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(Re)constructing a hostile environment: political claims making and the primary definers of a refugee 'crisis'

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(Re)constructing a hostile environment: political claims making and the primary definers of a refugee 'crisis'

1. Introduction

At the fundament of any contentious societal issue is the question of who is empowered to speak and have their voice heard. To forge a more complete understanding of how an issue comes to be defined in public discourses requires a nuanced analysis of interventions in debates. There are a myriad different ways to conduct such an analysis but this task first requires a clear definition of what it means to make a claim in a public debate. In the realm of the political, claims can involve both actions and words. Recognising that one may seek to influence the public debate either as an individual or as part of a collective, we define interventions into debates on contentious issues through the prism of 'claims-making' which connects both actions (e.g. events, decisions) and discourse (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Using this approach, we develop an understanding of which actors prevail in defining a significantly contentious societal issue: namely the so-called refugee 'crisis' that began in 2015. Our study provides a paradigmatic case for those working across cognate research areas during a period in Europe where there is again a refugee emergency due to conflict. Our study sheds light on how such events can be constructed in the public sphere and the importance of context that leads to their framing.

Analysing claims should not be isolated from its political context. This study is situated in the lead up to the decision to leave the European Union in June 2016 (Dennison and Geddes, 2018) when much contentious debate encompassed issues of migration and asylum. While recognising that public debate can take place across different venues, the focus of our study is on one venue that has consistently been a critical site for actors to define issues of migration and asylum: newspaper titles. The impact of claims made in newspaper coverage on the public discourse around migration and asylum has been recognised by research in recent years analysing how the print media helped to frame the reporting of the refugee emergency across Europe (Georgiou and Zabrowski, 2017; Harteveld et al, 2018).

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3 In the UK specifically, the role of the media in shaping discourses in the field of asylum has
4 been revealed by existing research (KhosraviNik, 2010). Moreover, despite technological
5 change and the importance of social media (Bennett, 2018); key titles in the 'print media' (in
6 hard copy or online) continue to be influential venues for shaping perceptions of the issues
7 around migration and asylum, including when these intersect with the UK's relationship with
8 the EU (Foos and Bischof, 2018). Greenslade (2005) has highlighted the variation in
9 approaches by 'quality' newspapers on the one hand and 'tabloid' newspapers on the other
10 hand (see also Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008; Threadgold, 2009). In that same analysis, titles
11 such as The Express are identified as crucial for understanding how issues of asylum are
12 mediated given that in the early 2000s that outlet 'became fixated on the 'crisis' of asylum-
13 seekers, often devoting its front page to alarmist stories' (2005: 21) and research has
14 highlighted that this has been a continuous trend (Share, 2018). Such efforts made to
15 conceptualise the arrival of refugees as a 'crisis' speaks to a core finding of our study: namely
16 how the tragedy experienced by those fleeing persecution and war is reconstructed by actors,
17 particularly political elites (and specifically those on the right of the political spectrum), as an
18 issue of border control and political management. Our findings are grounded in an
19 understanding of the refugee 'crisis' as an event and an awareness of the specific context of
20 debates surrounding asylum in the UK. As such, our research design and findings offer a novel
21 contribution to the ongoing debates in this context. Moreover, although our analysis is
22 developed through a theoretical lens which emerged from the same UK context (Hall et al,
23 1978), this lens animates our novel data in a manner that offers a potential framework for
24 researchers in other contexts to draw upon for their own studies.
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43 2. Research context and theoretical frame

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47 The refugee 'crisis' that captured the public consciousness across Europe in 2015 revealed the
48 Janus face from which European publics viewed the arrivals on their southern shorelines. The
49 arrival of would be refugees became a salient political and public issue in September 2015
50 following the journey of thousands of refugees predominantly from Syria and the middle east
51 region across the Balkans, Central Europe and Germany. In response, the European
52 Commission presented a plan to redistribute 160,000 refugees across EU member states,
53 sparking opposition from many member states. This revealed a gap in the willingness of
54 government actors to engage in sharing responsibility and, more broadly, the contestation
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3 rather than cooperation between member states over the issue (Niemann and Zaun, 2018). Thus
4 the events of the refugee emergency revealed two very different conceptualisations of what
5 was taking place and the potential responses possible. In the early days of the ‘crisis’ (August-
6 September 2015) we saw on the one hand the *willkommenskultur*¹ represented by images of
7 volunteers expressing solidarity and embracing the arrival of refugees in Germany (Jurgens,
8 2021). On the other hand we later observed the public demonstrations of far-right movements
9 expressing deeply anti-refugee and anti-migrant rhetoric from the Seine to the Danube (Bastow,
10 2018; Bocskor, 2018) which when fused with Euroscepticism can generate electoral
11 implications (Pirro et al, 2018). Therefore, not all European governments responded to the
12 emergent refugee situation in the same way (Rea et al, 2019). Moreover, the approach taken by
13 some European governments altered as the situation unfolded (Vonberg, 2018) and extant
14 research has revealed the importance of appreciating the temporal dimension of media
15 coverage of the refugee situation across Europe (Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017), a
16 dimension we shall explore within our analysis.
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28 In this article we focus on a context where the response by political elites to the refugee crisis
29 intensified rather than challenged the policy dispositions that have been in place for decades:
30 the United Kingdom. Moreover, the contemporary UK political landscape is one that is
31 continuously being reshaped following a contentious EU referendum where the movement of
32 people across borders was at the forefront (Baglioni et al, 2019). Before exploring further, it is
33 crucial to note that across UK civil society there have been consistent and coordinated efforts
34 by some to welcome refugees (Squire, 2011; della Porta, 2018) and furthermore the asylum
35 and immigration policies of the UK Government do not necessarily reflect the approach of
36 devolved administrations within the UK (Mulvey, 2015; Guma et al, 2019). However, given
37 that authority over issues such as migration and asylum resides in Westminster, it is from that
38 central level of government that policies and large parts of discourses continue to be shaped.
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48 A hostile policy environment in the UK for those seeking refuge has been evident throughout
49 Labour and Conservative Governments (Squire, 2016) and imbued with discourses of
50 deservingness (Sales, 2002) and border control (Walters, 2004) that have and continue to draw
51 upon simplistic imaginaries such as the ‘economic pull factor’ (Mayblin, 2019). However, one
52 of the objectives of this study is to aid our understanding of how an event located within a
53 specific time period can be reconfigured into a device for (re)constructing certain discourses
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¹ A ‘culture of welcome’

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3 and policies around asylum. Moreover, when we seek to understand the context of our study
4 we need to also appreciate the history of social relations in Britain which has enabled a
5 particular framing of those arriving in the country by political actors. Claims made by such
6 actors can in fact foster popular consent for policies that emphasise border control (Hall, 1986).
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11 Against this background, we sought to uncover which actors were most dominant in defining
12 the diverse group of people who began arriving on European shores in 2015. The question of
13 who defines an event is a well-established avenue of inquiry among those examining the
14 influence of particular actors who use the media to set the agenda. Moreover, debate
15 surrounding who has agenda setting power in the field of migration and asylum has been a
16 source of contestation and political claims analysis by scholars in the UK in past decades
17 (Statham and Geddes, 2006; Freeman, 2002). Our contemporary research offers a prism
18 through which we can better understand political claims made during a critical juncture, both
19 in terms of the refugee emergency itself and the political context of the UK.
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27 To better understand the political claims analysed in this study we turned for inspiration to the
28 seminal work of Hall et al (1978) and the distinction made between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’
29 definers. ‘Secondary definers’ being comprised of the media which acts to interpret, and indeed
30 often amplifies or exaggerates any potential crisis. However, our analysis in this study focuses
31 upon the ‘primary definers’ and their capacity to set the agenda in the way explicated by Hall
32 et al (1978):
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39 *‘Once in play the primary definition commands the field; there is now in existence an issue of*
40 *public concern, whose dimensions have been clearly delineated, which now serves as a*
41 *continuing point of reference for subsequent news reporting, action and campaigns’ (: 75-76).*
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45 Although we can say that primary definers are the generators of the claims being made, our
46 analysis does not neglect the role that the media plays in selecting what qualifies as
47 newsworthy. Instead we recognise how newspapers in the UK are reflective of the broader
48 inequalities and asymmetries of power apparent across society (Gans, 1979). As such, news
49 production processes can ‘reproduce the definitions of the powerful, without being, in a simple
50 sense, in their pay’ (Hall et al., 1978: 57). Building on the logic of this approach, we sought to
51 understand how refugees come to be defined in a media landscape that for some time has
52 reflected the hostile policy environment discussed above. The conclusions drawn by
53 Greenslade (2005) that the portrayal of those seeking asylum in the UK has been driven by
54 racist misrepresentations corresponds with the problem identified by Philo et al. (2013) that
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3 there is a complex interaction between policymakers, media representation and public attitudes
4 and as such it is highly problematic that:
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7 *‘Media coverage can highlight and stimulate potential tensions and fears by stigmatising*
8 *refugees and asylum seekers. This legitimises negative official and public responses’* (Philo et
9 al. 2013: 169).
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13 Although extensive research has been carried out on issues of migration and asylum in the UK,
14 no study exists which marshals the empirical insights using the methodology of a political
15 claims analysis and views them through a lens that utilises the concept of ‘primary definers’
16 (Hall, et al, 1978). By adopting this approach, we illuminate the way in which political elites
17 in the UK, through their role in the news process act as ‘primary definers’ of the situation. In
18 the following analysis we reveal the continued dominance of political elites in claims making
19 in the UK and the negative disposition of these actors towards refugees. Furthermore, what our
20 findings uncover is that rather than claims making being reflective of pragmatic or policy
21 actions, claims making in the UK in the context of the refugee crisis was articulated
22 predominantly through verbal statements. We elaborate how such verbal statements were used
23 to externalise the refugee crisis as an event happening ‘outside’ of the UK. In other words,
24 rather than conceptualising the refugee crisis through the prism of a humanitarian tragedy
25 (McMahon and Sigona, 2020), those seeking refuge in Europe were constructed by many
26 political elites, to be a threat (Triandafyllidou, 2018; Bennett, 2018). The idea of the refugee
27 being conceptualised as a threat to the UK has been the subject of extant analysis, with Mulvey
28 (2010) revealing that as far back as the early 2000s under the New Labour Government, the
29 ‘framing of asylum as a numerical crisis and threat, aided by the media, not only contributed
30 to that crisis but also implied the solution, a reduction in numbers’ (Ibidem: 445). We aim to
31 explore this perspective further, building upon the work of Hall et al (1978) on the question of
32 who defines a problem in a given situation. Considering the work of Statham and Geddes
33 (2006) (contra Freeman, 2002) on the role of dominant policy actors, we seek to illuminate the
34 ways in which political elites are able to utilise their authority to act as ‘primary definers’ and
35 construct the event of the refugee emergency through the prism of a ‘crisis’ that must be
36 ‘managed’. Guiding our analysis are three central research questions:
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- 54 ■ RQ1: Who were the primary definers of the refugee ‘crisis’ in the UK print media?
- 55 ■ RQ2: What was the disposition of actors towards refugees when making political claims
56 about the ‘crisis’?
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- RQ3: What were the issues that actors invoked when making political claims about the ‘crisis’?

In the subsequent sections of this article we shall: i) elaborate upon our research methodology of political claims analysis; ii) present the findings of our political claims analysis, focusing upon key elements such as the actors involved, the positioning of their claims - either for or against refugees - and the issues that they focus upon; and iii) finally we shall conclude by drawing together our findings and reflecting on their implications for the future shape of discourses on asylum and migration in the UK.

3. Research design

To answer the questions set out above we adopted a research design germane to the topic of migration and asylum (Statham and Geddes, 2006; Cinalli and Giugni, 2013) which enables us to evidence the ways in which certain claims are more dominant than others in a particular field (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). The methodological approach we deployed is *political claims making*. Through a synthesis of quantitatively driven protest event analysis and the qualitatively driven political discourse analysis, political claims analysis provides a mixed-methods approach that captures the actions of a range of societal actors resulting in findings being drawn from a ‘multi-organisational field’ (Ibidem, 1999: 3).

The political claims which form the focus of this study were derived from a randomised representative sample of newspaper articles sourced from the online tool Lexis-Nexis using the keywords ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum’. Moreover, reflecting previous iterations of the political claims approach in the extant literature, we focused on three UK titles, two of which are quality newspapers (one centre-left, the other centre-right) and one tabloid; namely *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Express*. The purpose here is to capture a breadth of readership and reporting styles: quality newspapers (the traditional ‘broadsheets’) predominantly target middle class audiences, whereas tabloid newspapers have sought mass market appeal. Moreover, in terms of the registers used, the former frequently adopting a more serious or sober tone and the latter opting for more sensationalist headlines (Greenslade, 2005; Philo et al., 2013). Our focus on ‘newspaper’ titles in this study also offers an insight into how editorial positions from the era of ‘print’ news are being reproduced online as these titles now use a

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3 variety of digital channels to distribute their articles. One limitation of our approach is that it
4 does not capture the nuances of devolution in the field of asylum (see Mulvey, 2018). Thus our
5 'UK oriented' approach presents an opportunity for future scholarship using this method to
6 analyse any divergences within different policy arenas.
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11 The timeframe of our analysis ran from August 2015 to April 2016, reflecting the peak period
12 when claims from various actors were made in the debate. Moreover, our sample of claims are
13 drawn exclusively from news articles, rather than from (for example) editorials or letters pages.
14 Let us now turn to our unit of analysis: the individual political claim.
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19 It is crucial to differentiate our understanding of a claim on the one hand and an article on the
20 other hand. A newspaper article can contain numerous claims and a claim in itself can be
21 constructed of different statements or actions. If these statements or actions stem from more
22 than one actor then this must be considered to be part of the same claim if they meet three
23 conditions: i) that the claim took place on the same day; ii) that the claim took place at the same
24 location and; iii) that the actors involved in making the claim can reasonably considered to be
25 acting in concert. Furthermore, our data collection is based upon a codebook which sets out the
26 guidelines for the coding of each individual claim. Each of our claims are characterised by a
27 certain structure, which can be distilled into key elements that form the key characteristics of
28 a claim, such as the 'actor' (who makes the claim), the 'position' (whether the claim is
29 favourable or unfavourable to refugees) and the 'issue' (which is the main concern of a claim).
30 Thus, a claim is best understood as an intervention in the public discourse by a specific actor.
31 Our case focuses upon those claims where the 'objects' discussed are refugees either as
32 individuals or as a group. An example of our approach is illustrated in Figure 1, which is drawn
33 from an article in the Telegraph in January 2016 with the headline '*ISIL using refugee crisis to*
34 *target UK*'. The article contained five claims in total, one of which stemmed from then Justice
35 Secretary Michael Gove MP; the text below is a direct extract from that article. As we can
36 observe, the claim is made by a UK Government Minister (whom we coded as a 'state actor'),
37 who identifies border control as the key issue (which we coded as 'political management') and
38 who makes a claim that demonstrates a negative disposition to new arrivals (which we coded
39 as 'anti-object'). As was often the case, the issue of the refugee 'crisis' was conflated with the
40 broader issue of freedom of movement in the European Union. In this instance by a senior
41 politician who would later that same year become a key figure in the campaign for the UK to
42 leave the European Union.
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[Figure 1]

In our study, two researchers undertook the coding of claims from our sample of news articles. To ensure consistency in the coding, an exploratory pre-reliability test on the coding of claims was conducted with the aim of identifying coding errors and remaining problems in the codebook. The feedback for this test was used for one last thorough revision of the coding instructions and intra-coding reliability tests were run and reflected successful consistency in coding claims. We now turn to the outcomes of this coding process, elaborating upon three key elements of our political claims analysis: the actors who dominate the political discourse on the refugee 'crisis', the position these actors take on the 'crisis' (pro-refugee, anti-refugee or neutral) and finally, the issues around which their claims are focused.

4. Findings

In this section, we present the data generated by our coding process and our findings which are structured to correspond with the three research questions outlined earlier, namely: the distribution of actors involved in claims-making in the UK media, the disposition of these actors towards refugees and the issues these actors focus upon in their claims.

4.1 Findings I: Actors

The context we have outlined earlier in this article reflects the fact that for several decades issues surrounding migration and asylum have become strongly politicized in the UK. There was deep polarization occurring almost in parallel with the refugee crisis that forms that basis of our study, when the country was entering a referendum on whether to vote to leave or remain in the European Union and where the topic of immigration and asylum was a salient issue (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017). Considering this contentious context, we began our analysis by focusing on the types of actors who have made claims across the three UK newspapers. As we can see from Table 1 (the figures in the last column), state actors, that is governmental or public administration representatives, played a pivotal role in shaping the public debate of the 2015 refugee crisis with almost one in every two claims (45.4%) made by them. This finding can be explained firstly by the decision-making capacities of state actors; on whether or not to accept refugees and to participate in resettlement programmes and whether (and indeed how) to contribute to calls for humanitarian assistance and integration strategies at multiple levels of governance. Secondly, this finding speaks to the resources that state actors possess and can

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3 deploy to have their claims reported by the media and be treated as the ‘primary definers’ of
4 topical issues (Hall et al, 1978). Alongside state actors, the second most frequently salient
5 actors are political parties (16.4% of all claims): this once again relates to the resources and
6 opportunities that political actors possess to primarily define topical issues such as the refugee
7 ‘crisis’. Moreover, this finding also reflects that migration and refugee issues are highly
8 contentious and politicized in the UK, therefore parties, particularly those which are right-wing
9 and anti—immigrant consider these to be topics on which to mobilise popular support (Bale,
10 2018), and are consequently motivated to make political claims.
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18 **[Table 1]**
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21 However, the field of migration and asylum is one in which other actors, such as civil society
22 organizations, charities, and non-profit groups play a crucial role as first responders in terms
23 of humanitarian activism as well as awareness raising and fundraising. This is reflected by our
24 claims making findings revealing that one in every ten claims are made by what we call ‘group-
25 specific organisations and groups’ which, in our analysis are mainly formal and informal
26 refugee-crisis oriented organisations (both pro- and anti-refugees) among other actors
27 including self-organised groups of refugees/migrants and other groups such as the unemployed
28 and disabled people. These findings should be understood in tandem with the percentages of
29 other civil society and advocacy groups which together amount to more than 5% of claims. The
30 presence of a range of civil society and interest groups who have street level knowledge and
31 experience in our claims making sample highlights that although state and political actors
32 occupy the privileged position of ‘primary definers’ in the field of migration and asylum they
33 are by no means the only actors who can offer a prism through which the public can understand
34 complex transnational events such as the refugee ‘crisis’. Nevertheless, our findings offer
35 support to the thesis that it is political elites rather than (pro-refugee) actors in civil society
36 which are dominant in the debate (Statham and Geddes, 2006). Another finding from our
37 sample was the virtual absence of the labour movement in claims making relating to the refugee
38 crisis. One may argue that this is to be expected given that the issue can be framed around
39 political management and humanitarian issues or indeed point to the decline in the membership
40 and consequently the influence of the trade union movement in the UK (Department for
41 Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Nevertheless, the trade union movement have a track
42 record on challenging racism and discrimination and as the situation unfolded in 2015 explicitly
43 criticised the UK Government for not accepting more refugees (TUC, 2015). As such, this is
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3 an important gap to identify, given the capacity of the labour movement to offer a progressive
4 voice on contentious issues.
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7 Another group of actors whose vocal capacities have found a platform in the media are
8 supranational actors (11.7% of all actors' claims), again a somewhat unsurprising finding given
9 the transnational nature of the refugee 'crisis', in which supranational organizations such as the
10 United Nations (UN) or the International Organization for Migration (IOM), along with the
11 EU, have played a role. However, we shall explore later in this article the difference in
12 disposition between these supranational actors compared to state actors and political parties
13 towards refugees.
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20 To understand the context of our findings even further, we analysed our data across the time
21 period of the events surrounding the refugee emergency. We found that the total number of
22 claims across the different months revealed that the number of claims spiked in September
23 2015 (26%) and reached its second highest peak in January 2016 (14.6%), reflecting a temporal
24 salience of the events. Moreover, our data revealed some divergence in terms of the time
25 periods where different actors made their claims. For example, we observed that the frequency
26 of state actors claims making remained consistent across the timeline with the exception of
27 December 2015 (9.7%) and tailed off somewhat in April 2016 (38.8%). Actors such as political
28 parties maintained a similarly consistent trend which fell to single figures in December 2015
29 (6.5%). Interestingly however, we found that the claims made by non-state and non-political
30 party actors actually appeared to spike somewhat during the same month of December 2015,
31 this is true for Group-specific organisations and groups (19.4%), Advocacy and policy-oriented
32 groups (12.9%) and other actors (22.6%), the latter of which encompasses local citizens,
33 individual activists, celebrities and those framed as the elite by the newspapers. We can
34 hypothesize that as the key players such as state actors and political parties wind down because
35 of the parliamentary recess, less prominent voices are given more opportunities to voice their
36 claims in these media platforms. Moreover at this time a number of actors launched fundraising
37 campaigns to provide material support to the refugees. In terms of supranational actors we
38 observed a spike in December 2015 (19.4%) and in February 2016 which trended towards a
39 peak of 22.4% in April 2016. This could also suggest that as state actors and political parties
40 vacated the stage in December these other voices were given more opportunities but it also
41 speaks to the fact that as the political implications of the refugee crisis for the European Union
42 and discord between the member states became manifest, these actors became more prominent
43 (Niemann and Zaun, 2018).
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3 Overall, although state actors and political parties perform the role of primary definers in the
4 political claims making surrounding the refugee crisis, our findings reveal that they do not
5 enjoy a monopoly over the public debate, with voices breaking through from a range of civil
6 society organizations, some of which are rather weak in terms of material resources that are
7 already under pressure from meeting the needs of those experiencing poverty, marginalisation
8 and other forms of vulnerability (Stewart and Mulvey, 2014; Collins et al, 2015). Therefore, as
9 we explored our data, we also considered the question of whether (and the extent to which)
10 these more solidarity-oriented voices were given a platform across the three newspapers that
11 form the basis of our sample.
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20 A comparative analysis of actors' claims across the three newspapers is also provided by Table
21 1. Overall, among the newspapers it is The Guardian that gives voice to a broader range of
22 actors, in fact although state actors are also dominant in this newspaper (37.7% of claims), The
23 Guardian reports more than twice as many claims made by societal actors (either group specific
24 organizations or civil society-advocacy organizations) than the other two newspapers. Thus,
25 from this first overview of claims making actors it appears that the public debate regarding the
26 refugee 'crisis' is more pluralistic in the left leaning 'quality' newspaper than in the others. On
27 the contrary, The Express provides a much stronger voice to political parties (almost a third of
28 actors are political parties, more than double that of The Guardian, and three times that
29 compared to The Telegraph). When digging deeper into an analysis of these actors we found
30 that The Express frequently offered a platform to key figures in UKIP, including the one-time
31 leader of the party and prominent advocate of the Leave campaign in the EU referendum, Nigel
32 Farage. This outcome confirms the tabloid's strong contribution to the politicization of the
33 refugee and immigration issue by providing political leaders who are more vocal on this topic
34 the opportunity to be primary definers in the refugee crisis, thus strongly contributing towards
35 both the polarization of the debate and its framing around particular issues, as we shall discover
36 later.
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50 Another interesting finding which we elicited during our analysis was the distribution across
51 newspapers of the supranational actors category: both The Guardian and The Telegraph were
52 more willing to provide a platform to supranational actors and organisations (the EU and
53 United Nations High Commission for Refugees), that are of course central to a topic such as
54 refugee issues but sometimes are at odds with the viewpoint of the UK Government.
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4.2 Findings II: Positioning

Earlier we outlined the polarised context in which our study takes place and thus our findings need to be understood against that background. Although the discourses of border control and deservingness have come to shape the UK context in recent decades (Squire, 2016), there has always been a constituency of support for migrants and refugees that has become manifest in both individual and collective forms (Montgomery et al, 2018; Darling, 2010). The polarisation between those who perceive refugees as a threat and those who offer solidarity is not an exclusively British phenomenon and neither is the intensification of this divide (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The polarisation around the refugee crisis within British society is illustrated in Table 2 which shows the position towards refugees of actors involved in making claims; actors can adopt a pro-, anti- or neutral position towards refugees. Table 2 reveals that two types of actor occupy the polar opposite positions of the political arena. On the one hand, half of all claims made by state actors are against refugees, while a third of them have a neutral stance, and only one in five perceive refugees in a positive light. Similarly, nearly two thirds of claims made by political parties are anti-refugee, with again only one in five adopting a pro-refugee viewpoint. In stark contrast, almost all claims made by civil society and human rights organizations, and more than two thirds of those claims made by group specific organizations, are in support of refugees. Other actors such as professional organizations and a range of different other societal actors adopt a more neutral position, as they occupy that space between a positive business-oriented perception of migration and refugee issues, and more critical positions inspired by political entrepreneurs. The position of supranational actors reflects the heterogeneity of political views towards migration and asylum, with some supranational organizations articulating support for refugees, namely those that work to protect them such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Whereas a more diversified position can be found within the EU, with the European Commission and some member states defending the rights of refugees and the European Council and other member states adopting a more cautious or critical position.

[Table 2]

To give additional perspective into these findings we once again we analysed our data from a temporal perspective and scrutinising the data across the period from August 2015 until April 2016, the number of claims which were made against refugees spiked between January and

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3 April 2016, a key period of campaigning in the run up to the Brexit referendum, while the pro-
4 refugee claims reached their highest peak in October and December 2015 following the death
5 of Alan Kurdi and coinciding with the welcoming approach by Angela Merkel and the German
6 government. Therefore we can detect from these findings that the events surrounding the
7 refugee emergency in Europe and their primary definition in the UK are best understood not
8 only as being formed of two interpretations (humanitarianism and solidarity on the one hand
9 and political management and border control on the other hand) but also two periods with the
10 momentum against refugees gathering pace after Christmas 2015.
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18 When we look at Table 3 we also gain further insight into the uneven distribution of these
19 claims across the three UK newspapers which reflect different editorial narratives: with The
20 Express publishing the most anti-refugee claims (58.6%) compared to 42.9% of such claims
21 by The Telegraph and 29.9% by The Guardian. This hierarchy is reversed when we observe
22 the proportion of pro-refugee claims across the three titles, with most of these claims being
23 found in The Guardian (45.5%), which is then followed by The Telegraph (34.4%) and then
24 The Express (20.3%). Of course, the positions reflected here must be understood not only in
25 terms of the editorial position of each newspaper but also their readerships. However, a more
26 nuanced understanding of how discourses and policies that represent a negative position
27 towards refugees remain dominant can be developed by appreciating the extent to which media
28 platforms embrace heterogeneity in the types of actors who are able to primarily define a
29 situation. As we discovered in our study, perhaps a more pertinent observation is how the
30 absence of heterogeneity can enable certain actors to primarily define a situation around
31 particular issues that narrows the range of potential discourses and voices and shapes the debate
32 towards certain policy responses.
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44 **[Table 3]**

45 46 47 48 4.3 Findings III: Issues 49 50 51

52 Thus far we have learned which actors have most (and least) frequently performed the role of
53 'primary definers' during the refugee crisis and we have also identified the positions these
54 different actors adopt in relation to refugees. However, the question of what is at stake in the
55 claims that are made can only be properly understood when appreciating the issues around
56 which such claims are shaped. The types of issues that formed the basis for the claims in our
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sample are outlined in Table 4 which reveals the frequency of different issues that were mobilised in the construction of claims by different actors. Table 4 illustrates both the variegated ways in which the refugee crisis was conceptualised by actors and the uneven distribution of the issues that formed the focus of their claims. Table 4 also reveals that by far the most frequent way to define the refugee issue was as a matter of political management (68.1% of claims), meaning that actors made claims primarily defined around the modalities of crisis management (e.g. border control, asylum application processes and the sharing of responsibilities across EU member states). The next most frequent type of issue raised by actors concerned the background, situation and fate of refugees (15.9%) which often revolved around issues such as the perilous journey of refugees across the Mediterranean and the conditions in the camps that received and accommodated them if they were lucky enough to survive the crossing. Finally, almost one in every ten claims (8.6%) centred upon an issue focused on more general problems connected with the influx of refugees, and a residual portion of claims (4.2%) concentrated on public and civic initiatives or placed an emphasis on integration policies (3.2%).

[Table 4]

What our findings demonstrate is that despite the diverse ways in which the refugee crisis could be conceptualised by actors; in the UK the debate was dominated by claims that conceptualised it as a matter of crisis management. Again, if we give consideration to a temporal perspective of our data we found that only during the month of December 2015 the main issues were instead centred upon the perilous journey of refugees alongside the practical problems connected with the massive arrival of refugees. Although actors could have focused on the protection of refugees by referring to human rights norms that place an obligation on states to give refuge to those fleeing conflict and persecution, many frequently defined the situation as a problem of protecting borders. Of course, this conceptualisation did not reflect a consensus. Instead, the differences between actors we outlined earlier, is replicated in our findings in Table 5 that illustrates the uneven distribution of issues across actors in the UK. We found that it is state actors who predominantly made claims relating to the political management of the refugee crisis (77.9%), a figure mirrored, albeit with the caveat of much fewer claims being made overall, by political parties (74.4%). Moreover, when considering the dominant issues raised by supranational actors, we see a similar pattern with the primary type of issue again being that of political management (78.3%). It is only when we look more closely at non-state organisations do we begin to discern some divergence in the types of issues being highlighted

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3 such as group specific organisations and groups which although also engaged in issues of
4 political management (32.9%) are mainly focused upon issues relating to the background,
5 situation and fate of the refugees (46.3%). Nevertheless, the latter lack those resources and the
6 political saliency that state actors possess, and therefore their presence is much less visible.
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10 [Table 5]

11 5. Conclusions

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18 At the outset of this article we sought to explain the context in which our study took place: a
19 context where the discourses and policies of asylum and migration have been restrictionist in
20 nature for the best part of two decades. What our findings reveal is that in terms of the political
21 claims made across three UK newspapers, there was clearly a dominance of political elites in
22 claims-making relating to the challenges presented by the refugee 'crisis'. These findings offer
23 support to earlier studies that have revealed the role that resources play for actors to influence
24 public discourses (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Baglioni et al 2008; Giugni 2010). Therefore,
25 it follows that those actors with greater economic, political and relational resources have more
26 opportunities to have their voices heard. Moreover, these actors do so during a period of crisis,
27 thus acting to stabilise rather than disturb the asylum policy architecture. Indeed, our analysis
28 reveals that political elites utilised their position as 'primary definers' in the UK to frame
29 refugees arriving in Europe as a threat or risk to the country (Triandafyllidou, 2018; Bennett,
30 2018), rather than through a frame of solidarity.
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42 From a broader perspective, the negative position adopted by political elites in the UK aligned
43 with other actors across the EU who were rejecting a Europeanization of the emergency. This
44 calls upon researchers to give greater consideration to the type of temporal perspective
45 embedded within our analysis which highlights how the momentum against refugees via claims
46 making in the UK accelerated in the months preceding the June 2016 referendum.
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52 In using their position to articulate claims that are predominantly negative towards refugees,
53 political elites in the UK defined the situation in a way that also 'crowded out' other actors
54 from the public discourse. This not only reduced opportunities for other actors but also created
55 a terrain for them to articulate their own claims that had already been primarily defined as being
56 in the realm of political management. Thus the potential for alternative claims to successfully
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discursively generate solidarity (Wallaschek, 2020) was curtailed. As Hall et al (1978) reflect, 'arguments against a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into its definition of 'what is at issue' - they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting-point' (Ibidem: 58). As migration scholars have noted, the dramatization of the events which began to unfold in the Mediterranean in 2015 as one of 'crisis', served to produce the context where only certain actors had the agency to respond through governmental action (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra, 2015). We found that the approach of political elites in the UK is to take the wide range of complex issues surrounding the refugee 'crisis' and use simplistic imaginaries (Mayblin, 2019) to define the situation through the prism of political management and border control.

Although the disposition of political elites is predominantly negative towards refugees, when other actors are given a voice - such as civil society organisations - often the perception is more positive. It also speaks to a broader range of issues. Yet, frequently their message is already embedded in a discourse that has been shaped around issues of political management. While recognising the limitations of our study (i.e. it's precise focus on a particular period of time and on three media outlets) we conclude that if there is to be a shift in discourse and policy in the UK, from a political management agenda to a humanitarian/human rights agenda on issues of asylum and refuge, then a first step would be to rebalance who occupies the crucial role of 'primary definer'.

We view this research – through a worked example of using claims analysis - as a tool for others in this field to refine and apply across different media channels to build the detailed evidence base that can assist in this task. Our approach thus seeks to create the groundwork for future research that will analyse the claims made during refugee emergencies.

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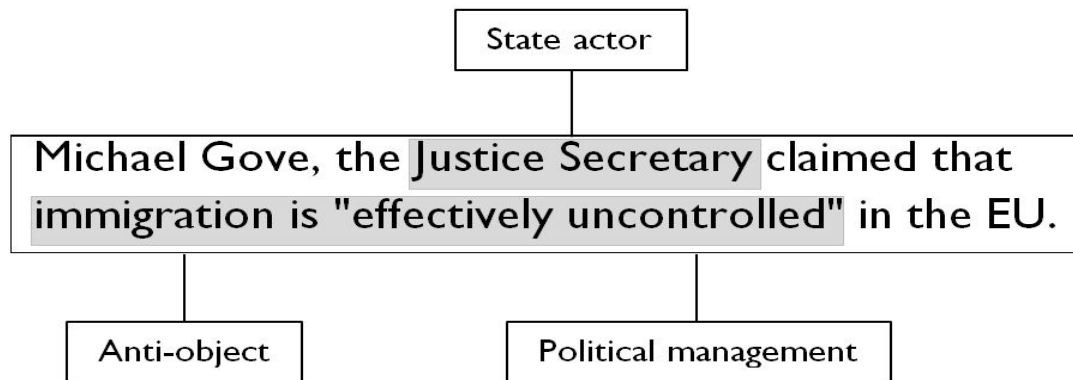
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Figure 1: *Anatomy of a political claim*



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Table 1: Actor by newspaper (percentages; frequencies between brackets)

Actor	The Guardian	The Telegraph	The Express	Total
State actors	37.7 (101)	55.6 (144)	43.3 (113)	45.4 (358)
Political parties	11.9 (32)	9.7 (25)	27.6 (72)	16.4 (129)
Professional organizations and groups	4.9 (13)	3.5 (9)	5.7 (15)	4.7 (37)
Labour organizations and groups	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (2)	0.3 (2)
Group-specific organizations and groups	16.4 (44)	8.5 (22)	6.1 (16)	10.4 (82)
Civil society and human rights organizations	4.1 (11)	1.2 (3)	2.7 (7)	2.7 (21)
Advocacy and policy-oriented groups	3.4 (9)	3.5 (9)	1.9 (5)	2.9 (23)
Supranational actors	15.3 (41)	13.5 (35)	6.1 (16)	11.7 (92)
Specific countries	0.7 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.8 (2)	0.5 (4)
Other actors	5.6 (15)	4.6 (12)	5.0 (13)	5.1 (40)
Total	100 (268)	100 (259)	100 (361)	100 (788)

N=788

Table 2: *Position towards refugees by actor (percentages)*

Actor	Anti-object	Neutral / Ambivalent	Pro-object	Total
State actors	50.3	30.4	19.3	100.0
Political parties	64.3	14.7	20.9	100.0
Professional organizations and groups	32.4	40.5	27.0	100.0
Labour organizations and groups	50.0	0.0	50.0	100.0
Group-specific organizations and groups	13.4	7.3	79.3	100.0
Civil society and human rights organizations	0.0	4.8	95.2	100.0
Advocacy and policy-oriented groups	39.1	13.0	47.8	100.0
Supranational actors	23.9	27.2	48.9	100.0
Specific countries	75.0	25.0	0.0	100.0
Other actors	57.5	2.5	40.0	100.0

N=788

Table 3: *Position towards refugees by newspaper (percentages; frequencies between brackets)*

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	The Express	Total
Anti-object	29.9 (80)	42.9 (111)	58.6 (153)	43.7 (344)
Neutral / Ambivalent	24.6 (66)	22.8 (59)	21.1 (55)	22.8 (180)
Pro-object	45.5 (122)	34.4 (89)	20.3 (53)	33.5 (264)
Total	100 (268)	100 (259)	100 (261)	100 (788)

N=788

Table 4: *Frequency of issue*

Issue	Percentages
Political management	68.1
The background, the situation and the fate of refugees	15.9
Problems associated to the refugee influx/crisis	8.6
Public and civic activities/initiatives beyond political governance	4.2
Integration policies	3.2
Total	100

N=788

Table 5: *Issue by actor (percentages)*

	Political management	Integration policies	The background, the situation and the fate of refugees	Problems associated to the refugee influx/crisis	Public and civic activities/initiatives beyond Political Governance	Total
State actors	77.9	2.5	10.3	7.8	1.4	100.0
Political parties	74.4	3.9	7.0	11.6	3.1	100.0
Professional organizations and groups	45.9	10.8	10.8	21.6	10.8	100.0
Labour organizations and groups	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	100.0
Group- specific organizations and groups	32.9	6.1	46.3	7.3	7.3	100.0
Civil society and human rights organizations	47.6	0.0	38.1	0.0	14.3	100.0
Advocacy and policy- oriented groups	52.2	4.3	17.4	13.0	13.0	100.0
Supranational actors	78.3	0.0	18.5	1.1	2.2	100.0
Specific countries	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Other actors	47.5	2.5	20.0	17.5	12.5	100.0

N=788