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RELIGIOUS REFERENCES IN ROMANIAN AND HUNGARIAN
NEWS AND COMMENTS ON THE REFUGEE CRISIS

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Abstract: Public discussions of the recent rise in the number of refugees and asylum seekers, commonly referred to as “the refugee crisis” employ recurrent references to religion. This paper investigates the salience of religion in Romanian and Hungarian online news and comments. It aims to contribute to better understanding the role religion plays in the public understanding of the refugee crisis, and also to the wider issue of the role of religion in public discussions. It also aims to identify the specific local discourses that the local audiences revert to when making sense of and commenting on foreign news. The analysis applies corpus linguistic and discourse analytical approaches to a constructed week sample of Romanian and Hungarian news and their comments. The main referential strategies identified with regard to religion are generic religion, religion as difference, visible religion and religious threats. Similarities of the two news cultures point to continuities that transcend national boundaries, and are connected to wider trends in the role of religion in the public understanding of the refugee crisis. References to religion are also shown to intersect with local political discourses. In the wider context of the European public sphere, and the debates over its secular nature or desecularization, the results suggest that the mediatization and politicization of religion in the context of the refugee crisis needs to be understood as a “secular return” rather than desecularization.

Key words: refugee crisis, visible religion, religion as difference, news in Romania, news in Hungary, Eastern European media, online comments, media representation of Muslims, media representation of refugees, corpus-assisted discourse analysis

The refugee crisis unfolding in the past years brought with it the emergence of religion as a recurring reference in public debates. “German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday slammed those countries in Europe who say they won't take in Muslim refugees, a position that several eastern European governments have taken in response to the influx of migrants from the Islamic world”, the Associated Press reported in August 2016. The report explained that the chancellor made her comments in response to Hungary, as well as German nationalists accusing her of threatening Europe’s security by allowing hundreds of thousands of migrants into Germany (Jordans 2016). Moreover, although the German chancellor was reported as speaking about Eastern European countries, the title of the news report was “Merkel rejects Muslim migrant ban, urges fair distribution“, thus framing her remarks in the context of the debate unfolding in the United States presidential campaign around future president Trump’s proposed travel ban on immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries, frequently referred to as a “Muslim ban.” Even though an actual travel ban was only instituted in 2017, the use of the expression surfaced early in the US presidential campaign (Colvin and Peoples 2016). Suddenly, religion appeared central to a political debate on the future of both Europe and the United States.

The media coverage of the refugee crisis and of the debates surrounding the proposed responses have been central to shaping these policies. Research commissioned into media portrayals of the refugee crisis by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has argued that political attitudes towards migrants and asylum seekers cannot be understood without taking into account media portrayals, as the mass media “provide the information which citizens use to make sense of the world and their place within it” (Berry et al. 2015, 5). Probably the most visible such manifestation of the power of the media in shaping the unfolding of the events was the iconic image of the body of a young boy which made it on the front pages of the world’s leading papers in September 2015, and shaped for a while both public opinion and policy response (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, 17). The wave of empathy generated by the dramatic images of Alan Kurdi, however, were short-lived (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017). Attitudes towards migrants and refugees have hardened throughout Europe, driven by various factors, from economic concerns to security fears. Religious difference also ranks high among these concerns and fears. A Pew Research Centre survey has found that “among Europeans, perceptions of refugees are influenced in part by negative attitudes toward Muslims already living in Europe.” (PEW 2016, 4). The same report also found that views of Muslims are more negative in Eastern and Southern Europe, although some of these countries, like Poland or Hungary, do not host significant such communities. Fears such as “Muslims do not wish to participate in broader

society” are clearly media-driven in countries like Hungary, where it is also much more prominent than in Germany, the UK or France (PEW 2016, 23).

This paper will investigate the salience and discursive functions of references to religion in the media coverage of the refugee crisis in two neighbouring Eastern European countries, Romania and Hungary, looking at both news reports and audience comments. It aims to contribute to better understanding the role religion plays in the public understanding of the refugee crisis, and also to the wider issue of the role of religion in public discussions. It also aims to identify the specific local discourses that the local audiences revert to when making sense of and commenting on foreign news. We do recognize that the expression “refugee crisis” is itself a strong construct, used by political and media discourses to convey a sense of urgency and is part of a rhetoric stigmatizing migrants themselves, casting them as an “other” (Krzyżanowski et al. 2018, 2). It is beyond the scope of this paper to reflect on the wider issue of crisis discourses, but references to religion can be expected to contribute to creating this “sense of crisis.”

1. Literature review: religion in analyses of refugee crisis news

Recognizing the importance of media coverage in the public perception of and policy responses to the refugee crisis, an increasing number of papers have looked at the way media covered the issue, focusing on both national cases and international comparisons. The UNHCR’s 2015 report looked at terms used to refer to refugees and the implications of referring to them as “refugees”, “asylum seekers” or “migrants” in Spain, Italy, Germany, the UK and Sweden, and found that the preference for terms had implications on the preferences for causes and solutions (Berry et al., 2015). The predominant themes of news coverage identified were humanitarian and securitizing. In Hungary, research into the coverage of the 2015 events, including the Charlie Hebdo attack and the building of the fence on the country’s border, also focused on the choice of terminology, and analyzed the language Hungarian government used to create a moral panic around “illegal” or “economic” migrants. The authors also showed how the government communication campaign and its securitization discourse managed to define the frames used by the media as well (Bernáth and Messing 2015; Bernáth and Messing 2017). Analyses of the German response also highlighted the importance of terminological clarity or the lack of it in framing the moral deservingness of refugees (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). The validity of the refugee claims also appears as central to Canadian media debates (Lawlor and Tolley 2017). The plight of Syrian refugees was shown to be

covered more in terms of victimhood by the Turkish press, and more as an administrative issue by the Bulgarian one (Dimitrova et al. 2018).

A recurrent feature of this important and growing body of research is that although it agrees that religion is central to othering the refugees and securitizing the debate by presenting them as a threat, it does not focus specifically on the discursive mechanisms by which religion comes to play its assigned role. One of the possible reasons is of course that in mainstream media, religious indexing is in fact not frequent. A paper that coded whether religion was mentioned found that this was the case in 6.8% of the articles (Dimitrova et al. 2018). Another reason is that when references to religion do appear as prominent, they are primarily related to the Islamic State (eg. Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017, 1757), a terrorist organization. Media reports in general tend to make reference to religion in the context of armed conflicts and terror attacks (Pickel 2018, 34), hence the backgrounding of the issue of the religion of refugees and host societies, or of religious plurality in general, both in mass media and media research on the refugees. As an editor of a volume on religion in the refugee crisis has put it, “although scholarly studies on migration and religion fill libraries, its forms, functions and formats in Europe’s current refugee crisis have hardly been analyzed or assessed” (Schmiedel and Smith 2018, 6–7).

Among the numerous such scholarly studies on religion and migration prior to the current “crisis”, an important body addressed the role of religion in the European public sphere, noting that there has been a return of religion variously described as post-secularism or desecularization. The most prominent proponent of the latter, Peter Berger argues that “modernity does not necessarily produce a decline of religion; it does necessarily produce a deepening process of pluralization – a historically unprecedented situation in which more and more people live amid competing beliefs, values, and lifestyles” (Berger 2012, 313).

However, other researchers argue, the undoubtedly increased visibility of religion in media and public spaces must not be confused with an increase in religious beliefs and values. The new visibility of religion can actually be “secular” in the sense that “religion is relevant for public discourse only by virtue of being either problematic or useful,” for example by taking over welfare functions (Hjelm 2014, 205). An important question to ask therefore is how the refugee crisis and the role of religion in its perception relates to these previous debates: are references to religion in the context of the refugee crisis references to beliefs and values, or is religion, if visible, a problematic or utilitarian phenomenon?

An analysis comparing mainstream media frames and audience frames regarding immigration on Greek online news sites has found that audience comments focused much more than news articles on immigrants as threats, and religious and cultural otherness was central to the perception of immigrants as “alien threat” (Miloni and Vadratsikas 2016).

The marked difference in media and audience frames also points to the importance of complementing media analyses with analyses of audience reactions when studying the problem of refugees and religion.

2. Context, research questions and methodology

In what follows we will analyze news and comments on the refugee crisis from Romanian and Hungarian news outlets. Eastern European media constitutes an important and underresearched topic of study from the point of view of both the role of religion and that of the representation of refugees for several reasons. On the one hand, in postcommunist Eastern European countries religion has undergone a deprivatization or republicization, gaining increased public visibility in the media (Herbert 2011, 640). At the same time, Hungary is among the European countries with the highest levels of rejection towards both refugees and Muslims (Pickel 2018, 27). The government has taken a hard line against accepting refugees and developed communication campaigns meant to reinforce the image of migrants as enemies and threats that have been described as a “moral panic button” (Barlai and Sík 2017). Neighboring Romania, by comparison, also has a low migrant acceptance rate, as other Eastern European countries, although somewhat higher than Hungary (Esipova, Fleming, and Ray 2017). Various political actors had various, sometimes ambiguous and shifting opinions on the issue of refugee relocation quotas, but this did not become a major issue in public discussions (Hosu and Stoica 2017). The two countries differ significantly in terms of their experience with and role in the Europe-wide unfolding of the events. Although neither is a target country, Hungary has witnessed an upsurge of refugees in 2015, and reacted by fortifying its southern border, with this “wall” becoming a central issue in international as well as domestic politics. Romania, on the other hand, is not situated on the main routes of migration, and reports on the refugee crisis are thus predominantly foreign news. Even though traditional comparative research is interested in differences rather than similarities, highlighting similarities of mediatization in these two countries with different experiences might point to wider trends in the mediatization of refugees and religion. A similar point was made by researchers identifying commonalities between the Turkish and the Bulgarian coverage, which suggest, according to the authors, “the existence of some universal trends in the media construction of refugees permeating coverage on this politically charged topic, regardless of geographic region or national culture” (Dimitrova et al. 2018, 542).

Based on the scholarly and contextual considerations highlighted above, we analyze (1) how salient religion is in news and comments of the refugee crisis in Romania and Hungary, and (2) what the main referential

strategies in indexing religion are. We also aim to highlight (3) common features of the two corpora that transcend national news cultures with regard to the role of religion in the public understanding of the refugee crisis.

The analysis is based on news and comments from four online news outlets, two from each country: 24.hu and hvg.hu from Hungary, and hotnews.ro and adevarul.ro from Romania. The sources were selected based on the following criteria: they had to be among the top online news sources in each country, based on their traffic, they had to allow for comments on their sites and needed to have a reputation of quality and independence. The latter was especially important in Hungary, where the media coverage was strongly influenced in many outlets by the government's anti-refugee rhetoric. In each country we selected an online-only news portal, 24.hu and hotnews.ro, and the website of a print publication, hvg.hu, the site of a weekly news magazine, and adevarul.ro, the website of a daily paper. All four can be described as generalist quality sources with centrist-liberal orientations and are thus broadly equivalent with respect to their broad orientations and positions in the public sphere.

The time-frame of the analysis is July 2016 to June 2017. These two semesters are periods in which there were no major "crises" related to refugees, migrants or asylum-seekers, and thus there is no single issue that should dominate the news. We started from a sample of two constructed weeks for each outlet, and allowed for +/- 1 day for days where there was no coverage. The sample includes articles mentioning migrants, refugees or asylum seekers on these dates. In identifying the articles, we started from migration-related tags used by the outlets themselves, except for hotnews.ro, where we searched the archives, because of the lack of tagging. Our sampling method resulted in a relatively close number of articles for three of the outlets, except for 24.hu, where the sampling yielded a much larger number of items. Therefore, for the latter, only one constructed week per semester was used. For each date in the sample, news mentioning refugees or migrants were collected, along with their comments. The sample thus created consists of 229 articles (hotnews.ro: n=61, adevarul.ro: n=57, 24.hu: n=51, hvg.hu: n=60) and 4194 comments (hotnews.ro: n=549, adevarul.ro: n=460, 24.hu: n=737, hvg.hu: n=2448).

The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to describe the salience of religion in news and comments, we turn to the keyword method of corpus linguistics, and compare the most frequent words in our corpus with a similar list generated from a reference corpus, asking whether terms referring to religion are significantly more frequent in our refugee-related corpus than what can be expected by chance alone, based on large, representative corpora (Baker 2008, 7). For this purpose, we used two comparable reference corpora, the Romanian web corpus (roTenTen) and the Hungarian web corpus (huTenTen), both accessible via

the Sketch Engine online corpus analysis tool (Kilgarriff et al. 2017). The HuTenTen corpus comprises over 2.5 billion words, whereas the RoTenTen comprises over 2.6 billion words. Significance was measured using the log-likelihood statistic.

In a second step, we identify the types or references that are used to index religion, and classify their functions according to an inductively developed scheme. This combination of corpus linguistics with discourse analysis follows the steps recommended by Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery for combining corpus linguistics with critical discourse analysis (Baker et al. 2013b, 27). For the qualitative analysis, we used Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative content analysis software to manage sources, manually code, and build categories. The unit of analysis in the second part, to which our frequency counts will refer to, was the comment for comment corpus, and the paragraph for the article corpus.

3. The salience of religion

In news of the refugee crisis, both in Romania and Hungary, religion appears as an audience frame. After discounting keywords referencing migrants, which are of course very frequent as they functioned as a sampling criterion, terms referencing religion do not appear in the top 100 keywords in either news corpora, but “Muslim” is the most significant keyword in the Romanian comment corpus, and the third most significant one in the Hungarian comment corpus. Table 1 lists the twenty most significant keywords separately for each news and comment corpus, also indicating domains they pertain to:

Hungarian news: articles

Orbán (*politics: actors*); népszavazás (*politics: process*); szíriai (*nationalities*); tranzitzió (*administrative*); afgán (*nationalities*); unió (*European Union*); Eu (*European Union*); illegális (*justice / law enforcement*); kvótanépszavazás (*politics: process*); szír (*nationalities*); embercsempész (*criminal activity*); Brüsszel (*European Union*); Szíria (*countries*); vádlott (*justice / law enforcement*); Törökország (*countries*); Merkel (*politics: actors*); Németország (*countries*); kormányfő (*politics: actors*); Ahmed (*refugees*); Ausztria (*countries*)

Hungarian news: comments

Orbán (*politics: actors*); terrorista (*criminal activity*); **muszlim (religion)**; Merkel (*politics: actors*); illiberális (*politics: ideologies*); fidesz (*politics: actors*); libsi (*politics: ideologies*); embercsempész (*criminal activity*); kvóta (*administrative*); Hebdo (*media*); szír (*nationalities*); tranzitzió (*administrative*); érvénytelen (*administrative*); letelepedési (*administrative*); **Allah (religion)**; fidióta (*politics: insult*); szutyok (*insult*); határvédelem (*administrative*); hazaáruló (*insult*); scum (*insult*)

Romanian news: articles

Merkel (*politics: actors*); Uniunea_Europeană (*European Union*); azil (*administrative*); Turcia (*countries*); Renzi (*politics: actors*); frontieră (*administrative*); Trump (*politics:*

actors); Angela (politics: actors); cancelar (politics: actors); Erdogan (politics: actors); Incirlik (countries); AfD (politics: actors); Novecento (other); Ankara (countries); Siria (nationalities); terorist (criminal activity); AFP (media); G20 (actors); terorism (criminal activity); referendum (politics: process)

Romanian news: comments

musulman (religion); Europa (Europe); Merkel (politics: actors); Uniunea Europeană (European Union); Germania (countries); Orban (politics: actors); Trump (politics: actors); Erdogan (politics: actors); viol (criminal activity); Rusia (countries); extremist (politics); est (countries); Turcia (countries); turc (nationalities); **Islam (religion)**; ilegal (justice / law enforcement); invadator (threats); invazie (threats); Angela (politics: actors); granitele (administrative)

Table 1. Top keywords and domains in Romanian and Hungarian article and comment corpora

All keywords have LogLikelihood values significant at $p < 0.01$. LogLikelihood was calculated using Paul Rayson's online tool, available at <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>.

Identifying keywords is also one of the ways of describing the “aboutness” of text corpora: whereas frequency lists are dominated by terms that are generally frequent in the given language, the keyness approach used above highlights terms that are significantly more frequent in the texts analyzed (Baker 2008, 127). In case of the refugee news and comments analyzed here, we note that the keyword lists of both the Hungarian and Romanian news corpus are dominated by references to political actors, countries, nationalities, the European Union, political and administrative processes, i.e. general concerns of public affairs journalism. There are two main domains in which the comment and the news corpora differ: the presence of several instances of offensive speech among the Hungarian keyword comments, which can be regarded as a general discursive feature, and the presence of keywords related to religion, specifically Islam. These results indicate that religion is central to the commenting audiences in both countries.

In order to make sure that the above results are not generated by only a few articles in the sample, i.e. that only a few articles on specific topics would generate a high number of comments on religion, we also checked for the dispersion of religious indexing in the corpus. Results show that 42% of the Romanian articles and 40% of the Hungarian articles had comments that made reference to religion, reinforcing our previous conclusion. At the same time, religion is not absent from articles either: 23% of the Romanian and 10% of the Hungarian articles also engaged in some form of religious indexing.

4. Indexing religion: types of religious references

Religion can be referenced using various discursive strategies in both news articles and comments. Therefore the keyword method, based

on the frequency of specific words, needs to be complemented by qualitative analysis meant to identify other referential strategies. In a second step, we have manually identified references to religion and tagged them with descriptive categories like “religious texts”, eg. references to the Bible or Quran, “places of worship”, eg. churches or mosques, “religious practices” eg. prayers, “religious authorities” etc. We then grouped these tags into four wider categories: *generic references*, *religion as difference*, *visible religion*, and *religious threats*. These represent the main referential strategies of indexing religion in news discourses of the refugee crisis.

Generic references include references to religion in general, or to a specific religion as a system of beliefs. References to religion in general typically occur in discussions of human rights, definitions of discrimination or persecution, as in pointing out “the need to protect human dignity, regardless of their origins, colour of skin, religion, gender, sexual orientation or political values” (G.S. 2017). Most frequently, however, it is specifically Islam and Christianity that is referred to: “We have already defended Europe from Islam once. Now we are a border fortification again” (comment on Vaskor 2016). The Hungarian sample also includes references to other religions in the comments, including ancient religions, buddhism, and Judaism. In such cases, religion is often referred to as a form of barbarism in comments. In the Romanian sample there surfaces a form of the “secular sacred” as well (Knott et al. 2013, 11): “this new religion that is called humanist has replaced Christianity in the West” (comment on Ungureanu 2016).

By definition, generic references to religions as systems of faith include references to religion as a source of values. This type of usage is most characteristic of the Hungarian comment corpus, where it is a form of disputing the Christian credentials of the government, i.e. a form of political argument. Generic reference to religion also occur as a form of criticism in Romanian comments: “they are the adepts of the cult ‘the holy bucket, the holy oil and the holy kilogram of floor’”, a reference to campaign giveaways (comment on I.C. 2016).

Generic references to religion are, maybe counterintuitively, not the most frequent type of reference in either news or comments, but their weight in comments is much greater in both news cultures. The difference can be explained by the nature of the sources: though the keyword method has also revealed that religion is highly salient for the commenting audiences, it is not a salient topic for mainstream quality papers conforming to a secular ideal of the public sphere.

The most characteristic way of referencing religion is using it as a group attribute, to designate a group of people: “They only consider it racism when they attack black people, Arabs or Muslims; if it’s Eastern Europeans, it is totally all right. This is how western thinking works” (Comment on Hvg.hu. 2016). We have termed this reference type *religion as*

difference, since it constitutes a strong form of othering, being often offensive or even hateful with respect to refugees. “Muslim” and “Muslims” turned up as top keywords in our Hungarian, respectively Romanian comment corpus because this type of reference to religion dominates both the Hungarian and the Romanian comments. Religion can also appear as an attribute of individual, or an attribute of countries or regions, as in “a Muslim refugee”, “Islamic terrorist”, “Muslim countries” or “Christian Europe”. This function of religious indexing is in line with the wider tendencies noted in other news cultures and prior to the refugee crisis as well: numerous analyses have shown how the religious identity of Muslims is increasingly politicized and focusing more and more on difference (for an overview see Baker et al. 2013a).

Treating large numbers of people professing a religion as a group has been described with the concepts of collectivization and differentiation (Baker et al. 2013b, 123–47), and the analysis of British media has also shown how this usage is prone to present Muslims not only as a heterogeneous group, but also “separate from, and in tension with, the rest of the United Kingdom or ‘the West.’” (Baker et al. 2013b, 146).

Our list of corpus-based keywords included “Europa” as the second most salient keyword in the Romanian comment corpus. Presenting Europe as a space under religious threat is a recurrent feature of both comment corpora, and is a major difference between the news articles, which rarely employ this frame, and comments, which frequently do. The topos of a besieged “fortress Europe” surfacing in the context of the refugee crisis is again not specific to the news cultures analyzed here. It has been described as a form of criticizing the approach of the European Union as shifting the burden of border defense to countries on its periphery in Serbian and Croatian discourses as well (Sicurella 2018). In our corpora, however, it appears rather as a historic topos, with the “fortress” in need of defense rather than criticism. But the topos intersects in our case as well with local political discourses, in this case discourses on the migration of local workforce, as both Romania and Hungary are countries that are a source of migration to Western Europe. Thus, the collectivizing references to Christians can serve as a form of criticism of policies that target not only refugees, but also Eastern Europeans, and point to the further local stakes of the mediatization and politicization of religion: “Eastern European workers, educated and Christian, are no good, but some Arabs will do just fine. (...) But not of any kind, but only Muslims; the others, like East Europeans, do not fit the ‘criteria’”- wrote commenters on news of post-Brexit British workforce needs (comments on N.O. 2017).

A third type of references indexes specific elements of religions and religious practice: religious texts, symbols, norms, institutions, places of worship and authorities. We have termed this group *visible religion*, because the elements that dominate this group tend to refer to visible

practices or the institution of the church and its head. This latter usage occurs of course with reference to the Christian Catholic church and the pope, whose words and actions have high news values, and occur frequently in the Romanian articles, where visible religion is the most prominent group of references. Norms and practices include references to sharia, times and manners of Islamic prayer, Islamic dress, norms regarding food, and sometimes religious values as a source of action.

The increased public visibility of Islam in Western European societies has been a major source of cultural and political disputes, with numerous debates on the construction of mosques or publicly acceptable forms of dress (Göle 2013). While the visibility of religion in news articles in our corpus appears to be defined by the visibility of the head of the Catholic church, in news comments it is references to religious symbols and norms that dominate the discussion. This holds for both news cultures, even though neither Romania nor Hungary are countries where Islam would be publicly visible in everyday life. Thus, these Eastern European discourses are connected to the wider European debates on cultural identities, with the topos of the islamisation of Europe being a recurrent form of arguments. In Romanian comments, these arguments also intersect with the local disputes on the definition of the traditional family, a highly politicized debate surrounding a proposed referendum on constitutionally defining the family as a union between a man and a woman. These references to religion are thus parts of local “culture wars”, but also manifestations of Euroskepticism: “In 1957 the Treaty of Rome laid down the foundations of the European Economic Community. (...) What is it they want today? (...) Unraveling Christian religion, Christian customs, the traditional family, and replacing these with LGBT ideology, Islam, multiculturalism as the new occidental values which we are supposed to accept. These 3 countries, Poland, Czechia and Hungary are the final bastions in the way of leftist ideology, better said of neo-marxism, which is the new form of communism” (comment on Romanovschi 2017). Even though Eastern Europe is sometimes given as an example of desecularization via a deprivatization or republicization of religion, the visibility of religion and discussions of visible religion in the context of the refugee crisis rather point to the thesis described as “the secular return or religion”, relevant “by virtue of being problematic or useful” (Hjelm 2014, 205), and framing wider anxieties over political and cultural identities.

Finally, religion can be indexed by making reference to various forms of *religious threat*: references to jihad, to crusaders and various forms of religious militancy or fanaticism recur throughout the news articles as well as comments. At the same time, this latter group is based on a distinction that is often not made by commenters, who often appear to use “islamist” as a synonym of “Muslim.” Although indexing religion with terms like “crusaders” or “islamism” or “militants” is not as frequent as the other types of references, a general sense of threat is associated with

the former types of references as well: violence and crime are recurrent references, and we have seen how keywords from the domains of crime and law enforcement had a strong presence in our list of top keywords as well. This usage is also in line with the “secular return” thesis.

5. Conclusions

Religion has a strong presence in news discourses of the refugee crisis in Eastern Europe. This is the case primarily of news comments, where a corpus-based keyword analysis has revealed that references to “Muslims” are among the top keywords in both Romania and Hungary. Thus, religion appears as a strong audience frame, associated with articles that do not index religion as well, and recurs throughout our corpus.

In the context of the refugee crisis, religion appears primary as a designator of difference. This type of usage dominates comments in both news cultures. Apart from the collectivising use of religion as difference, it can also be indexed generically, or with reference to visible elements, or with reference to forms of militancy and threat. *Generic religion*, *religion as difference*, *visible religion* and *religious threats* are the four referential strategies used to reference religion in the context of the refugee crisis.

These referential strategies connect Romanian and Hungarian news of the refugee crisis to wider European discourses. Thus, religion as difference, as an attribute that defines and differentiates people and groups they belong to appears to be one of the general discursive features of recent discussions of migration in general, transcending national boundaries. The return of the historic topos of a Christian “fortress Europe” is also present in other news discourses. Religion also activates local political frames, or, to put it differently, when discussed in a local context, religion is strongly politicized, ie. used as an argument in local political debates, from disputing ideological credentials of local political actors to debates on same-sex marriage, Euroskepticism or policies regarding Eastern European migrants. In the wider scholarly debates on the role of religion in public life, they point to a secular return of religion: it is visible religion and religion as a mark of difference that returns.

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