because of the war (see https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1293861/umfrage/anzahl-der-kriegsfluechtlinge-aus-der-ukraine-nach-aufnahmeland/; date of access: 8/17/2023), and about 1.1 million of these displaced people have fled to Germany (see https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1294820/umfrage/kriegsfluechtlinge-aus-der-ukraine-in-deutschland/; date of access: 8/17/2023).
[26] See https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/04/ukraine-council-introduces-temporary-protection-for-persons-fleeing-the-war/ (date of access: 8/18/2023).
[27] For a detailed discussion of the nexus between narrative and scale in the context of migration, see Adinolfi and Caracciolo 2023.
[28] As Birgit Bahtić-Kunrath and Carolin Gebauer (2023, 55–58) have shown in their comparative analysis of representations of refugees in Austrian journalism in 2015 and 2022, Syrian refugees were typically framed as the 'other' because most of them were male Muslims. The majority of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Europe in 2022, by contrast, were white women and children.
[29] It should be noted, however, that, despite these strong centripetal effects of the new narrative of welcome culture, we are beginning to witness the formation of counter-narratives that call into question Germany's support of Ukraine (see, e.g., https://www.zeit.de/news/2023-09/07/wagenknecht-ukraine-hilfen-fuer-steuerzahler-untragbar [date of access: 12/14/2023]) as well as its unlimited solidarity with Ukrainian refugees (see, e.g., https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/sozialleistungen-ukraine-fluechtlinge-uckermark-sachsen-anhalt-buergergeld-propaganda-102.html [date of access: 12/14/2023]).