

# “They can’t become the enemy”

A discourse analysis of the portrayal of climate refugees in Swedish  
media

# Abstract

Climate refugees are becoming increasingly common due to increased global warming as a result of excess emissions, the vast majority of which come from the Global North. The aim of this thesis is to examine how the climate refugee issue is described in Swedish media against a backdrop of a potential conflict between a Swedish self-image as progressive in humanitarian matters, and the recent stricter migration policies. The thesis examines Swedish newspaper articles discussing climate refugees published between 2015 and 2022. The WPR method is utilized to answer how climate refugees are portrayed, and how the responsibility to protect both Swedish citizens and climate refugees is manifested. Findings show the portrayal constructs climate refugees as security threats, which evokes the responsibility to protect Swedish citizens from said threat. Simultaneously, the responsibility to protect climate refugees is evoked through a manifestation of Swedish morality and accountability as part of the Global North. However, this responsibility is handed over to the UN due to the complex nature of the issue. The analysis shows an interconnectedness between securitization and the Good International Citizen as the discourse protects the idea of Sweden as progressive, yet avoiding taking direct responsibility for climate refugees.

*Keywords:* Climate refugee, WPR, Good International Citizen, Securitization, discourse analysis

*Words:* 9948

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# 1. Introduction

*“They [climate refugees] can’t become the enemy”.*

Quoted above is Koko Warner, one of the world’s leading climate migration researchers at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. She discusses her fears about the evolution of climate-induced migration and how to develop safe, dignified, and regulated migration policies in an interview. The article emphasizes how easy it is to visualize climate refugees as part of a future dystopia, when it is in fact a current problem (2020). Media plays an instrumental role in framing political issues for the public, particularly in the integration of migrants into local communities (Triandafyllidou, 2013). Typically, European media has been described as tending to focus on controversial aspects of migration as opposed to more well-researched and investigative content (Law, 2010, 208).

The core principle of the UN Refugee Convention is non-refoulement, which “asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom” (Art. 33, UN Refugee Convention). Francesca Rosignoli, researcher on climate justice and refugees, states that it can be hard to prove that climate refugees are being forced out of their home countries (Enekvist, 2020). The increase in natural disasters caused by climate change, however, can constitute a serious threat to life or freedom. Although proving climate grounds for asylum can be difficult, the appeal of a Kiribati man has made climate grounds a viable cause for asylum according to the UN Human Rights Committee. The reasoning was that there is no need for an *immediate* threat to life and health, since climate change-driven displacement can concern both slow change and natural disasters (UNHRC, 2016).

Media portrayals of climate change-related issues are becoming a more common object of study within political science. Studies have been made on discourses of climate change in newspapers in the UK, Australia, and the USA (Schäfer et. al., 2016). However, this has not been the case in smaller traditional host countries, such as Sweden, which is a fitting example as it both receives a comparatively large number of refugees and has seen a rise in anti-immigration sentiment since the 2010s. Sweden was one of the biggest European host

countries for political refugees per capita during the last decade, second only to Malta (third counting Turkey) (Christophersen, 2020). Sweden is also an example of a country where the European right-wing populist movement, which typically opposes immigration, has entered parliament. The Sweden Democrats became the third biggest party in the 2018 election (Riksdagen, n.d.). Their influence has grown significantly since they entered parliament and can be demonstrated by Moderaterna (the second largest party) in January 2021 opening for cooperation on certain issues (Abrahamsson, 2021). The main reason for conducting the study lies within the lack of research on an issue expected to grow significantly within a country experiencing a rise in anti-immigration sentiment.

## 1.1 Statement of Problem

The International Organization for Migration described in their 2008 report how the greatest consequence of climate change would be human migration as early as 1990. They describe the situation concerning climate refugees as a growing crisis, estimating the number of climate refugees in 2050 ranging from 25 to 200 million (ibid.). In 2021, internally displaced people were more than twice as common as refugees fleeing war (IDMC, 2022). However, the term *climate refugee* is new, and the global community has not reached a common definition despite efforts (Apap, 2019). The most urgent consequences of climate change will first reach (and already has in many cases), the Global South, and in particular low-lying nations such as Bangladesh. Rising sea levels have already caused great levels of migration - so far mainly to urban areas and/or neighboring countries (IDMC, 2022)

The underlying cause of this trend is the development of the Global North, which is estimated to be responsible for 92% of all excess emissions (Hickel, 2020). This is something that the Swedish media appears to be aware of when discussing climate-related questions. A sense of accountability connected to climate change, as well as a sense of responsibility towards climate refugees is visible in the media representation of the issue, often acknowledging the Global North's accountability.

Previously, Sweden was one of the few countries in the world that accepted environmental disasters as a reason for protection status. However, only one person is reported to have been granted permanent residence on these grounds. In the aftermath of the so-called "refugee

crisis” of 2015, a new temporary ‘foreigner law’ was imposed which annulled the environmental disaster protection (Enekvist, 2020). Social conflicts and growing inequalities have set the tone for the Swedish political debate, which regularly connects these increasing instabilities with migration (Scharpa & Schierup, 2018) (Ericson, 2018). As opposed to other countries with similar political landscapes and migration policy trends, Sweden is a country typically known in the international community for being progressive and morally righteous (Lawler, 2012). Being at the forefront of refugee- and aid-related issues has become part of Sweden’s global brand as a “humanitarian superpower”. However, the public opinion on migration has diverged from the set ideas of the so-called Swedish values that the global brand rests upon. One of the most significant values in this branding was the tolerant attitude and policy towards refugees (Simons and Manoilo, 2019). This change in political attitudes and the innate contradiction of values and/or prioritization raises the question, how (if at all) this is reflected in society.

## 1.2 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to examine how the fast-developing climate refugee issue is described against a backdrop of a potential conflict between the Swedish self-image as progressive in humanitarian matters, and the recent stricter migration policies. Across Europe, and globally, discourses surrounding climate refugees are turning into security issues (Sakellari, 2021). How securitization and responsibility towards climate refugees (due to an obligation as a good international citizen) coincide and affect each other is of relevance to understanding which societal discourses are being presented to the general public. According to Foucault, discourse is described as a powerful way of engaging both critique and resistance (Hook, 2001, 522). Foucault introduced the ‘the process of problematization’ which he described as “how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) become a problem” (1983, 66). The analysis in this thesis is based on this perspective and uses Carol Bacchi’s discourse analysis method “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR) to examine the portrayal of the issue of climate refugees. The intention is to investigate if, and possibly how, securitization and/or good international citizen discourse(s) divides the responsibility of protecting Swedish citizens and protecting climate refugees into opposing objectives.

As this issue is projected to grow substantially along with climate change, it is an important issue to explore. Host countries' reaction to this problem is of importance both inside and outside the realms of academia, especially since it is projected to accelerate. By looking at the Swedish media portrayal of this problem, this thesis will attempt to shed light on the current situation and determine how this applies to (or conflicts with) the reputed progressive values of Sweden. Holding securitization in contrast to the idea of responsibility towards refugees and the Swedish public is a necessary step in evaluating this issue. The lack of research on climate refugees and the idea of the good international citizen, as well as on climate refugee discourse in Sweden overall, creates a possible research gap that this study aims to fill. This research gap thereby provides the thesis with academic relevance.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- How is the Swedish media portraying the issue of climate refugees?
- How is the responsibility of the Swedish state to both protect the Swedish public *and* climate refugees manifested in the media?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Responsibility to protect can also refer to the principle of international law. In this thesis, it is rather used as a moral responsibility connected to the GIC.

## 2. Previous literature

### 2.1 Should they be called ‘refugees’?

There is an ongoing debate concerning the term “climate refugee”, and whether it should be used or replaced by “climate migrant” or “environmentally displaced persons”. The opponents to the label of “climate refugees” are sometimes the migrants themselves. The reasoning is that the migrants interpret ‘refugee’ as a negative term that signifies victimhood and portrays them as people without agency (ABC News, 2014). Although these climate refugees' legal claims to the term “refugee” may be disputed, as well as their own opposition to the term, they are often referred to as such within media (the point of study of this thesis), and by extension they are viewed as such by the general public. The label ‘climate refugee’ can also help highlight the urgent nature of climate change, giving it more exposure. Ayazi & Elsheikh (2019) make the case for the necessity of using the label ‘climate refugees’ for climate displaced persons, since the global use and dependency on fossil fuels can constitute persecution. This reasoning would work as grounds for a normative framing of international recognition and protection for those forced to displacement (ibid.). This reasoning forms the basis behind using ‘climate refugee’ in this paper to describe people being displaced due to climate change. Another important reason is also to remain consistent with the material, and thus avoid confusion. The label of climate refugee will thus be used in this thesis; nevertheless it is important to acknowledge the controversial tendencies of the label.

### 2.2 Media’s Representation of Climate Change

Schäfer presented an extensive review of the field of media communication on anthropogenic climate change in 2015, highlighting the importance of investigating media discourses on climate change. He characterizes anthropogenic climate change as an ‘unobtrusive’ topic, partly due to the difficulty for the average person to observe the change, and partly due to the complexity of the issue. Since climate change is hard to observe for most people, scientists are primarily the ones observing it, and their findings tend to be complex and esoteric. The third reason is that a great extent of the consequences of climate change are not happening right here, right now. Mostly, they are believed to happen in the future, having the largest



effect in countries in the Global South rather than the Global North. This unobtrusiveness means that most people form their opinions on climate change and its consequences through the media (853).

Furthermore, Schäfer identifies four main frames used by the media concerning climate change. Firstly, “anthropogenic climate change as a global problem”, conveying that man-made climate change is real and that action is required. The main advocates of this frame include the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Secondly, “scientific uncertainty” highlights that the science is inconclusive, and therefore acting would be hasty. This is typically framed by calling climate science ‘alarmist’ or ‘junk science’ and is mainly sponsored by the fossil fuel industry. Thirdly, “economic development” acknowledges the existence of anthropogenic climate change, but stresses that action would interfere with economic development, a frame that is also sponsored by fossil fuel companies. Finally, “ecological modernization” shows the importance of technological development in fighting climate change, with industry and ‘developed countries’ as pioneers. Its main sponsors include European multinational corporations but also other industry sectors globally (2015, 855). Frames like these are generalizing but underline the different perspectives reaching the general public and how these are sponsored by different stakeholders. This categorization may bring forward an understanding for the current political discourse. Though it may vary which frames are mainly used in different countries, there are opposing interests within the overall discourse.

### 2.2.1 Securitization and Climate

Previous research within the field of climate has often characterized the development of climate change as a securitization issue. Schäfer et. al. (2016) examined 101,000 newspaper articles from nine countries, showing an increase in securitization discourse within industrialized countries such as the US, UK, and Australia. Simultaneously, the trend had an opposite effect in countries belonging to the Global South, such as India and South Africa. A specific focus on climate refugees within media reporting has been provided by Sakellari (2021). This was done through a visual and textual analysis of how online news media in the UK present the issue of migration instigated by climate change. The author has found specific discursive packages that inspire policymaking and public opinion. The image of the climate

refugee is said to be depoliticized and removed of its complexity and context, thus fitting into securitization objectives (2021, 63).

## 2.3 Media's Representation of Refugees

The representation of refugees within the media is an area which has been broadly discussed and studied. Bosch et. al. (2019) found that the majority (55%) of news stories on migration and refugees could be categorized as concerning 'politics'. Following this were 'crime' (19%), 'social & health' (12%), 'economy' (9%) and 'displacement' (5%). Within the category 'politics', researchers found differences between countries in regard to subcategories. Sweden, along with Norway and the UK, had the largest subcategory of 'national legislation'. Other countries' largest subcategories included integration, relocation and deportation & returns (2019, 121). Another interesting finding was how the people in the stories were being referred to. In total, 21% were referred to as migrants or refugees, which is considered a low representation. The authors found this to be evidence for the debate being framed predominantly by politicians' discourse. They also mean that this visualizes how the ones most affected by the issue are excluded from the debate, creating a distance between the general public and refugees (ibid., 122).

## 2.4 Sweden and Climate Responsibility

Thörn & Svenberg explain why climate responsibility often is related with Sweden in their account of the Swedish environmental movement. Since the introduction of comprehensive environmental legislation in 1968, Sweden received substantial international attention for its "new" environmental movement within social movement studies up until the 1990s.

Institutionalizing the movement at an early stage is said to have been significant, explaining the early engagement from the Swedish government. This can be understood as a part of the Swedish welfare state's model for social engineering and its 'consensus culture' (2017, 193-194).

On the international arena, Sweden has aimed to take a leading role in the development of environmental policy through the introduction of the "ecological modernization" model.

Thörn & Svenberg describes an advanced liberal responsabilization, meaning significant and

active involvement from both civil society and business in political responsibilities. This is said to lead to ‘politics of responsibility’, where there is a struggle in defining who should be the subject of responsibility within environmental politics (2017, 194). Since the beginning, there has been a power struggle between (anti)-institutionalization and (de)-politicization. Furthermore, the idea of *climate justice* has become prevalent in the discourse of the Swedish environmental movement (ibid., 213). However, as the sense of responsibility is linked to institutionalization and politicization, the links between the area of responsibility and the Swedish state’s part in climate change as an industrialized nation is seemingly neglected. Concerning responsibility towards climate refugees, there seems to be a lack of research in general, and in particular regarding media discourse.

## 3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of a combination of securitization theory, as well as the theory of the good international citizen. This framework allows the thesis to delve into whether the Swedish media follows the general European discourse of securitization and is complemented by the use of the discourse on Sweden as a morally righteous state in this humanitarian matter.

### 3.1 Securitization

As seen in previous research, securitization is often connected with both refugee and climate issues in the media. Therefore, securitization theory is a fitting starting point when investigating media discourse on climate refugees and seeing if (and how) Swedish media shows the same tendencies. Securitization theory revolves around the idea that no issue is in itself a threat, and can only become a threat or a security issue through discursive politics (Balzacq, 2010, 1). In general, refugees have been presented in European media as either threats or victims, which are used interchangeably and therefore perpetuate an idea of refugees as non-human (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, 1165). This means that they either suffer, or potentially make others suffer. Whilst victimization mobilizes public support and concern for refugees, it simultaneously creates a threat of difference and instability (Johnson, 2011, 1016). Manzo explains how they, as victims, become an ‘other’ that lacks agency, and due to desperation turn into a threat to the hosting country (2010). Sakellari brings the victimization discourse further by connecting it to the massification of refugees. Discourse using language such as “a *wave* of environmental refugees” can be considered alarmist and disempowers and reduces the uniqueness of each community. They are thus narrowed down to a ‘mass of unfortunates’, representing them as only distressed and desperate (2021, 74).

Securitization of climate change-induced migration is rationalized in mass media by accounting for causality between climate-linked resource scarcity, population movements, violent conflicts, refugee flows, and eventually disturbances within the societies of the host countries (Boas, 2015). This is perpetuated even though there is a lack of empirical evidence supporting this line of argumentation (Owain & Maslin, 2018). In turn, this discourse

legitimizes any actions taken by host countries to limit migration in times of high refugee numbers.

The theoretical use of securitization in this thesis will focus on tools used by the media to portray refugees in general, as well as climate refugees in terms of security. Seeing as there is a comparatively small part of research refugee discourses focuses on climate refugees, and considering this thesis assumes the label 'climate refugee' onto persons displaced due to climate change - using theorizations on the broader term 'refugee' is both fitting and constructive. Sakellari also deems the discourse on refugees and on climate refugees as similar (2021, 65). The application of this line of securitization is done through looking at language which describes climate refugees as victims or threats, use of massification language, as well as the line of rationalization, from resource scarcities to disturbances of host countries' societies. With the background given by researchers such as Sakellari, Chouliaraki & Stolic, and Boas, using these tools will help in investigating if the Swedish media has a securitization discourse surrounding climate refugees and if so, how that is presented to the Swedish public. The victimization of the securitization discourse connects to the good international citizen through the responsibility to protect (R2P).

### 3.2 The Good International Citizen

Studies on discourse on climate refugees have mainly revolved around topics of security. In contrast, an area with less connection to the issue in previous studies is the good international citizen (GIC). GIC has a wide range of use but is typically applied as a tool in the examination of discourse connected to foreign policy (Souter, 2016, 797).

The theorization within international relations stems from the concept of an international society, rather than an international system, meaning that states recognize themselves as intertwined through collective institutions and shared norms (Buzan, 1993). In the same way that the Swedish society consists of its citizens with both rights and duties, the same applies to an international society - but here, states are considered citizens. Citizenship is provided by membership in the United Nations, and the UN rules as the sovereign with ideals instrumental for the development of its citizens (Abbondanza, 2021, 178). The 'good' part in being an international citizen tends to be acknowledged as states being law-abiding and cooperative (Pert, 2014, 4-16). More specifically, a good international citizen is typically

strongly committed to multilateralism, international law and human rights, and is expected to contribute to international affairs (Souter, 2016, 798). GIC allows for an examination of what role being part of the international society and being perceived as good through its norms and institutions plays, if applied to the international and domestic issue of refugees. The presence of the UN in climate refugee discourse makes for an interesting connection between the GIC and the portrayal of climate refugees.

Within the field of international relations, the study of states acting as good international citizens has been limited (yet resolute). The concept of GIC, according to Shapcott, signifies a state acknowledging the limits on its pursuit of self-interest due to its national, international, and humanitarian obligations (2020, 246). Due to the sense of accountability and responsibility towards climate refugees which appears to be present within the Swedish media discourse, the theory can be useful for analyzing how climate refugees are portrayed. Although the connection between GIC and climate refugee discourse has yet to be established within the field, a connection has been made regarding the issue of refugees in general.

Souter makes the case for including the granting of asylum in being a good international citizen, even at the cost of some special responsibilities to protect. This idea challenges the general perception of a GIC as realizing general duties within foreign policy. He means that whilst asylum on its own should be a vital part of being a good international citizen, it is especially necessary under two circumstances. Firstly, when humanitarian intervention is ill-advised or made politically impossible by the norms of international society. Secondly, when the intervention - humanitarian or not - is the cause of refugees being created, thus generating special responsibilities for the intervening states to protect those refugees (2016, 795). This, by extension, leads to a state being forced to de-prioritize the protection of their own citizens.

Although the usual issue in climate refugee matters of proving causality may seem an “easy out” within this reasoning, the second circumstance listed for GICs could still be attributed to most of the Global North when it comes to climate refugees. The Global North is responsible for 92% emissions of carbon dioxide in excess of the planetary boundary. In comparison, most countries in the Global South were within their “fair share” - even including India and China (Hickel, 2020). Though polluting and other climate-changing mechanisms do not intervene as directly as a military intervention does, it still intervenes with citizens of other states and creates refugees.

Previous connections between GIC and asylum policy have mostly focused on Australia. Australia's strict laws and policies concerning refugees and immigration (the "turn back the boats" policy) have been held in contrast with their status as a GIC. One key factor attributed to this juxtaposition is the securitization discourse of maritime migration and the harsh attitude toward asylum seekers (Abbondanza, 2021, 179). The connection to securitization goes in line with the aim of this thesis and showcases the connection between the two theories. Using GIC as a tool for examining the portrayal of climate refugees in Sweden can explore the possible opposition of the state's responsibilities to its citizens and its humanitarian responsibility to protect them.

GIC has been selected for this thesis due to the nature of the issue of refugees being simultaneously an international and domestic matter. Included in the idea of GIC are both responsibilities towards a state's own citizens, as well as non-citizens (such as refugees). This may lead to a conflict in the light of securitization - portraying refugees as a security issue pits the idea of protecting one's own citizens against protecting the refugees. These theories are suited to establish in what ways, if any, a moral obligation for the Swedish state to be 'good' is present in the medial discourse. In connection to the aspect of securitization, one can examine whether there is a coexistence of portraying refugees as both threats and victims, and how this reaches the Swedish public. Furthermore, GIC conflicts with securitization mirrors the conflict of Sweden as a traditional host country for refugees, versus Sweden as a country with an anti-immigration movement. The thesis will thus look for evidence of the international society, with Sweden as a 'citizen'. Other tools, such as mentions of collective norms and institutions, the role of the UN, responsibility towards both citizens and non-citizens will also be included when analysing the GIC component.

## 4. Method

Discourse analysis can be approached as both a theory and a method (Bergström & Boréus, 2000, 222). This thesis aims to use discourse analysis, focused on problematization, as a methodological framework accompanied by securitization and the GIC theorizations. Many political theorists have contributed to the concept of problematization. Foucault contributed to a shift from political participants to the knowledge of these participants in the study of how we are governed (Bacchi, 2009, 26). Problematization analysis concentrates on how difficulties are constructed as problems, as well as how that construction forms the conditions of any proposed solutions (Foucault, 1991a, 389). He goes on to explain how despite there being multiple responses to a difficulty, the general form of problematization allows these responses to coexist:

*To one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made. And most of the time, different responses actually are proposed. But what must be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their simultaneity is rooted; it is the soil that can nourish them in all their diversity and sometimes in spite of their contradictions. (...) The work of the history of thought would be to rediscover at the root of these diverse solutions the general form of problematization that has made them possible (Foucault, 1991a, 389).*

The focus, thus, should not be on the solutions themselves but rather the foundation (i.e. the problematization).

### 4.1 What's the Problem Represented to be?

Foucault's problematizations are at the heart of the method chosen for this thesis - Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR). Bacchi understands Foucault's problematization as used in two ways: one was to question assumptions being taken for granted, and the other was to understand the way of thinking behind a particular form of rule (Bacchi, 2009, 30). Based on this, WPR is a tool used to uncover underlying assumptions within problem representations of social and political issues (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, 271). Typically, this method is used for studying policy. However, Bacchi herself has in later



work used the method on non-policy related issues, emphasizing how the WPR approach can be useful in the analysis of a wide range of knowledge practices (Bacchi, 2017, 3).<sup>2</sup> Bacchi describes WPR as a resource or a set of tools with which to interrogate critically (2012, 21). Whilst some discourse analysis fits as both theory and method, WPR benefits from using a supplementary theoretical framework seeing as it is a more tool-heavy method rather than an explicit theory.

The method itself is composed of six questions concerning the portrayal of a problem. However, there is no necessity in answering all the questions, and an author can choose which questions are most relevant to their research (Bacchi, 2009, 100-101).

The three questions used in this thesis are:

1. What's the 'problem' [...] represented to be (in a specific policy)?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?  
Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

(Bacchi, 2009, xii)

These have been selected as they are most relevant in answering how Swedish media portray climate refugees, and examining how the responsibilities to protect are visible in the material. The first question is vital as it acts as the foundation for the remainder of the analysis. Here, most of the findings are presented, followed by a conclusion of what the problem is represented to be. As previously stated, Bacchi makes a point of questioning assumptions taken for granted which motivates the selection of the following question. Finally, the last question is important in order to understand the way of thinking behind the discourse and critically analyze how the portrayal is being framed and what perspectives are left out. The three other questions were judged to be outside of the aim of the thesis and concern effects of the representation, the historical and competing representations and spaces of production of the representations. The thesis will analyze the articles question by question and finally present a summarizing conclusion on the overall findings.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of this include Archibald (2020) and Pringle (2019).

## 4.2 Material

The material used in this thesis is composed of articles from the four largest daily Swedish newspapers with national distribution (Ocast, 2022). This is to ensure that the discourse being analyzed is one that reaches the public to the largest extent, which is also why both morning and evening newspapers will be included. Findings from Retriever Research (also named Mediearkivet) database, as well as an overlook of other studies with a similar focus, has narrowed down the newspapers used to Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet and Expressen. They also represent different ideologies. Dagens Nyheter is a daily morning paper that is “independent-liberal” and is owned by Bonnier AB. Expressen is a daily so-called evening paper also owned by Bonnier AB, they are also liberal. Svenska Dagbladet is a daily morning paper which is “independent-conservative” and owned by Schibsted. Aftonbladet, a daily evening paper, is “independent-social democrat”, also owned by Schibsted.

The material was collected through Retriever Research, a news archive that collects digital and print articles. The search words used in the retrieval were “klimatflykting” (climate refugee), “miljöflykting” (environmental refugee) and “klimatförändring AND flykting\*” (climate change AND refugee\*). The use of AND ensures that both the search words are present in the articles, and the asterix ensures that any variation of refugee is included. The last search word resulted in articles not specifically addressing climate refugees being included, which had to be eliminated by an assessment of relevance. After this process, 25 articles remained in total. The distribution was the following, Dagens Nyheter: seven articles; Expressen: seven articles; Svenska Dagbladet: nine articles and Aftonbladet: two articles.

## 4.3 Delimitations

During the collection of material, some articles found when using the parameters have been shown as unavailable. The reason for this can be attributed to the limitations of Retrieval Research, as they lack access to locked articles from Bonnier AB (LUBsearch, n.d.). This limits the material somewhat. However, most articles were provided by Dagens Nyheter and Expressen (14/25). Therefore, using this method of data collection is deemed sufficient for this study despite the aforementioned flaws.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

By using the WPR method, the findings are discussed and analysed by way of the theoretical framework used throughout this section. The questions are first presented and answered one by one, categorized by themes. The final part contains a shorter further discussion in order to discuss findings in a freer format.

### 5.1 What is the problem represented to be?

This first question is, in Bacchi's words, "an exercise in clarification" (2009, 2). She further states that policies may contain multiple problem representations (2009, 4). It can be of particular weight to clarify these when occurring outside of the policy arena, seeing as the material consists of multiple authors from various newspapers. Therefore, the different representations have been mapped out and divided into four main categories.

#### 5.1.1 Unavoidably united

The foremost response to the question of how the problem is represented is the consensus that this is a global problem, thus requiring a global perspective and global action. This is no new finding, being a typical part of climate change discourse. However, the perspective of this study connects with the Good International Citizen framework. As predicted by the GIC, the UN is a central actor in the discourse. The UN and its sub-agencies are regarded as authorities within the discourse, as the majority of the material refers to the UN in some capacity, including using it as a source for statistics on both the climate and refugee situations. Other areas of use are quotes to lend legitimacy to claims, as well as serving as a place for direct calls to action (Larsson et. al., 2017; Rogvall, 2019b; Kerpner, 2021).

The use of the UN provides the basis for two findings. Firstly, it corroborates the worldview of the GIC approach. As Buzan concluded in 1993, states exist within an international society that is dependent upon the ties brought forth by collective institutions and norms. The UN acts as the sovereign who provides the ideals its citizens (i.e., its member states) are expected to follow in order to be 'good' (Abbondanza, 2021). An example of the material which

highlights this idea comes from Gerremo, who states that “...our own national challenges demand an analysis that also includes the world at large, the world in which we, whether we want to or not, are an unavoidable part of” (2018). This quote is found in an article discussing how Sweden has a “locked” political discussion on migration. The point made is that both climate and migration issues should be dealt with in an international setting, alluding to the importance of the international society. Putting these ideas into the context of Swedish newspapers shows how the idea of climate refugees can be perceived - an issue of global character which should be dealt with according to the ideals communicated by the UN.

### 5.1.2 The complex issue / complex fluidity

In the beginning of the process of sorting through the material, the complexity of the issue became apparent. Typically, the theme presented here as a complex issue can be divided into two paths. One path is for articles to characterize climate refugees as part of a complex issue due to the interconnectedness between actors such as states, the UN, and international agreements, and the uncertainty of determining the cause of refuge. Examples of this can be found in Kärnstrand’s article in Svenska Dagbladet from 2019, where a combination of different factors such as violence, precariousness, and extreme weather are underlined as push factors. Falkehed’s article highlights the complexity by portraying victims of terrorism in Chad, explaining how climate change in the Lake Chad area connects to their experience (2019).

It is hard to create politics around the issue since it [climate refugees] is a large and multifaceted group of people. They flee due to climate change. But the span is large - from voluntary to forced, temporary to permanent, from natural disasters like storms and floods to gradual changes like drought and loss of services of ecosystems (Elin Jakobsson in Bergh, 2019).

The other discourse path connected to complexity is simply to not count climate refugees as a separate and defined concept when exploring the issue. A lot of articles, found in the first screening of the material, briefly mention climate refugees in one sentence when discussing other humanitarian crises such as famine, war, or “mass” migration. Because of this, they were excluded from the material. However, it drew attention to the Swedish media’s

tendency to keep the discussion at a surface level. Both tendencies, however, present the issue of climate refugees as a ‘fluid’ concept. Since it is presented as an issue belonging to many actors and areas of politics, it is typically not dealt with in a unified manner. This means that many problems are linked with one another and are used as a part of a larger explanation - such as in Falkehed’s causes for terrorism (2019). In summary, climate refugees are rarely spoken of as a separate issue, and when it happens, the complex nature of the issue is highlighted.

### 5.1.3 Mass immigration - a massive future problem

Massification discourse is visible in the material. The use of alarmist language such as Sakellari’s (2021) “waves of refugees” consistently follow descriptions of the climate refugee situation. Examples of this include “the next big refugee wave” (Enekvist, 2020), “future streams of refugees” (Götmark & Andersson, 2019), and “the age of mass migration has only begun” (Wiman, 2020). The imagery conveyed by the wave and stream metaphors alludes to unstoppable forces of nature, rather than viewing refugees as individual humans. Although the age of mass migration lacks those associations, it still fits into the narrative of something monumental and beyond human control. The alarmist nature of this discourse portrays climate refugees as threats and something other than human, which can affect ‘us’ (Sweden). The narrative of a lack of control ties into the discourse of refugees lacking agency, which constructs climate refugees into threats to host nations (Manzo, 2010). These images connect not only to the massification discourse, but also to the foundation of securitization of how issues are constructed into threats through media discourse (Balzacq, 2010).

Concerns about resources and uncertainty are often connected to the massification discourse. Boas, in her work on securitization as strategy, clarifies the discursive steps which work to rationalize the securitization of climate refugees. The first step is climate-linked resource scarcity, which causes population movements that can lead to violent conflicts. These can in turn motivate refugee flows, finally leading to (possible) disturbances of the societies of host countries (2015). The material has shown no signs of the steps having to follow each other. Instead, they are often lumped together as examples of how complex the issue is, or of how dangerous the issue is. For instance, Götmark & Andersson (2019) highlight the effects population increase has on resource scarcity, migration and briefly conflicts - more so than

climate. Rogvall describes hypotheses of a dystopia where, due to resource scarcity followed by population movements, “the desperation leads us to refugee flows and war. Soon we have made ourselves extinct” (2019b). The potential danger expressed in this quote, as well the use of securitization tools, is discernible.

#### 5.1.4 A Swedish responsibility / Tragedy

The humanitarian tragedy is ever-present in the discourse. Three out of 25 articles consist of reports where the writers have traveled to affected regions and spoken to climate refugees - Petersson (2019) and Alestig (2021) from Bangladesh, and Falkehed (2019) from Chad. These stories have strong pathos and portray people who are living under difficult and dangerous circumstances and have witnessed traumatic events due to climate change. Focusing on a single refugee contradicts the massification discourse surrounding refugees. Instead of portraying them as a mass of unfortunates, the generalization and loss of uniqueness which was described previously is sidestepped for personal accounts of their displacement stories. Individual refugees are highlighted, with the uniqueness of their community being brought directly to the forefront, whilst still using single cases as a representation of a global issue. The remaining articles often highlight the tragic nature of the issue as well. In these cases, statistics concerning the number of current and predicted refugees, along with homelessness figures - as well as secondhand accounts - are commonly used to portray injustices and tragic fates of life (Rogvall, 2019a; Stiernstedt, 2015).

Within these portrayals lie a sense of responsibility which is often attributed to Sweden. A “double injustice” is a popular angle found within the material when discussing which groups of people are most likely to become climate refugees. “It is those who are the least responsible for climate change, and who have the lowest ability to protect themselves, who are forced to pay the highest price. It is a double injustice.” (Höglund, in Röstlund, 2017). Between the lines, and sometimes spelled out, is a sense of responsibility which connects to Sweden as part of something bigger - either the UN, the EU or the Global North. Falkehed highlights how Africa is only responsible for 4% of the global carbon dioxide emissions yet carries a double burden of climate change and political instability (2019). Both Röstlund and Falkehed speak of the responsibility of those with higher emission rates, alluding to the responsibility Sweden thus has as a part of the Global North. Malteson & Näslund cover the

former Swedish Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven's, promise of solidarity in the UN - saying that we must serve the world to serve our nations (2015). Portraying tragedy to evoke feelings of responsibility and/or guilt is a common tool. As per Alestig, a simple guilt-evoking message is delivered to the citizens of the Global North, saying: the signing of the Paris agreement was a promise to countries like Bangladesh. Therefore, the Global North needs to deliver on that promise (2019).

## 5.2 What assumptions underlie this representation?

This question arises from the analysis presented in the previous section. From there, it is investigated how we can critically view the assumptions drawn from the discourse. According to Bacchi, this question is essential in order to understand what the reader is meant *not* to question, and what 'knowledges' are implied. The answer reveals the conceptual logic which enables the problem representation to be coherent (Bacchi, 2009, 5). Herein lies the explanation for the contradiction between securitization and the good international citizen. Three assumptions have been identified - Sweden as morally righteous, the (Swedish) political impossibilities of the issue, and the danger in uncertainty. Together, these assumptions account for how Sweden can uphold its reputation as a humanitarian role model whilst disengaging from climate refugee-related issues.

### 5.2.1 Sweden - the morally righteous

As described in the introduction, there is an idea of Sweden, both nationally and internationally, as morally righteous (Lawler, 2012), or even as a so-called humanitarian superpower (Simons & Manoilo, 2019). Within this line of discourse lies the answer to how the responsibility to protect climate refugees is manifested. Signs of these ideas are visible in the discourse. For example, Sweden is portrayed as a country that takes responsibility in climate questions nationally, has a high level of climate-related financial aid (per capita) (Röstlund, 2017), participates in negotiations on international climate goals, and is a country with a duty to pass on knowledge in this field (Alestig, 2019).

“Not even Sweden is at this stage in line with the Paris agreement”, Alestig (2021) claims, when covering the plight of climate refugees in Bangladesh, pointing out how Sweden and other countries are failing these low-lying countries by struggling to reach the target of a

global maximum 1.5°C-temperature increase. However, within the critique of Sweden's efforts, there still lies an assumption of Sweden as righteous. "*Not even Sweden*" suggests surprise that Sweden has not been able to reach these goals, but typically would have been at the forefront of the matter.

There is also evidence of pride in Sweden having a generous refugee reception. Schori states that Sweden has delivered human safety over the decades (2017) and Wiman declares that Swedes can be proud that Sweden managed to keep that generosity "until the very last moment" (2020). This idea manifests the logic of the good international citizen. In order to be considered 'good', a state needs to be firmly devoted to human rights and be active in the state of international affairs (Souter, 2016). By displaying Sweden as generous in this international humanitarian issue, its place in the international society is cemented. However, both examples are expressed in a past tense, suggesting it is no longer possible to maintain such generosity. An explanation for this can also be found within GIC and is covered in the following section.

### 5.2.2 Political impossibilities / refoulement of responsibility

The presentation of climate refugees as complex and global throughout the discourse rests on an assumption in two parts. Firstly, Sweden lacks the power to a) handle such a complex and global issue, and b) receive refugees in the same capacity as previously. It is for example explained how the temporary law, which came into force in 2016 because of the increased number of refugees, removed environmental disasters as reason for asylum (Bergh, 2019).

In addition, the media tends to place the responsibility for these causes on either the EU or the UN. Examples of this can be found throughout the discourse. Röstlund's article highlights the complexity of defining the term "climate refugee" as a reason for why they cannot be included in the refugee convention. The author thus urges the UN to implement regulations (2017). Furthermore, Enekvist exemplifies these assumptions when describing how Sweden is bound by the laws of the EU and its participation in international conventions (2020). This ensures that Sweden does not handle asylum seekers in any way which contravenes the norms of international society. Thus, Swedish citizenship of the international society is expressed, and Sweden is depicted as a rule follower and a 'good' citizen. Simultaneously, this line of



reasoning is used to remove responsibility directly from Sweden. An explanation as to why the issue is not currently being dealt with by Swedish authorities. These impossibilities also partly explains why the same can be said of the EU and the UN.

Viewing the UN as the sovereign (Abbondanza, 2021) comes into play when the question of responsibility and feasibility is discussed. Seemingly, this hierarchy of international society is recognized by the discourse. The material shows how Swedish media typically associate climate issues with the EU, and refugee questions with the UN, within the material. The EU's responsibilities in regard to climate refugees typically only revolve around combating climate change itself. The UN, however, becomes responsible for most of the issues surrounding refugees. A lot of the steps towards acknowledging climate refugees and defining the term would require a global consensus, and therefore, the UN needs to be in charge (Enekvist, 2020). The UN also has legitimacy in refugee matters and an established refugee agency (UNHCR), which validates the level of responsibility, a reasoning that can be seen in Bergh (2019). The complexity thus warrants that the issue be handled by the highest power - the sovereign, i.e. the UN.

In summary, the representation of the issue relies on the assumption that it would be politically impossible for Sweden to have an impact. Based on the workings of the international society, Sweden's responsibilities are covered by their membership in the EU and most importantly, the UN. In this way, Sweden upholds the idea of itself as 'good' based on the GIC model.

### 5.2.3 Danger in uncertainty

The final assumption identified in the material is the threat of uncertainty, which becomes the final cornerstone in accounting for the contradiction between Sweden as humanitarian, and Sweden as uninvolved in the plight of climate refugees. It also answers the question of how the responsibility to protect the Swedish public is being manifested by the media.

A large part of the discourse centers around the assumption that there is a future threat of danger to Swedish society surrounding climate refugees. This worry stems from uncertainty. The uncertainty is partly due to the issue being estimated to grow dramatically, and partly due

to its complexity. As shown by the massification, there is an alarmist tone that portrays the possibility of refugees as a threat to the stability of Swedish society. The mass of unfortunates thereby represents a faceless mass who are desperate, and therefore a threat (Sakellari, 2021). The facelessness in massification language translates to uncertainty in other contexts. An example of the alarmist nature which threatens disturbance to European host countries is the following quote:

If Europe thinks that they have problems with migration today... wait 20 years and see what happens when climate change drives people from Africa, particularly the Sahel area. We are not only talking about one or two million, but ten or 20 million. And they are not going to go to South Africa, they will travel across the Mediterranean Sea (Cheney, in Sund, 2017).

The assumption of danger in uncertainty evokes another sense of responsibility. The responsibility to protect Swedish citizens is cemented through this securitization. Meanwhile, the responsibility to protect climate refugees and uphold the norms of the international society is avoided. This is also aided by the connection between uncertainty and complexity. They seem to support each other within the discourse. Here, the complexity adds to the effect of uncertainty as something dangerous. Uncertainty also adds another layer of complexity.

## 5.3 Where are the silences?

This question allows for a more critical discussion to conclude the analysis. To explain this question, Bacchi borrows from Foucault. The limits of the problem representation are questioned, emphasizing how problem representations can constrain the way issues are perceived and thus responded to (Bacchi, 2009, 13). This question therefore aims to cover lost perspectives and possible misrepresentations.

### 5.3.1 Influencing the UN

As has been covered above, the material accounts for a Swedish responsibility which is handed over to the EU or the UN. The complexity of the matter is then used to explain the difficulties these international organizations have with tackling the issue. What is not mentioned, however, is the membership and by extension the influence that Sweden could hypothetically have within the UN. In one part, one could argue that if membership in the UN constitutes citizenship, then influence within the UN would constitute the right to vote. When Sweden is portrayed as ‘good’, it should mean that it has citizenship, and thus some power to influence any decisions. Instead, the UN is depicted as a separate entity from Sweden.

### 5.3.1 Silent Mass of Unfortunates

Within the given material, the tragedy aspect (as covered in 5.1.4) is commonly explored through second-hand accounts. Sources and quotes are typically provided by scientists and organizations affiliated with climate and refugee matters. As mentioned previously, out of the 25 articles analyzed, three articles quoted climate refugees. However, the remaining 22 articles do not mention nor quote any one specific climate refugee. That means that in a span of seven years, only three articles have been published by the four largest newspapers in Sweden featuring the perspectives of climate refugees. The consequences of excluding climate refugees from their own stories connect to the assumptions discussed above, mainly revolving around securitization.

The distance between the actual subjects of the climate refugee issue and the discourse relates to the presentation of the problem from 5.1.3. There, a massification discourse was detected

in the language, resulting in the representation of the issue as a ‘massive future problem’. A consequence of this discourse is the disempowerment of communities as well as their individual uniqueness being reduced, as theorized by Sakellari (2021, 74). Similarly, writing about people without using them as firsthand sources can result in the loss of individual uniqueness and disempowerment. Also prevalent in the discourse is the uneven power dynamic between the countries most responsible for climate change (the Global North) and those most affected by it (the Global South). This power dynamic is the cause of the guilt and sense of responsibility discussed in 5.1.4. The alienating results of massification and exclusion is likely not favorable to that power dynamic either.

Tying into the “something other” assumption (5.2.3), the silence of climate refugees in Swedish media amplifies the securitization of the issue. Covering a humanitarian crisis as something tragic and the people experiencing them as victims does not necessarily equal a security threat. However, when excluding the perspectives of those affected, “the threat of difference”, as explained by Johnson (2011), increases. It is important to add that the common use of scientists and ‘experts’ as sources may be a result of them being more accessible to a Swedish journalist, also being able to provide new perspectives and well-researched knowledge or statistics. Even so, these perspectives cannot replace those of the affected parties nor counter the erasure of marginalized groups.

## 5.4 Further discussion

Currently, there are no or few (depending on the definition) climate refugees in Sweden. Due to this, the topic is not heavily discussed in the migration debate and thus, the choice of material is limited. As stated in the introduction, it is easy to imagine the issue as a dystopian future problem, though it is in fact a current and developing problem. This idea is mirrored in 5.1.3, where the alarmist fashion of the massification discourse depicts a threat in the future. The future aspect permeates the discourse and allows for the responsibility to be handed over to the UN. As there are supposedly no climate refugees currently in Europe or the Global South, action is not on the agenda, but rather planning and legal definitions. Furthermore, the suggestion that there are no climate refugees in the Global South is certainly debatable. This thesis has chosen to use climate refugee as an all-encompassing term. However, when

looking at other classifications such as climate displaced persons, there is an argument to be made for the issue to already exist in the Global South.

The material has also shown a variation in the amount of articles written about climate refugees over the selected time period (January 1, 2015-January 1, 2022). The most frequent year was 2019, with nine out of the 25 articles (36%) included published that year. (2015: three articles, 2016: zero, 2017: four, 2018: five, 2020: two and 2021: two). The selection of time period was motivated by the so-called ‘refugee wave’ of 2015. Nevertheless, it appears that this event did not have much effect on the discourse, as 2015 had three articles and the following year 2016 had the least with zero. While the selection of the time frame considered attitudes towards refugees in general, this result is noticeable. It is plausible that the debate was instead focused on another ‘type’ of refugee, and therefore climate refugees were not heavily debated. In this case, there are grounds for stating that the Swedish media not only depicts climate refugees as something other than human, but also as something other than refugees. Seeing as the complexity of the definition and the issue itself is strongly present in the discourse, this finding would be in congruence with that line of discourse.

Both the massification discourse and the use of resource scarcity reveal the same securitization uses as found in media from other countries in previous research. It may, however, be more inconspicuous. Whilst the same mechanisms are at play as those found in the UK, the tone is not as strong. The purpose of this thesis is not to compare the two contexts, yet it is of note that when referring to securitization, the findings in the material are more unclear than the examples provided by the framework. The strength of the expressions used is slightly weaker, with the connections between refugees and disturbance not as outspoken. Sakellari provided examples where media had openly connected climate refugees with a greater threat of terrorism and immigration (2021, 68). The Swedish media perpetuates the idea of Sweden as a great humanitarian power and even if securitization is at play, the position as a good international citizen could be threatened were it too obvious.

## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to examine if securitization and the GIC discourses have impacted the ideas of responsibility to protect Swedish citizens and climate refugees, and if it has turned the two ideas into competing objectives. In order to pursue this aim, two research questions were posed, namely: *How is the Swedish media portraying climate refugees?* and *How is the Swedish state's responsibility to protect the Swedish public and climate refugees manifested in the media?* The process of answering was executed by using Bacchi's WPR method, which has been applied to 25 articles of four major Swedish newspapers with mentions of climate refugees, published between January 1, 2015, and January 1, 2022. Using WPR, the problematizations have been analyzed using a theoretical framework based on securitization and the good international citizen.

In conclusion, the issue of climate refugees has been found to be portrayed in a manner which constructs the refugees as security threats and hands over responsibility to the UN (and in some capacity the EU). It does this whilst maintaining the idea of Sweden as a good international citizen. Through this process, the responsibility to protect the Swedish public is manifested through the securitization of refugees. Meanwhile, the responsibility to protect climate refugees is manifested by highlighting the tragic fates of climate refugees. Swedish responsibility is regarded as being connected due to being part of the Global North and thus being instrumental in contributing to climate change. The discourse then indicates that the UN, or the international society in the broader sense, is to take charge of this responsibility.

More specifically, securitization portrays refugees as both threats and victims, as expected by researchers. Chouliariki & Stolic state that these portrayals are interchangeable, as they both present refugees as something other than human (2017). The analysis has shown that both victim and threat portrayals result in this effect. By connecting disturbances in host countries to refugee flows, violent conflicts, population movements and climate-based resource scarcity, climate refugees are shown as threats. The instrument which more clearly illustrates how they are viewed as something other than human is to be found in massification. Here, the climate refugees become faceless as part of an overwhelmingly large threat. This facelessness is also seen in the lack of firsthand accounts. As mentioned previously, there are three exceptions that counteract some of that exclusion. However, the discourse generally avoids using the perspectives of climate refugees. Climate refugees are also continuously portrayed

as victims through accounts of tragedy, which connects to the sense of responsibility expressed to protect them. Nonetheless, victimization also works as a distancing tool. This misrepresentation causes loss of individual uniqueness and disempowerment and thus contributes to the portrayal as something ‘other’.

Consequently, the good international citizen comes to play as a complement to the sense of responsibility brought forth by the victimization of climate refugees. It offers a path to direct that responsibility directly to the ‘sovereign’ i.e. the UN. The discourse uses an existing hierarchy of international society to direct responsibility away from being a direct concern of Sweden. In doing so, the issue of climate refugees is contextualized as global and unifying. The issue therefore also manifests the world view of the GIC, where the international society and its collective institutions and norms dictate these types of issues. The complexity of the issue can be said to facilitate both securitization and GIC in their explanations. Certainly, it is included in a reasoning that reinforces the international society’s view. Sweden is also excused from directly working on this issue by accounting for the complexity of the matter and Sweden’s relatively small power. However, this portrayal eludes the perspective of influence as a member state.

In summary, the Swedish media portrays climate refugees through a discourse which can be considered contradictory. The responsibility to protect Swedish citizens is evoked by alluding to the danger of climate refugees. Therefore, the idea of a Swedish responsibility to protect climate refugees would be expected to contradict that danger. Yet, responsibilities to both groups are present in the material. These ideas are upheld simultaneously by reducing the idea of Sweden as humanitarian to equal citizenship of the international society. The Swedish media shows the vagueness of the GIC, namely how strongly committed to humanitarian objectives and international affairs an international citizen must be to be considered ‘good’ nor how consistently it needs to be applied. It can therefore be concluded that the idea of a state being ‘good’ within the international society can be loosely applied and spread in the name of acting responsibly. The theories applied can be said to support the problematization containing both responsibilities to protect rather than work against each other.

## 6.1 Further research

Seeing as the discourse seeks to present this issue as complex, further research could examine the role of this ‘complexification’ in connection to the framing of climate change matters.

In light of the current war in Ukraine and the following debate concerning attitudes towards European versus non-European refugees, it could be interesting to compare this research with the current situation in Europe regarding Ukrainian refugees. There is an ongoing debate about the Global North’s reaction to this humanitarian crisis and whether sympathies are stronger due to a geographical or perceived cultural proximity. Since climate refugees typically are further from these categories than Ukrainians, this thesis could contribute as part of a foundation on research mapping attitudes or general discourse on different “types” of refugees.



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