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# Shaping a Climate of Arrival: National and Local Media Representations of Refugees' Arrival Infrastructures in the Netherlands

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Negative media representations such as framing refugees as criminals may increase concerns among the general audience about the arrival of asylum seekers. At the same time, these media representations may also create anxiety among the refugees themselves and negatively impact on their sense of belonging. In this article, we explicitly focus on media representations of arrival infrastructures for refugees and how these representations shape their climate of arrival. We zoom in on the regulatory-administrative dimension consisting of all formal structures involved in the arrival of refugees, the everyday practical dimension that refers to infrastructuring practices outside the regulatory-administrative framework related to refugees, as well as the normative-discursive dimension that consists of ideas and debates around arrival and arrival infrastructures. By taking arrival infrastructures as our centre of attention, we move beyond a refugee-centred approach. This allows us to uncover the different layers of the climate of arrival brought to light by national and local media representations as well as to nuance the rather uniform and dominant image of refugees in the media. Our findings show the responsibility of media to represent a more diverse image of refugees as well as the need for migration and media scholars to move beyond a sole focus on how refugees are represented in the media.

**Keywords:** refugees, arrival infrastructures, national and local media representation, climate of arrival

## Introduction

The influx of refugees in Europe reached over 1.3 million in 2015 (UNHCR 2016). Politicians problematized the number of arriving refugees and spoke of a ‘refugee crisis’ (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015). Scholars, on the contrary, argued that this was more a crisis of the lack of (political) solidarity than of numbers, since the numbers pale in comparison with the number of refugees in countries outside Europe and the number of non-refugees entering Europe annually (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; Crawley 2016). Nevertheless, the negative connotations of this refugee influx—and of refugees themselves—found its way into the domestic media (Berry *et al.* 2016; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). Refugees were portrayed as threats or risks given their different cultural backgrounds, potential economic needs, and/or health or crime concerns (Siegel and Nagy 2018; d’Haenens *et al.* 2019). The arrival and presence of refugees were also connected to issues that were unrelated to migration itself, such as unemployment, housing problems, and radicalization (Crawley and McMahon 2016). These media narratives contributed to a negative and threatening image of refugees (d’Haenens and Joris 2019).

Media representations of refugees’ arrivals often constitute the main knowledge of citizens and, as such, influence local populations’ actions and reactions towards certain issues, especially in the context of immigration (Mistiaen 2019). The causal impact of media representations is difficult to disentangle (Berry *et al.* 2016), but it is generally assumed that media representations do—differentially—affect the public’s perceptions of refugees and set the political agenda (d’Haenens and Joris 2019; Mertens *et al.* 2019). Negative and numerous media representations may, for example, increase worries about immigration in the receiving society and make it a main concern of the general audience (d’Haenens and Joris 2019; Lams 2019). They may also prevent refugees from being seen as deserving support upon arrival (Newton 2008). While refugees themselves are not necessarily aware of how they are being represented in the media (Lams 2018), such negative media narratives may create anxiety among refugees, disturb their integration in the destination country, and negatively impact on their sense of belonging (Crawley *et al.* 2016; Smets *et al.* 2019). What is more, such a negative public discourse may bring about feelings of inferiority *vis-à-vis* receiving-society members and affect how refugees interact with them (Smets *et al.* 2019).

Given the impact of media representations, the question arises as to how refugees’ arrivals were represented in the aftermath of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. In this contribution, we aim to answer this question based on a qualitative content analysis of two Dutch newspapers.<sup>1</sup> We move away from a sole focus on how refugees are being framed in the media and emphasize the representation of refugee’s arrival. In line with Phillimore (2021), we believe that the current public debate centralizes the role of refugees at the expense of attention being given to the extent to which receiving communities provide and constrain opportunities for refugees to integrate. For this reason, we shift our attention explicitly to the representation of refugees’ climate of arrival, that is the multilayered atmosphere in

which refugees have to find their place in a—for them new—society after their arrival. To gain insight in the climate of arrival for refugees, we draw on the concept of arrival infrastructures, which highlights ‘those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated’ (Meeus *et al.* 2019: 1). This concept refers to a wide range of (interlinked) institutions, actors, spaces, practices and technologies that have a role in refugees’ migration and arrival processes (Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Meeus *et al.* 2019). We focus on three dimensions of arrival infrastructures.<sup>2</sup> First, a regulatory-administrative dimension that addresses all formal structures that arise due to the implementation and enactment of migration laws, policies and practices that impact on refugees upon arrival (Räuchle 2019). Second, an everyday practical dimension which refers to all infrastructuring practices related to the arrival of refugees (Meeus *et al.* 2019). Third, a normative-discursive dimension which—in the words of Räuchle (2019: 34)—should be defined as ‘the urban society’s general set of ideas and debates on immigrants’. We explore how these three interrelated and intersecting dimensions of refugees’ arrival infrastructures in Amsterdam were being denoted in two newspapers and how these representations shaped the refugees’ climate of arrival in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, we first elaborate on previous studies on the representations of refugees in the media at a national and local level and illustrate the Dutch context. After a note on the method employed, we present our findings on the media analysis of arrival infrastructures for refugees in 2016 in one national and one local Dutch newspaper. We subsequently present insights into the administrative-regulatory, everyday practical and normative-discursive dimensions of the arrival infrastructures for refugees. In the conclusion, we show how these three layers have created an ambiguous and multilayered climate of arrival for refugees in the Netherlands as well as its implications.

### **The Representation of Refugees in the (Dutch) Media**

Analyses on the representations of refugees in the media usually focus on frames that are being used for refugees and the discourses that such frames bring about (e.g. d’Haenens *et al.* 2019; Lams 2018, 2019). Already before the so-called refugee crisis, frames and discourses related to refugees—and immigrants more in general—were mainly dominated by notions of control, risk and danger (KhosraviNik 2010; Kamenova 2014). Migrants—including refugees—were considered ‘economic, cultural, or criminal threats and thus covered in a highly unfavourable way’ (Eberl *et al.* 2018: 217; see also Pickering 2001; Lynn and Lea 2003; Crawley *et al.* 2016). These negative discourses stayed standing during the so-called crisis in 2015 (e.g. Berry *et al.* 2016; d’Haenens *et al.* 2019). Both the arrival and the presence of refugees were being problematized in the media by using all kinds of threatening metaphors that create feelings of emergency (Lams 2018). This resulted in a somewhat uniform image in the media—a ‘dramatic,

frightening and overwhelming arrival of “other” bodies onto European shores’ (Burrell and Hörschelmann 2019: 48).

The uniform image had to do with the use of specific selective and judgmental frames in the media coverage that were supposed to interpret ‘the reality’ (d’Haenens and Joris 2019). It concerns, on the one hand, an intruder frame, meaning that refugees are considered as threats to a country’s economy, security, and identity (Joris and de Cock 2019; Smets *et al.* 2019). On the other hand, refugees were being portrayed as victims given their suffering in their home country, during their journey and upon arrival (Smets *et al.* 2019). Although these frames differ in tone and bring a different level of threat, both hinder refugees from being seen as reflexive agents (Smets *et al.* 2019). They are given little agentive power or voice, especially in comparison with politicians or other elite groups (Dos Santos Silva *et al.* 2018; Mistiaen 2019). Reducing refugees to these simplistic, incomplete images makes it quite complicated for them to demonstrate their ability and resilience (Smets *et al.* 2019).

The climate of rising anti-refugee sentiment and negative media coverage can also be seen in the Netherlands, the country that is central in this contribution. The Netherlands used to be known for its relatively open and tolerant character; however, this has made way for a harsher social reality for refugees, with more restrictive admission and immigration policies since the early 1990s (van Eijl 2012). In line with many other European countries towards the end of the 1990s, the Netherlands started to adopt a ‘failure of multiculturalism’ discourse. Nowadays, the country is known for its restrictive and institutionalized refugee reception approach (Rast and Ghorashi 2018), characterized by—sometimes remote—reception and asylum centres where asylum seekers await the decision in their legalization procedure without being allowed to work or learn the language (Rast *et al.* 2020). Once refugees are formally recognized and provided with refugee status, they are relocated around the country.

Previous media analysis has shown that migration was already—even before the so-called ‘refugee crisis’—problematized in the Netherlands. Refugees were quite negatively represented in the Dutch media due to them being considered intruders in society (d’Haenens and de Lange 2001; Roggeband and Vliegenthart 2007; Lams 2019). The ‘intruder frame’ was largely replaced by a ‘victim frame’ during the peak of the so-called crisis. Lams (2018, 2019) analysed the media coverage by the national right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf* as well as the national left-wing newspaper *De Volkskrant*. He concludes that refugees have a striking lack of voice and agency in both newspapers but that *De Volkskrant* shows caution about casting refugees as intruders or malicious individuals, in contrast to *De Telegraaf*, which may be characterized by a more sensationalist tone. Lams (2018, 2019) shows, however, that both newspapers are characterized by a sphere of crisis in which refugees are being portrayed as persons in dire need of help. While the ‘victim frame’ might be preferable over the ‘intruder frame’, this raises the question of whether there are not more favourable or welcoming frames of refugees in the media. As it is known that media representations of refugees are far from uniform, more realistic media representations of refugees are needed (see also Zill

*et al.* 2020). In this contribution, we therefore explicitly consider the context in which refugees arrive and illustrate how arrival infrastructures for refugees in the Netherlands are represented. Moving beyond an isolated focus on how refugees themselves are represented and taking the environment in which they arrive as part of the analysis we hope to get a more nuanced picture of the practical, as well as normative and discursive dimension around the climate of arrival for refugees in the Netherlands.

We focus on national and local media coverage as it has repeatedly been argued that the city rather than the state is pivotal in refugees' arrival and home-making processes (Meeus *et al.* 2019). Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands that is central in this contribution, is historically known for being a liberal city. It has a long history of migration and of tolerance towards different religions, lifestyles and mentalities which has led to its current superdiversity (Uitermark 2014). The city was—and still is—generally proud to announce its tolerance of 'strangers' and its migration policies have long been an example of what was known as a 'multi-cultural approach' (De Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). However, Amsterdam partly took on the national restrictive stance when it comes to the integration of asylum seekers. At the same time, the city tried to uphold and create more-open local policies which, among others, allow asylum seekers to work after arrival in the city and offer a more tailor-made support approach that suits the refugees' integration trajectory (Oostveen *et al.* 2018). This indicates a different stance towards refugees which might bring about a diverse national and local media coverage on refugees.

## Methods

We have used a qualitative content analysis (cf. Cope 2021) to illustrate how both a national *and* a local newspaper contribute to the shaping of the refugees' climate of arrival in the Netherlands. It is widely acknowledged that representations may differ per type, signature and regional focus of the newspaper or media company (Finney and Robinson 2008; Lams 2018; de Coninck *et al.* 2019; d'Haenens *et al.* 2019). Moreover, local news production on refugees' arrival may be influenced by both local power structures and local place identity and does not necessarily conform with national news productions, meaning that local discourses may challenge or strengthen the images dominant in the national discourse (Finney and Robinson 2008). As both national and local media coverage contribute to the shaping of a climate of arrival for refugees, it is interesting to see how refugees' arrival infrastructures are being represented in newspapers that differ from each other in terms of signature and regional focus. Therefore, we have selected the only local hard-copy newspaper of Amsterdam, *Het Parool*, which has a left-wing and progressive character. Additionally, we selected the most-read right-wing national newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, which is—according to Lams (2018)—characterized by a more sensational and conservative nature. Combining the media representations on the administrative-regulatory, everyday practical, and normative-discursive dimensions of refugees' arrival infrastructures in these

different newspapers enabled us to paint a more complete picture of the climate of arrival for refugees in the Netherlands.

We focus on the media coverage of refugees' arrival infrastructures in 2016. This is in the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis' and, as such, is a better representation of the climate of arrival with which refugees are confronted in normal, non-crisis, times. Besides, the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 provoked a wide range of supportive as well as exclusionary initiatives for refugees upon arrival in the European Union which were difficult to uphold over time (Boersma *et al.* 2017). This raises questions about the infrastructures that were still available later for arriving refugees and how this may have impacted on the climate of arrival. Furthermore, the representations of refugees at the peak of the so-called refugee crisis have already repeatedly been studied (e.g. Berry *et al.* 2016; Eberl *et al.* 2018; Lams 2018, 2019; Burrell and Hörschelmann 2019; d'Haenens *et al.* 2019). While these studies do not provide insights into the context of arrival as we aim to do, they do show some of the dynamics that were at play at the peak of the crisis. Therefore, we believe that focusing on the year 2016 will provide both more accurate and innovative insights into the current climate of arrival for refugees.

After having selected the two newspapers and the timeframe for our analyses, we used the news databank *LexisNexis* to search for relevant items by using the terms 'refugee' and/or 'asylum seeker' in combination with 'Amsterdam'. This resulted in 377 relevant articles<sup>4</sup> of which 231 were published in *Het Parool* and 146 in *De Telegraaf*. These were published in a wide range of sections of both newspapers and written by a myriad of different journalists, which shows that the focus in both newspapers is not solely on refugees but on a wider range of issues that touch upon refugees' arrival experiences. We imported all media items in Atlas.TI to analyse the climate of arrival that was being shaped by these newspapers. At first, we coded all aspects of the media items that were relevant in the context of understanding the representation of the arrival infrastructures for refugees. We got numerous codes on a wide range of topics that provided somehow insight in the refugees' climate of arrival in the Netherlands—and in Amsterdam more particularly. To make sense of our initial coding logic, we decided to recode our data and categorize all relevant codes on the basis of a four-tier approach. First, we used descriptive codes and categories for (descriptions of) all more formal structures that arose due to the implementation and enactment of migration laws, policies and practices. Examples are refugees' processes, legalization procedures, formal institutions, etc. Second, we used a similar approach and descriptive codes for all infrastructuring practices that are part of the everyday practical dimensions of the refugees' arrival infrastructures. This includes spaces, personal and non-citizen initiatives and both formal as well as informal practices that have obtained a role in these processes. Third, we used analytical codes to explore the normative-discursive dimension of the arrival infrastructure in both newspapers. This means that we examined how arrival was being framed, which arrival infrastructures were brought to the fore and how these were being represented in the two newspapers. What is more, building on previous media analysis on refugees, we analysed a wide range of normative-discursive elements—such as all

associations made between refugees, (the lack of) voices of particular groups, biases in both newspapers, the use of metaphors, the selection of topics and other forms of language that were (either consciously or unconsciously) used. Initially, we assumed that these elements might contribute to certain frames or images of refugees and, as such, constitute ‘effects of truth’ (Waitt 2021: 346) about the arrival of refugees in and by both newspapers. Finally, we combined the insights of these three interrelated dimensions to draw conclusions about the refugees’ climate of arrival and how this was being shaped by the two newspapers.

### **Shaping a Climate of Arrival for Refugees**

In this section, we discuss the results of our analysis by subsequently addressing the representation of the regulatory-administrative dimension of refugees’ arrival infrastructures in the two newspapers, discussing the representation of the everyday practical dimension of refugees’ arrival infrastructures in them both and, finally, illustrating the normative-discursive dimension of the refugees’ arrival infrastructure. In the concluding discussion, we illustrate how the media coverage on these three dimensions has shaped the refugees’ climate of arrival in the Netherlands and Amsterdam and discuss the consequences.

#### *Focusing on the Limitations of the Regulatory-Administrative Dimension*

Both newspapers provide insight in the regulatory-administrative dimension of refugees’ arrival infrastructures by discussing the (implementation of) migration laws, policies, and practices that are part of refugees’ arrival infrastructure from the moment they first enter the Netherlands up to their civic integration trajectories. Although the focus of the two newspapers differs, as we illustrate in the third results section, they both show that arrival was not that straightforward in 2016. This was caused by several shortcomings in formal regulatory-administrative arrival infrastructures. Both *Het Parool* and *De Telegraaf* repeatedly refer to the formal procedures and outline which refugees are supposed to travel to the reception centre in Ter Apel to register their arrival in the Netherlands and claim asylum. Here, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) decides whether to take their asylum claim into consideration; however, they lacked capacity to do so (see also Kox and van Liempt 2022). Both newspapers mention the extended waiting list and the lack of capacity of the IND, which meant that refugees sometimes had to wait six months for the IND to decide on—or even start—their legalization procedure. *Het Parool*, for instance, on 13 April 2016, portrayed the Syrian Ziad Alkamoua, who was disappointed after being wrongfully deceived by the authorities: ‘Upon arrival in the Netherlands, he was expected to receive a residence permit within three months. But those three months, he soon heard, turned into half a year’. Previous studies show that extended waiting by refugees was no exception in the aftermath of the refugee crisis (De Backer *et al.* 2022; Kox and van Liempt 2022).

During this waiting period as well as during their legal procedures, refugees are housed in reception centres run by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers (COA). Both newspapers illustrate the lack of centres and beds for the number of refugees who arrived in 2015 and the beginning of 2016. *De Telegraaf*, for instance, repeatedly challenges the competence of the COA to arrange (support for) beds as well as to provide adequate housing. The lack of opportunities to find adequate housing for refugees can partly be explained by protests that arose in response to plans to build new asylum centres but is also a more structural problem of shortcomings in the formal infrastructures for refugees. Asylum seekers are frequently relocated to asylum-seeker centres all across the country, according to *Het Parool* on 25 June 2016: ‘These brothers were located by the COA at eight different locations since their first day of arrival on 27 October. Since they have been in Alkmaar, they have found more stability’. Given the lack of capacity, local authorities tried to repair some of the shortcomings of national immigration policies by providing emergency shelters and by offering new locations for asylum-seeker centres. On 13 May 2016, *Het Parool* wrote of this repair work at the local level:

In September, the municipality requested the Salvation Army, HVO-Querido and the Rainbow Group [three humanitarian organizations] to create emergency shelters in due notice. Within one week, there were two shelters for hundreds of asylum seekers.

This resulted in more shelter for refugees, although *De Telegraaf* revealed on 19 February 2016 that this support was still inadequate. According to Mayor Eberhard van der Laan, the municipality is doing what it can and the COA is struggling with a work backlog: ‘I don’t want to trivialise that it takes a long time for these people, but we cannot change that for them. The COA cannot get things in order and we work under the COA regime’. Consequently, as we illustrate in Section 2 of the results, myriad infrastructuring practices came about and refugees ended up using other non- or semi-formalized trajectories outside the formal, institutionalized regulatory-administrative domain to gain access to housing. National and local institutional actors thus may collaborate and strengthen each other to enable the arrival of refugees in the Netherlands and limit the shortcomings in the administrative-regulatory immigration domain.

National and local actors who are part of the regulatory-administrative dimension may also oppose each other (cf. [Meeus et al. 2019](#)). The most striking example are the Bed, Bath, and Bread arrangements (BBB arrangements) for asylum seekers whose asylum claims are rejected or who are not yet eligible for an asylum procedure. As these refugees aspire to legalization, they are still occupied with arriving in the Netherlands (cf. [Kox and van Liempt 2022](#)). Both *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool* repeatedly discuss the lengthy political debate on these BBB arrangements. They show that the national authorities have been somewhat reluctant to provide any form of support for these rejected asylum seekers, while actors at the local level saw themselves confronted with the consequences of the lack of support



for this group and, as a result, provided shelter and support for them (cf. [Kox and Staring 2022](#)). In Amsterdam, some rejected asylum seekers and volunteers united in a group called ‘We Are Here’ and started to protest against the national immigration policies. They moved from squatted building to squatted building and claimed shelter as well as access to basic rights. Both *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool* gave extensive coverage of this group. *De Telegraaf* (12 January 2016) mainly emphasized the costs involved and discussed how the local government of Amsterdam decided to ‘dig deep into their pockets to offer shelter to 193 asylum-seekers who had exhausted all legal remedies’. They also emphasized that, from a legal point of view, this group was not entitled to support. On 24 September, *Het Parool* pointed to the need for a solution, writing ‘This just isn’t being solved (...), meaning that we won’t have clear national policies on this matter’. Although both newspapers use a different angle to discuss this topic which aligns their signature (see also Section 3), this debate reveals how the different state levels can work against each other and shape the regulatory-administrative as well as bring about new infrastructuring practices for refugees ([Meeus et al. 2019](#)).

### *Illustrating Repair-Work in Refugees’ Everyday Lives*

The shortcomings of the administrative-regulatory dimension of refugees’ arrival infrastructures also have consequences for the everyday practical dimension, which consists of a wide range of infrastructuring practices for refugees outside the administrative-regulatory dimension. *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool* both discuss a wide range of spaces, personal and non-citizen initiatives, as well as formal, semi-formal, and informal infrastructuring practices that have obtained a role in refugees’ arrival processes. Given the scope of the newspaper, *De Telegraaf* focuses mainly on these artefacts at the national level as well as on incidents in asylum and reception centres at the local level. *Het Parool*, in contrast, mainly illustrates local infrastructuring practices. Among others, this newspaper stresses the connections—or the failing connections—between local spaces of arrival and those at the national level. For instance, on 10 September 2016, a reporter for *Het Parool* described, based on his observations, how a local action group waited for the international train to arrive to welcome new refugees and guide them to Ter Apel for their formal arrival and entrance into the Dutch asylum administration. Refugees arriving at night could not make use of the buses that were organized by the government as these only ran during the day:

I bivouacked with 19 volunteers or Refugees Welcome at the Central Station on a December evening. An entire camp was set up: bottles of water, baby food, bananas and cake were spread out in the central hall, which had the look of a fridge.

This shows that volunteers filled the gaps by offering support to refugees that enabled them to connect with the next arrival infrastructure.

Both newspapers show that refugees end up using other semi-formalized or non-formalized trajectories outside the formal regulatory-administrative domain

due to the shortcomings of the formal institutions. This concerns, first, more formal infrastructuring practices such as the shelter that was arranged by the municipality and organized by local humanitarian organizations as discussed in the previous section. In addition, both newspapers provide examples of organizations whose (in)formality is rather ambiguous given their funding by or dependency of (local) authorities. Besides, both newspapers show that less-institutionalized, personal actors at the local level became involved in repairing or protesting against the perceived shortcomings of governmental infrastructures. The newspapers provide examples of local—partly personal—infrastructuring practices that arose because of the increased influx of refugees and that operated next to—or in the place of—more formal organizations. *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool*, for instance, both address the protest that arose at different local levels in response to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Citizens started to gather to demonstrate against emergency shelters for refugees, the allocation of housing in a time of home shortages and against the arrival of refugees in general. *De Telegraaf* wrote, on 11 March 2016:

Popular anger, demonstrations and even riots: a new phenomenon for many authorities in villages. Municipalities are visibly struggling with the overheated asylum debate. Protesters sometimes get out of hand, but local authorities also make mistakes.

*Het Parool* also points to the role of local informal practices repairing the shortcomings of the state. It covers several bottom-up infrastructuring practices at the neighbourhood or personal level that may welcome refugees and facilitate their integration—such as housing offered by citizens, a newly established community centre, a pop-up library for refugees, citizen-led language classes, walk-in meals, sports club activities, and special attention for vulnerable groups such as young and LHBTQI+ refugees. On 21 June, *Het Parool* illustrated this example: ‘Osama lives with three other refugees from Syria and Iraq in the house of Ottevanger and his friend Erwin, who offer housing to gay refugees’. These more informal infrastructures, which exist next to the formal infrastructure, contributed—among others—to the organization of shelter for refugees, the facilitation of (language) education, access to the job/internship market and the stimulation of civic integration trajectories.

While *De Telegraaf* mainly focuses on the national level and the problems that are being observed there, *Het Parool* also includes the meso level in its coverage, which fits the local signature of this newspaper. The focus on the meso level provides more insights into the solidarity at the local level but also helps to see the person behind the label ‘refugee’. For instance, on 5 January 2016, *Het Parool* discussed how a local athletic trainer sponsors and coaches newly arriving refugees in the city and how the Dutch team members ‘are not being held back by language barriers in making contact with newcomers’. Such media coverage offers information on welcoming initiatives and shows that there are also open attitudes towards refugees in everyday settings. At the same time, it reveals the complexities that refugees are confronted with ‘as refugees’ as they have to make sense of

different infrastructuring practices at different levels. In their local sports team, they might be welcomed by friendly locals but, in the street, they might be taken for terrorists. This brings about an ambiguous infrastructure, with discouraging and encouraging, welcoming and hostile facets. This ambiguity comes to the fore in a portrait by *Het Parool* on 8 September, of a Syrian refugee who tries to become part of the city of Amsterdam:

I have been invited for dinner by people. I like to meet Dutchies. But in the streets, I feel I am being looked at. Sometimes they look at us as if we were terrorists. That's not good.

### *Creating an Ambiguous Discourse of Refugees' Arrival Infrastructures*

Our analysis shows that both newspapers focus on and highlight different elements of the administrative-regulatory and everyday practical dimensions of refugees' arrival infrastructures. This is no surprise given the different signature of these newspapers. It does show that combining the media coverage of both newspapers with a different scale and signature provides insights into the different representations of the regulatory-administrative and everyday practical dimensions of refugees' arrival infrastructures in the Netherlands. These bring about—implicit or explicit—associations with refugees and, consequently, impact on what Rächle (2019: 34) calls the 'normative-discursive dimension' of refugees' arrival infrastructures. In this last section, we use three examples that are part of the normative-discursive dimension of refugees' arrival infrastructures to illustrate the ideas and debates on immigrants that are circulating in both newspapers. These show the ambiguous image of the arrival infrastructures for refugees that consists of many diverse, dynamic and intertwined layers.

First, we observed that both newspapers use different wordings to discuss the arrival of refugees, something that contributes to the different frames and images of refugees (see also Lams 2018, 2019). *De Telegraaf*, for instance, usually uses so-called security-oriented language that contributes to the notion that refugees are intruders or economic, cultural or criminal threats (cf. de Cock et al. 2019). When discussing, for example, the Turkey deal in which the EU and Turkey agreed that the latter would enhance its external border controls in exchange for six billion euros as well as the acceptance of up to 72,000 Syrian migrants by the EU (Heck and Hess 2017; van Liempt et al. 2017), *De Telegraaf* includes a warning in their coverage of 16 February: 'Once they are in Turkey, lots of them will try their luck in Europe'. *Het Parool*, in contrast, uses what de Cock et al. (2019) call 'humanitarian-oriented' terminology. This means that the paper covers experiences and portraits of refugees that reveal the shortcomings of European and/or national policies and shows the—sometimes devastating—consequences for refugees. For instance, when discussing the same Turkey deal, *Het Parool*, on 8 February, did not warn that these refugees will eventually come to Europe. Instead, they wrote:

Ten thousand refugees from Aleppo are stranded at the Turkish border. Other regions say they are not able to handle this influx, but Europe does not want to have these refugees either.

The newspaper seems to consider refugees as victims of European immigration policies and, as such, create an entirely different image of these same refugees who were central to *De Telegraaf* a day earlier. While *De Telegraaf* also uses humanitarian-oriented language and *Het Parool* uses more security-oriented wordings as well, this implies that both newspapers create different images of refugees, thus influencing society's ideas of debates on refugees (cf. R auchle 2019).

Second, we observed substantial bias in the coverage of the arrival infrastructures for refugees by both newspapers. Both addressed key events that occurred in 2016, such as the aforementioned Turkey deal, the claims of the We Are Here group, the transformation of a former prison into an asylum centre, the protests against the housing of refugees, the monthly reports by the mayor of Amsterdam and so on. However, they are very selective on what (not) to cover within their newspaper. While there are other examples, we would like to illustrate this point on the basis of the media coverage of a meeting of the EU Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs on the Schengen Area and border controls, held in January 2016. *De Telegraaf* used an economic angle to discuss this meeting and included the views of a spokesperson from the logistics sector on the costs incurred because of the border controls within the Schengen Area. *Het Parool*, on the other hand, took a more humanitarian stance, calling the use of intra-Schengen border controls 'a drastic remedy' while referring to the different arrival points for refugees and the lack of adequate support for the Greece authorities to protect their border. In line with this, a similar reasoning can be seen in the selection of topics that are being covered by both newspapers. *De Telegraaf* mainly focuses on security and threats that are perceived to be related to—or caused by—the arrival of a high number of refugees. They repeatedly discuss the economic consequences of the refugees' arrival, the shortages in the housing market, the lack of capacity and incidents at the reception and asylum centres and other shortcomings of different levels of the state. For instance, when discussing concerns about mental health care for refugees after the terrorist attacks in Germany, they raise the issue of 'whether security risks of crazy asylum seekers are sufficiently seriously taken into consideration' (*De Telegraaf*, 27 July 2016) instead of discussing the refugees' right to (mental) health care. This fits in the frame of refugees as intruders and security threats, as discussed above, and tends to alienate refugees. *Het Parool*, in contrast, tends to focus more on informal initiatives for refugees, individual experiences and solidarity with refugees in the city of Amsterdam. This newspaper tends to neglect the economic considerations and citizens' concerns regarding refugees, which comes at the expense of a complete picture of refugees' arrival and presence as well. Their coverage partly fits the 'victim frame'. However, they give refugees a voice as well and present their histories, everyday lives, leisure and dreams—as, for example, in this quote of 10 October, 'This land has made a student of me'. We believe that this type of reporting contributes to the normalization of refugees and to conviviality in society.

Third, *De Telegraaf* in particular gives little voice to the refugees themselves, something that also came to the fore in previous media analyses (e.g. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017; Dos Santos Silva *et al.* 2018; Lams 2019). Politicians' and elite voices are usually privileged above those of ordinary citizens or migrants'

voices and in this way symbolic bordering is achieved through the silencing, collectivization, and decontextualization of refugees' voices. In our analysis, both *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool* give voice to a wide range of actors who—in line with the newspapers' own political orientation—discuss different policy themes, something that contributes to the politicization and domestication of refugees' plight (cf. Lams 2019). For example, *De Telegraaf* mostly gives voice to those who are suspicious about refugees' arrival, which is in line with their political stance towards the phenomenon. This includes politicians and protest groups. *Het Parool*, by contrast, uses another angle. It tries to counteract such suspicions and mainly gives voices to those in favour of refugees. This local newspaper also discusses capacity shortages and shortcomings in centres and other failures of the state such as housing shortages. However, this newspaper tends to focus on the daily lives of refugees and emphasize the frustrations and desperation caused by the regulatory-administrative bureaucratic web of procedure and requirements. It also gives voice to a wide range of academics, policy-makers, and citizen-led initiatives to provide more insights into the topic. What is more, they try to give refugees a voice by showing individual portraits and following some of them over time. *Het Parool*, for example, on 12 December 2016, illustrated the complexities around arrival by sharing a narrative from a refugee from Syria:

He explained what kind of bureaucratic web he had gotten into in the Netherlands; how the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), the IND (Immigration and Naturalization Service) and the Dutch Refugee Council regularly contradict each other. (...) Mohab got used to filling in a form for every step he took. (...) A miracle happened at the beginning of December; Mohab found a container house in Amsterdam-North. We sit at the window and look out over the IJ. 'I have now found out that there are enough people who want to help me, I like that. But I have started to mistrust governments, everywhere in the world. It seems like they don't want you to develop'. Then he is lucky in Amsterdam. He is grateful for the efforts of volunteers and other stakeholders. He knows that refugees do not always get that help everywhere.

The three examples show that both newspapers make their own choices in line with their scale and signature in how to represent elements of refugees' arrival infrastructures in the Netherlands. Combining the representations of both newspapers and illustrating the different ideas and debates on refugees that are circulating in the Netherlands and—in direct interaction with each other and other media—shape the climate of arrival for refugees in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion

In this contribution, we have illustrated how two Dutch newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool*, represented the regulatory-administrative, the everyday practical, and the normative-discursive dimensions of refugees' arrival infrastructures in 2016 to understand how refugees' climate of arrival was being shaped in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis. We have shown an ambiguous image

of the arrival infrastructures for refugees that consists of many diverse, intertwined and dynamic layers. The representation of the regulatory-administrative dimension of the arrival infrastructure for refugees brings about a discourse of insufficiency and inadequacy, especially in the context of shelter, housing and integration trajectories. Both newspapers emphasize the shortcomings of this formal dimension and draw attention to all kinds of formal, semi-formal, and informal infrastructuring practices that arose in (the aftermath of) the so-called refugee crisis and which provide and constrain opportunities for refugees to arrive in the Netherlands. The newspapers' focus on these shortcomings and their illustration of infrastructuring practices in refugees' everyday lives bring about different-positive and negative- associations, ideas and debates about refugees and their arrival infrastructures.

Moving beyond a focus on refugees to multilayered arrival infrastructures shows an ambiguous discourse of refugees' climate of arrival. Here, refugees are not solely portrayed as intruders or victims, as is often found in existing media analyses (e.g. [Berry et al. 2016](#); [d'Haenens et al. 2019](#)). They are not only reduced to simplistic incomplete images, but also normalized and humanized. This illustrates that solely focusing on the framing of refugees in media coverage tends to overlook local constraints as well as opportunities offered by (part of) the receiving society that obstruct or help to build connections and create a home. While we observe specific biases, the use of metaphors, and a rather one-sided selection of topics in and by both newspapers, looking at the entire constellation of arrival infrastructures in two newspapers that differ from each other in terms of scale and signature contributes to more realistic, far from uniform media representations of refugees. This finding points to the importance of offering space in its coverage for everyday situations, spaces, and initiatives that humanize the arrival of refugees. This helps refugees to move beyond the sole identity of refugees and contributes to their agentive power. As media coverage is supposed to shape public opinion and set political agendas, it is crucial not to have one dominant view in terms of signature as well as scale, given the long-lasting effects this may have. Especially as the discourse—directly or indirectly—impacts on the organization of the regulatory-administrative and everyday practical dimension again as media representations may influence decision-making processes, actions, and reactions of formal and informal actors towards certain issues ([van Aelst 2014](#); [Mistiaen 2019](#)).

The combined analysis of the two newspapers helps to understand how the climate of arrival for refugees in the Netherlands is being shaped in the media. Simultaneously, it is difficult to capture the climate of arrival in a single word. The results of this media analysis show a ambiguous and sometimes conflicting arrival infrastructure in which refugees have to find their way. Different institutional and personal, national and local, hostile and welcoming actors strengthen and contest each other in a wide range of spaces at both the national and the local level. These are both positively and negatively represented in *De Telegraaf* and *Het Parool* from the angle of a wide range of actors and sometimes refugees themselves as well. While these findings make it complex to draw a clear picture of the refugees' climate of arrival in the Netherlands, these do align the experiences of refugees

themselves. This media analysis is part of a wider study on everyday experiences of refugees in Amsterdam for which we have also conducted participatory ethnographic research (e.g. [Kox and van Liempt 2022](#); [van Liempt and Kox 2023](#)). For ethical reasons, we did not confront our research participants with media representations of refugees in the Netherlands. Instead, we focused on how refugees experience their arrival and home-making processes in the Netherlands, who they are confronted with upon arrival and what this means to them. In line with our media analysis, the refugees report ambiguous experiences upon arrival in the Netherlands. They feel both supported and hampered by formal state infrastructures and welcomed by local citizen-led initiatives. While they usually appreciate the Netherlands and its inhabitants, they encounter lots of limitations, barriers and frustrations to actually become part of the city and participate in society. The struggle to overcome these hurdles and get access to parts of society that are relevant to them hampers them to a large extent to feel at home, meaning they are still occupied with ‘arriving’ long after their initial arrival in the Netherlands ([Kox and van Liempt 2022](#); [van Liempt and Kox 2023](#)).

Media representations do have a role in these arrival processes. After all, media representation does not simply *reflect* reality but also shapes and is shaped by it. As shown before, negative media representations may negatively impact on refugees, their arrival and integration processes as well as their opportunities in society ([Newton 2008](#); [Crawley et al. 2016](#); [Lams 2018, 2019](#); [d’Haenens and Joris 2019](#); [Smets et al. 2019](#)). Therefore, the way in which the arrival of asylum seekers is framed, especially in national debates, may influence society’s perceptions as well as those of the refugees themselves. This implies that these representations are not without risks, especially as refugees’ first impressions of and experiences in a country may have a long-lasting effect on their integration trajectories ([Ghorashi 2005](#)). This brings an important responsibility for newspapers and individual journalists. At the same time, in our current digitalized world, it would be too simplistic to assume that a single newspaper is the only news source which people consult, so this should not be looked at in isolation.

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## ENDNOTES

1. In line with other studies, we use the term ‘refugees’ to refer to all newcomers who have left their country to claim asylum elsewhere, even if they are not yet formally recognized as refugees.
2. We are aware that [Xiang and Lindquist \(2014\)](#) distinguish five dimensions—commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social. However, we believe that focusing on the regulatory-administrative, the everyday practical and the normative-discursive dimensions of arrival allows us to bring in the actors and artifacts of all

- dimensions that Xiang and Lindquist highlight and are more suited to illustrating the discourse in which refugees' arrivals are situated.
3. Elsewhere, we discuss in more detail the experiences of refugees on arrival and their interactions with a wide range of actors (Kox and van Liempt 2022; van Liempt and Kox 2023).
  4. We have excluded very brief items and readers' letters in our analysis as these did not provide sufficient insights/depth into the refugees' arrival infrastructures or representations.

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