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Department of Political Science

Tutor: Daniel Møller Ølgård

The Visual Depiction of Ukrainian Refugees

An empirical study of the depiction of Ukrainian refugees in Swedish national media



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Sandra Wennerström

Abstract

With a focus on Swedish national newspapers, the purpose of this thesis is to research and analyse the depiction of Ukrainian refugees. The reason behind the study is the hypothesis that Ukrainian refugees have been depicted in the media in a more positive light compared to other refugees from previous refugee crises. With the use of visual content analysis, front-page images from the newspapers *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* have been coded for the amount of people, visible facial features, facial expressions, age group, and gender of the adults in the images. The theoretical framework consists of studies from different research fields that all confirm how different aspects of images can affect the emotional responses of the ones who view the images. The results point towards that Ukrainian refugees are depicted in a positive and humanising way but it was not as clear and apparent as was first expected. Men and neutral facial expressions were more frequent in the images than anticipated. Other than that, results that were more expected were that a lot of the so-called ideal victims were depicted and that usually, the images picture smaller groups which are connected to giving higher emotional responses in the audience.

Keywords: Refugees, content analysis, visuality, visual methodology, media, emotional response.

Words: 9 567

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1. Introduction and background

In 2013, the current president of Ukraine, President Yanukovich, decided to dismiss an agreement with the European Union (EU) which would have meant a closer economic relationship between the union and the country. The decision sparked protests in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, and when the state's armed forces struck down hard on the protesters, the protests only escalated and grew bigger, resulting in Yanukovich fleeing the country in February 2014. One month later, Russian military forces took control of the Ukrainian peninsula Crimea and formally annexed the region after a dubious local referendum was held where the inhabitants voted to join the Russian Federation. In June 2014, pro-Russian separatists held referendums of independence in two regions in Eastern Ukraine leading to armed conflict between the separatists supported by Russia and the state military. Since then, the dispute has been ongoing in Eastern Ukraine and in late 2021, it was obvious to the Western powers that a large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia was most likely on the horizon. And the intelligence was right, on the 24th of February 2022, Russia invaded the country through what they called a "special military operation" (Global Conflict Tracker 2022). Since the armed conflict in Ukraine began, important infrastructure has been destroyed and civilian casualties have caused 4,7 million people to flee the country to seek safety elsewhere. Most refugees have fled to Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic (OECD 2022) and almost 50 000 refugees have sought shelter in Sweden since January 2022 (Migrationsverket 2022). Throughout the rest of the thesis, the conflict in Ukraine will be labelled as a war. This is a term that especially the Russian side has tried to avoid using but from how the conflict is described by most other sources that term was decided to be used, see for example United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (2022).

In the contemporary world, visuality is what in many ways characterises politics and surrounds us all of the time, on TV, in newspapers, and online. Because of how widespread visuality is today it has the power to influence people's comprehension of all sorts of events, especially political ones, and agendas can be furthered, with or without the intention of doing that (Bleiker 2018, 1). The assumption this thesis rests upon is that the way political events and crises are represented visually matters for how they are seen and understood in political debate and what decisions are made regarding them (Hansen 2021, 368). Images work indirectly and it cannot be claimed that they directly are the source of a particular political

policy or belief. What images do create are the parameters for what is appropriate to discuss and what is not which then can affect the political sphere. Behind images, there are also norms that decide what subjects are in some ways recognisable and which subjects are not. This can then influence what subjects are possible to be seen as worthy of compassion and sympathy (Bleiker et al 2013, 399-400). This thesis acknowledges that images are not the only aspects that have an important role to play when it comes to the depiction and portrayal of refugees but that their indirect power is still vital to be studied.

The structure of the thesis is the following; the introduction will be continued with a presentation of the purpose, research question and the hypothesis behind the thesis. Previous research, the theoretical framework, and the method and material will then be described. The results of the study will be disclosed together with the analysis. Lastly, a discussion will be held and a conclusion will shortly present the results of the study and what future research could focus on.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to research the depiction of refugees from Ukraine in Sweden with a focus on the media's depiction. Is the case of Ukrainian refugees linked to humanisation rather than dehumanisation as a result of the depiction heightening empathy and compassion in the audience? Was there a positive reaction and viewpoint to the refugees?

Studies have been done on the portrayal and depiction of refugees and will be introduced in further detail in Previous research. Generally, the results of those studies have demonstrated that refugees are often depicted in a negative and dehumanising light as well as being portrayed as a threat to the receiving country. Have Ukrainian refugees been depicted the same? The hypothesis (see 1.1.1) the thesis is built upon is that they have not been shown in the same manner as other refugee groups. Therefore, the hypothesis needs to be tried in empirical material to see if it could have any truth to it. This is also the gap within academia the thesis fills and will be an expansion on the understanding of the depiction of refugees. Additionally, looking from a Swedish point of view could strengthen and consolidate the subject even more. Worth mentioning, the results will not include or come to any conclusions regarding the causal effect between the Ukrainian refugee situation and Swedish

policy-making. If there are sure signs of the hypothesis resembling the reality or the opposite, reasons for why will solely be discussed and be analysed as potential reasons from what could be read from the data.

Research question: “How are Ukrainian refugees depicted in Swedish national newspapers' front pages and how could it affect the audiences' response to Ukrainian refugees?”

1.1.1 Hypothesis

The bottom line of the thesis is the preconception that refugees are framed differently and this hypothesis is the reason for researching this topic, to find out if there could be some truth to the idea. A direct focus on comparing the depiction of different refugees will not be done, although it will be discussed in the discussion part of the thesis and brought up at times in the analysis. The personal basis behind the hypothesis is the reading of newspapers every day for many years, including the times when Europe and Sweden had been through large refugee crises, for example, the one occurring in 2015. It gave a certain impression of how refugees are depicted and in some ways therefore how they are perceived, they are definitely victims but at the same time, they are too many and can be a threat towards a country. Some countries accepted a lot of refugees while others worked very hard to lessen the immigration of refugees in their countries. In Sweden, a far-right party grew in popularity at least partly as a reaction to the high amount of people immigrating. Questions about integrating refugees and asylum seekers are still debated. Remembering the depiction in news media, some images awoke sympathy and compassion while a lot showed the chaos the refugees allegedly brought with them. For example, you can often read articles and see pictures of African refugees trying to get through Turkey to Europe and camps full of refugees in countries around the Mediterranean. With the war in Ukraine in 2022 and the people fleeing, the expectation was at first that the depiction in the media would look the same as it did in 2015. The Ukrainian refugee situation has not yet become as large as the one in 2015 is worth noting, but still, there seemed to be a noticeable difference between the depictions. Is it because Ukrainians are Europeans? Because of their ethnic background? These sorts of thoughts grew, and the need to properly research how they were depicted also grew. There has been earlier work done on how refugees are visually portrayed in the media (Bleiker et al 2013; Hansen 2021),

which will be discussed more in-depth in *Previous research*. Shortly put, they discuss how the framing of refugees can be connected to dehumanisation and threatening perceptions.

2. Previous research

In “The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees” by Bleiker et al. (2013, 298-399), the authors used content analysis on front page images of two Australian newspapers. They highlight how the issue of refugees is one of the most contested issues politically in Australia but that not a lot of effort is put into analysing how media images can shape perceptions of refugees and how that also can affect the responsibilities towards them. They studied the emotional nature of refugees and how they outline political discussions on the subject, focusing on two time periods where the refugee issue was both important and controversial and leading up to an Australian election which made the issue at hand gain a lot of press coverage. The results of their study were that refugees were mostly represented in larger-sized groups and that they could often be shown on boats from a distance. They also analysed how many of the images the viewer could deduce recognisable facial features and could reach the conclusion that the percentage was extremely low, only in two per cent of the images was it possible. This is politically significant because studies in social psychology have shown that images of large non-identifiable groups can create an emotional distance between the subject and the viewer. What they could conclude is that the Australian refugee situation is seen more as a threat than something that should generate a compassionate response from the public. Additionally, the dehumanising effects of the patterns found in the images are problematic because they increase the politics of fear when it comes to Australia’s approach to refugees (Bleiker et al. 2013, 399). The authors assert that the dehumanising patterns in the visual materials are what the political discussion on the subject will build upon. The images are what decide what is seen and not seen and can therefore determine what is discussed and what is not (Bleiker et al. 2013, 413). This partly inspired what the study would include and be coded for in the case of Ukrainian refugees, could these dehumanising patterns be found in the images depicting them? I have transparently presented this thesis’ hypothesis earlier and if some of the patterns Bleiker et al. found in their case can not be established in my own analysis then my preconception’s accuracy is reinforced, while if they do exist, then the preconception will lose face.

Hansen, Adler-Nissen, and Andersen (2021, 367,385) have done a study on the European refugee crisis in 2015 and effectively show how images can change and influence policy responses. They also showed that the same sorts of images can go through changing meanings. For example, in Germany, images of boats overfilled with refugees were first a symbol of people needing to be rescued which then became a symbol for stopping the migration. Lawlor and Towler (2017, 967) did a study on the framing of immigrants and refugees in Canada using content analysis over a time period of ten years where the conclusion could show that immigrants are usually depicted as a threat and that refugees often are framed negatively connected to their national origins.

The studies introduced above all show the importance of studying refugees, especially how they are depicted visually and even more, refugees will most likely play a big part in the future making it an increasingly important subject to study. People have to flee for several different reasons, in some cases, people's own governments are the reason, other times, like in the case of Ukraine, there is another country's government that is the cause. In the future, it might often be the consequences of climate change that forces people to flee. No matter the cause it is important to research and fill the gaps concerning refugees. There are a lot of aspects to study but one of the most important ones and something you have to make clear is how they are depicted. Establishing this can enable researchers to come to conclusions about other matters regarding refugees in future work.

3. Theoretical framework

The chosen method will be explained in a later part of the thesis but one aspect must be made clear, and that is that the method is highly reliant on theorised connections through the so-called codes. The "codes" that the research is based on are chosen by the researcher but they have to have a stronger claim than only the researcher believing they are relevant. The claim for why the codes should be used in coding the material is that they should be connected to theory (Rose 2016, 92)). The codes that the images have been coded for are the amount of people, visible facial features, facial expressions, age group, and gender of the adults. Amount of people and visible facial features are inspired by and partly used as Bleiker

et al. did in *The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees* (2013). The power of the people in an image being visible is much more influential on the audience than if the people are unrecognisable. Small and Loewenstein (2003, 5-7) wrote about the “identifiable victim effect” and that victims that are identifiable create a much stronger emotional response than statistical victims. Identifiable victims are determined, and their identities are perceived as something, which means that they could bring forth from an audience a sense of realness. Moeller (1996, 36) highlights how an individual’s suffering will more easily appeal to the viewers’ sympathy. The identifiable victim effect looks to be engaging with the empathetic side of people and it creates a larger chance of people making personal sacrifices when aiding. Especially in the media, victims are often identifiable and this can cause a feeling of familiarity with the audience. There is also no historical aspect that creates a distance between the victim in the image and the beholder; the events are happening in the now, and these are victims the audience understands urgently need help. The image depicts a scene which is not taking place in the past but in the present (Jenni and Loewenstein 1997, 236-237, 240). These different aspects of being able to identify victims in an image are why this thesis coded the images for identifiable facial features. Refugees are victims of war and disasters, leaving their family, friends, and life as they have known to seek safety elsewhere. Bleiker et al. (2013, 399) only found recognisable facial features in two per cent of the images they coded of refugees migrating to Australia, connecting this to the dehumanisation of the refugees and it was being mirrored in the political debate. The code “amount of people” is also an aspect that Bleiker et al. (2013, 404) searched for. The more people there are in an image the less of a compassionate response is invoked in the audience. Most influential is the image of a single victim. The code “age group” looks at the amount of children, adults, and elderly in the images. All of these types can be seen as the “ideal victim” in the way they can evoke emotions in the beholder (Bleiker et al. 2013, 406; Moeller 1996, 36). The code “Gender of the adult” is for comparing the amount of women and men in the images. Worth mentioning is that in the case of Ukrainian refugees, it is more plausible that women are in the images than men because most men between the ages of 18 and 60 were not allowed to leave the country under martial law because of the possibility of being called in to serve in the military (Harlan 2022). Facial expressions in images also have a role to play when it comes to the emotional effect evoked in the viewer. Bleiker et al (2013, 406) bring up a study by Small and Verrochi (2009, 778) where they could show that sadness expressed by a victim in an image, the viewer feels that sadness, but that those effects decrease with an increasing

amount of people in images. A big group, where the facial expressions are hard to make out, can have a numbing effect on the audience. Having an individual victim in an image can have a humanising effect on the political climate when it comes to conflict or event the image is depicting (Bleiker et al. 2013, 408). Some studies have been done concerning neutral facial expressions. Hareli, Shomrat, and Hess (2019) linked neutral expressions on men to them being perceived as more dominant. This also held true with angry expressions on men. Anger and happiness in women were perceived as more dominant while neutral expressions did not evoke the same response in the viewers. They also saw that expressions of sadness in both genders clearly decreased the perception of being dominant. In Christopher Collins' feature "Are Neutral Faces Really Neutral?" (2016), he discusses that some studies have shown that in neutral expressions, viewers still find meaning and expression in what should be expressionless faces. One experiment showed that someone with a neutral expression elicited more credibility regarding their statements from a viewer's perspective than with other expressions such as anger. Furthermore, even facial structure can affect how others view the person's neutral face and expressions that come before or after a neutral expression affect how a person perceives the neutral one. Septianto and Paramita (2021, 91) researched how images, mainly focusing on charity images, which contain a sad message but a happy victim can encourage prosocial behaviours, e.i. behaviours meant for helping someone else, within the viewer. The reason why they could pinpoint this was that it makes it easier for the viewer to realise that with their help they could change the victim's situation for the better.

3.1 Definitions and concepts

3.1.1 Refugees

"Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country." (UNHCR)

The images in the sample used in this thesis have been coded for refugees which means that images consisting of only politicians or soldiers have not been considered. A harder line to draw was how images of civilians affected by the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees should be considered. The definition above defines refugees as having crossed the border of the country they are fleeing from but I have included images in the sample of people on the

border of Ukraine or on the way to leaving the country. In this thesis, images of people who have fled from their homes in Ukraine and left for another part of the country were also included, mainly because that is what a lot of people from eastern Ukraine went about when the war first broke out. Without making this decision the amount of images would be a lot less. Images of people that are very soon fleeing the country have also been included, the fact the people depicted are about to flee has to be clearly stated in the text accompanied by the front page image. Images of people who have fled their homes in Ukraine, either to another country or another part of Ukraine, by evacuation, have also been coded. SvD has two front pages, one for the online paper and one for the printed one and if both depicted Ukrainian refugees I used both. The images on the versions were always different but usually depicted the same theme.

3.1.2 Depiction

Depiction is “a representation in words or images of someone or something” (Merriam-Webster). There are a lot of words one could use to describe how images are built up and depiction is the word that has been chosen in this thesis. At times, some synonyms are used, for example, portrayed, but these should be seen as the same as depiction.

4. Method and material

The chosen methodology for this thesis is visual content analysis as described in *Visual Methodologies* by Gillian Rose (2016). The method requires the analysis to follow distinct rules and proceedings for it to be recognized as being reliable. Content analysis has since it was first developed in the interwar period been closely tied to mass media, mostly because it could be applied on its ever-growing scale (Rose 2016, 85-86). The fact that this method is quantitative and was developed with the intention of being used in mass media was among the first aspects that made it suitable for this thesis. The approach in content analysis is that the researcher measures the frequency of established visual elements (codes) in images of a defined population and then analyses the measured frequencies. There are four steps in this process, the first is identifying the images that are relevant to the research question. The images need to be connected to the research question and the method must attend to all the

images (Rose 2016, 88-92). Of course, in most cases, analysing every image of something in today's world would be next to impossible. Because of the number of images that exist one needs to use sampling. As with every quantitative method, the use of sampling is not without its difficulties. The images that are a part of the sample need to be representative of the whole population and carry significance. One also needs to remember that the size of the sample is important, it has to be large enough to encompass the extreme variations of the chosen material but not so large that it overwhelms the analysing resources. After selecting a sample, it is time to choose categories for coding. Rose (2016, 92) describes how different researchers have interpreted the way the categories should be different. Some say that they should be objective in a clear way, others, often more contemporary researchers, mean that they should rather be connected to their theoretical relevance and therefore be more interpretive. If the categories are more interpretive they contend that content analysis can have more of a qualitative spirit. Rose (2016, 92) continues that the categories, or codes, need to be exhaustive, exclusive, and enlightening, which can be very difficult to reach. Extremely important is that the codes must have a connection to theories, as was described in the theoretical framework, that link the images to their cultural context. The validity of the codes depends on the connection between the image, context, and code.

The approach that has been taken concerning the coding of the images is deductive coding, as the way Rose (2016, 88-92) explained with other words. Deductive coding means working with a predetermined set of codes based on theory and then they are established in the data (Delve). The codes are explained more in-depth in the coding frame below. Since the codes are predetermined, other aspects that might turn out to be important to study might be missed. At the same time, using predetermined codes makes it much easier to analyse a higher quantity of images and have the analysing procedure be the same for every image.

Lastly, why was content analysis chosen rather than another methodology? The other option that was considered was discourse analysis and it would most likely have worked well in many ways. However, the aim of this thesis was the possibility to look at more images than discourse analysis would have allowed being properly done within the available time frame and with this aim in mind, content analysis would work in a superior way. Discourse analysis might have contributed to a deeper understanding but with the research question in mind, content analysis does work well for the thesis.

4.1 Coding frame and operationalisation

Code:	Value:	Description:
Amount of people (as in Bleiker et al 2013)	Individual	1 individual in the image.
	Small group	2-3 people in the image.
	Medium group	4-15 people in the image.
	Large group	15+ people in the image.
Visible facial features (similar as in Bleiker et al 2013, the difference is the fourth value)	None	None of the people in the image had visible facial features. E.g. they were covered, blurry, or turned away.
	Group: Visible facial features	The image depicted a group and the majority of people had visible facial features.
	Group: Mixed visibility	The image depicted a group and the visible facial features were possible to code for around half of the people in the image.
	Group: Almost no visibility	The image depicted a group and there was a small minority that had visible facial features, e.g. one or two people in a group of eight.
	Individual: Visible features	The image depicted an individual and the facial features were visible.
Facial expressions	Happy	Concerning people with visible facial features, happy facial expressions such as

		smiling, laughing etc.
	Sad	Concerning people with visible facial features, cl
	Neutral	Concerning people with visible facial features, neutral is when a facial expression does not show emotions, happiness, sadness, or others, such as anger. Could in some cases perhaps be tied to boredom, see discussion.
Age group	Adults	The people in the image appeared to be over 18 years of age.
	Elderly	The people in the image appeared to be over 65 years of age.
	Children	The people in the image appeared to be 0-17 years of age.
	Unclear	Everyone in the image was analysed and one or several could not be defined in the descriptions above, e.g they were hidden, covered, blurry, or too far away.
Gender of the adults	Women	People in the image objectively appeared to be women.
	Men	People in the image objectively appeared to be men.

4.2 Material

The material used is two national newspapers, *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) and *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), giving the thesis a focus on the Swedish perspective. The chosen newspapers are two of the most subscribed morning newspapers nationally and therefore have some of the largest reach (Ocast). It also means that a lot of people get their information and understanding of events from these newspapers. There are a lot of platforms where images of the war in Ukraine circulate such as social media, blogs, and digital articles and could therefore also be platforms well fit for the research this thesis aims at exploring. However, newspapers are still today a relevant place where a lot of people receive their understanding and views of all sorts of events, especially political ones, and especially the two chosen newspapers are commonly known in Sweden as legitimate and qualified sources of information.

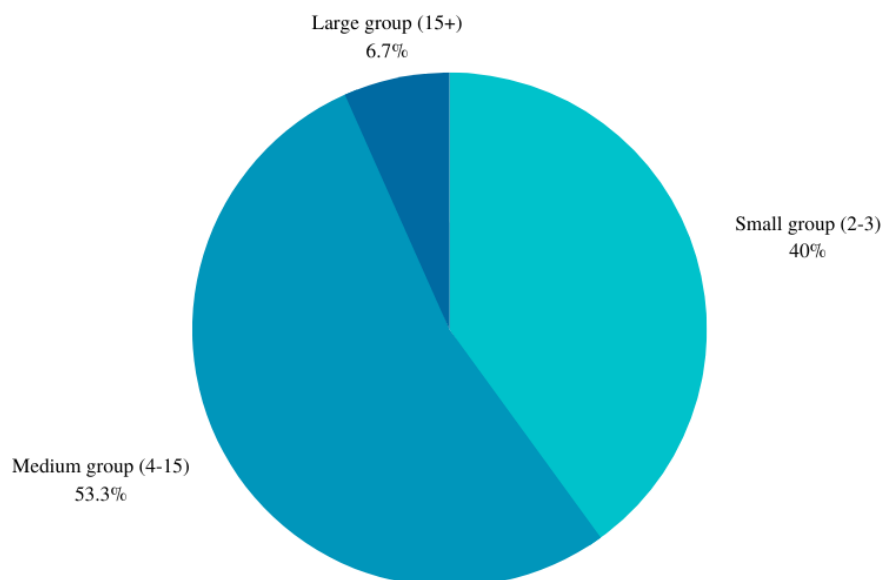
4.2.1 Delimitation

In many ways, this thesis has been limited. The usage of Swedish newspapers creates a focus on the Swedish perspective solely, while studying a broader European perspective could have added another dimension of understanding to the depiction of Ukrainian refugees. Only coding the front pages of two national newspapers might not show the whole depiction of the Ukrainian refugees because images from articles later in the newspapers, other newspapers, online articles, and news broadcasts on television are not considered. This does not mean that the selection that was made is unable to show a good representation of what the depiction looked like. Front pages of newspapers in general have an ambition of capturing readers' interests and showing what is happening just as much as the headlines that come with the image and the newspaper (BBC). It is also most likely essential for the newspaper to have a front-page image that they are the only ones using and so the image will most likely be chosen with more care than the images used in articles, concerning both printed and digital articles. The choice to use two newspapers and not more or analyse other images of Ukrainian refugees is also because of resources and time that was available. All the coding had to be done manually and over a quite short period of time and as the sole author and researcher of this thesis, the choice of how much to analyse and code was what fit best with the circumstances at hand, while still having enough images to be able to draw certain conclusions and comparisons. Regarding the time limit of the images in the newspaper, in essence, every front page that depicted Ukrainian refugees in some manner was analysed and coded. Every front page of the newspaper SvD from the 22 of February to the second of

December 2022 was examined for their relevance. After August there were not any front-page images depicting Ukrainian refugees so the last image that was coded was from August 2022 but the rest of the images to December were checked for their relevance. Concerning DN, images from the time period 22 of December to the fourth of August were checked and coded if relevant. After the fourth of August, DN was not available anymore and therefore the rest of the year's front-page images could not be analysed for their applicability to the study. This was not completely optimal but since the frequency of the relevant images was decreasing steadily after April in both of the newspapers the sample still reflects well enough the depiction. Images from early December to the 22 of February were also inspected since it could be that some people from Ukraine fled before the war broke out but no applicable images were found in either SvD or DN. The amount of images that were coded, combined from the two newspapers, was 34, four more in DN than in SvD.

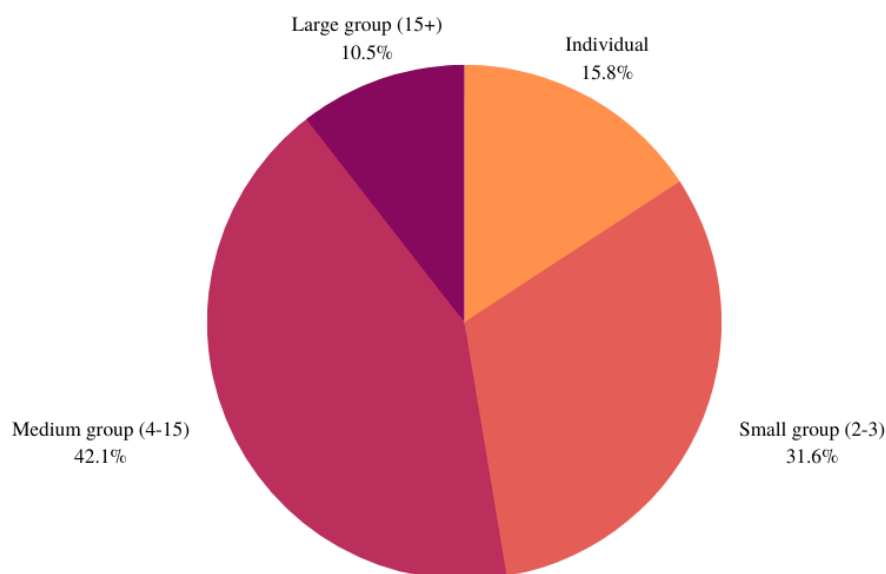
5. Result and analysis

Figure 1: SvD - Amount of people



In Figure 1, the amount of people in images depicting refugees was counted in the newspaper SvD. The chart shows quite clearly that the large majority of the front-page images contained few people. To be categorised as a medium group there needed to be at least four people in the image and no more than 15 people. Rarely did the images categorised as a medium group consist of more than around six people. If there were more than six or the image was categorised as a large group the image usually had a focus on one or a few people. There was not a single front-page image that depicted an individual in SvD but images of two to three people were more occurring. Even though a few of the images, 6,7 %, were of large groups, the maximum number of people was never over 15 to 18 people and therefore the images never seemed overwhelming with people.

Figure 2: DN - Amount of people



Concerning Figure 2 and the amount of people DN had on their front-page images, the fact that 15 per cent of the images only consisted of an individual is the most notable difference compared to SvD. Large groups were still in the minority of images and medium groups had

the highest percentage. Much of the same themes could be found in DN as in SvD concerning this code. Medium groups in DN were also around six people and if there were more people almost always there was a focus on a few people rather than on the whole group. The expectation was that more images would contain only an individual for it would have the most emotional and compassionate response from the viewer according to the theory. In reality, this was not the case. Why that was the case is harder to figure out and can not be solved only with the numbers in figure 1 and 2. Perhaps it is believed that images of individuals are not as suited for front-page images compared to images with only a few people or pictures of families were considered more fitting. What can be understood on the other hand from the first two figures is that images with an overwhelming amount of people were non-existent. As mentioned earlier, images were coded as being composed of large groups but the images were never perceived as being over-crowded.

Figure 3: SvD - Visible facial features

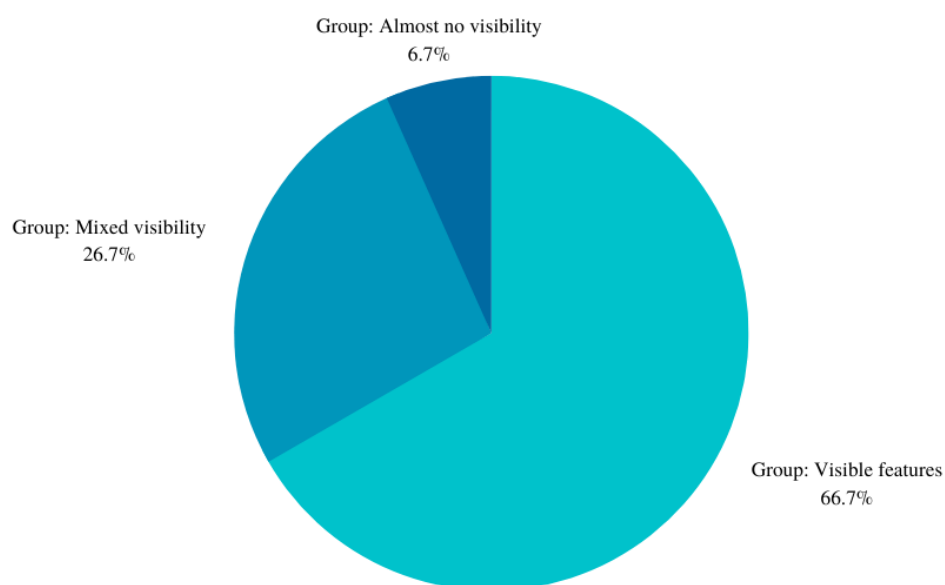


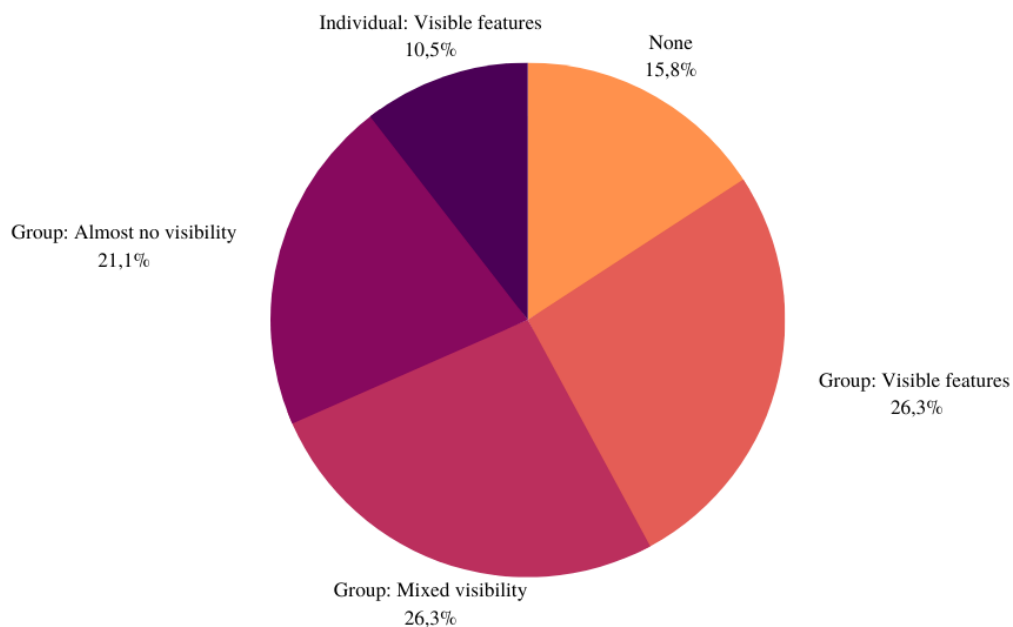
Figure 3 demonstrates a very high percentage of visible features in SvD and that all of the images had some grade of visibility in them. The value “Group: Almost No visibility” had quite a low frequency and in some ways, it could show how few times Ukrainian refugees were depicted in a way where you could not see their faces and recognize their features in a

way the value “None” also did. In some images though, the value “Group: Almost No visibility” did not function in this way and rather mirrored images that pictured a larger sized group but where one individual or a few people were still in the camera's focus and created in some ways an emotional and humanising effect with the audience. Figure 4 demonstrates to some extent, different results with DN compared to SvD, mainly regarding that 15,8 per cent of the images contained no facial visibility. Still, visibility occurred in most of the images to some degree and as it was with SvD, even if there was a majority of people whose facial visibility was nonexistent, the image itself still had in almost all cases focus on someone's visibility and their situation as a refugee. One example of this was a family moving towards a train with a small child, carried in the mother's arms, looking into the camera over the parent's shoulder at the camera while the rest of the family was turned away and moving (see image 4 on page 26). Even though there was only one person whose facial visibility was visible, the image does not speak for dehumanisation in the way that Bleiker et al (2013, 405) found in the images coded and analysed in the Australian case. This holds for almost every image in both SvD and DN. As social psychology states, facial visibility is important for the audience to have an emotional response in relation to an image. But even if an image has no facial visibility, the lack of it can in some instances also create an emotional response. On the seventh of March (see image 1), DN chose a front-page image that was unlike any other both SvD and DN had used before or after. It depicts two Ukrainian refugees who had been trying to flee but had been killed by Russian troops. This image perhaps has more to tell about the war in Ukraine and its brutality rather than Ukrainian refugees per se. Nonetheless, in many ways it is all tied together, to feel for someone else and their situation can perhaps be even stronger when it is put together with background information and visual representation of what the refugees are actually fleeing from. It also shows well how no facial visibility is not the only factor for evoking emotions. This image is also a good example of when the line between refugees and civilians was not crystal clear and harder to draw. As was stated in subheading 3.1.1, this thesis uses a wider definition of refugees and because the immediate text underneath the image states that the civilians were fleeing it was decided that the image fit with the dataset and could be included.

Image 1: (Dagens Nyheter 2022)

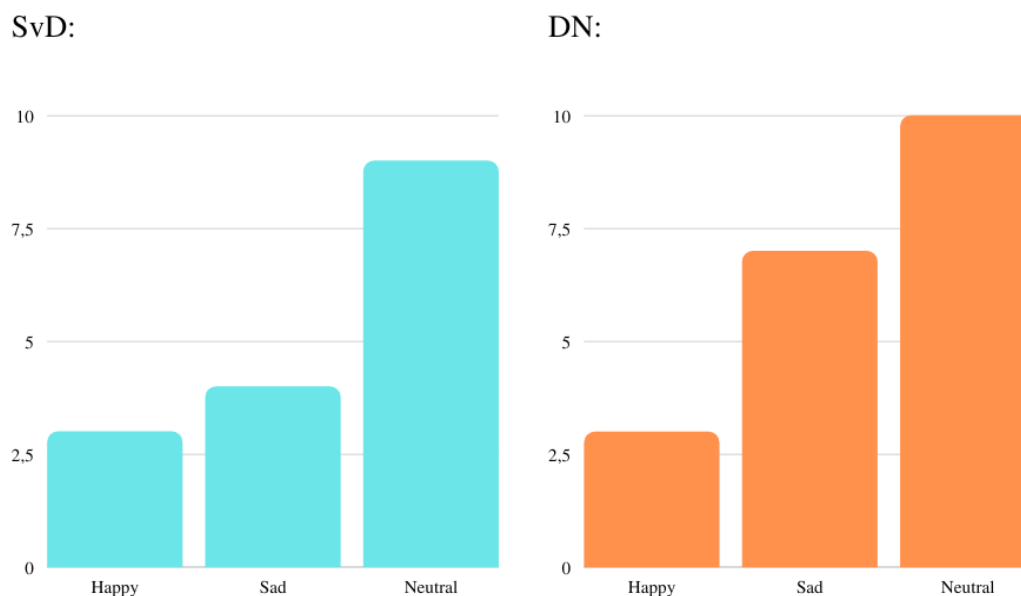


Figure 4: DN - Visible facial features



Rather quickly during the process of coding facial expressions, it became quite obvious that analysing and interpreting facial expressions is easier said than done. Of all the codes, facial expressions were the one that was experienced as being the least objective, often considerably

hard to decipher, and might not be thought of as the same expression as someone else would code it. As figure 5 shows, the focus was put on sad, happy, and neutral expressions. There was not a greater need for a wider range of emotions and the three chosen ones fit into all the images with visibility to some extent. Additionally, happy and sad do not always look the same and can have different variations, which made it, on the one hand, that a lot of expressions could fall under the two distinctions but which also meant that one might, on the other hand, miss out variations in the statistics that could have been interesting to study. The results we do have, however, can still tell us a lot about the visual representation connected to facial expressions. The third value, neutral, has both in SvD and DN the highest value of the three. It is an interesting aspect, one that was not expected to be as prominent as it was before the coding. In a lot of the images in both newspapers, the facial expression “neutral” could be tied to a lack of expression and even to boredom. A lot of the images where the value was coded as neutral, the images depicted refugees waiting in queues or outside immigration buildings. The pictures were not dramatic and striking, there was no extreme sadness or happiness. If anything, the neutral images often seemed to show the normalcy of the refugees’ situation. While they might have been through the events that would create the emotional expressions expected to be seen in the images, instead, the chosen front-page images did not seem to most times have the intention of showing a certain expression whether that be sad or happy.

Figure 5: Facial expressions

An example of when the line between sad and neutral was hard to draw and a good example of when the value is more dependent on the researcher and is not completely unbiased is the front page image from the 23 of March in SvD (inserted as image 2). The picture depicts a family of three with their seventeen-year-old daughter looking straight into the camera. The family scarcely made it past the Russian troops while fleeing and had to pretend to be Russian themselves when stopped. At the moment the image was taken, they were safe but still prepared to flee even further away if necessary. The image was classified as sad but it was not a completely indisputable choice to make. The man in the image wears a small smile, an expression that usually would be classified as a happy expression, and so has the woman, but with the way they are looking at each other and how the daughter wears a sorrowful expression, looking into the camera, the emotion evoked was an understanding of what they had been through and the sadness that entails. The image was categorised as sad because the expressions of the people in the image created sadness in the viewer, the fact that it also was a small group of people that constructed the image could possibly have enhanced the emotional response even more as the study by Small and Verrochi (2009, 778) reinforces.

Image 2 (Svenska Dagbladet 2022):



"Jag har inte vågat gå ut på en månad", säger 17-åriga Lisa, som SvD träffar på en restaurang i Odessa tillsammans med pappa Michall och mamma Yulia. Foto: Martin von Krogh

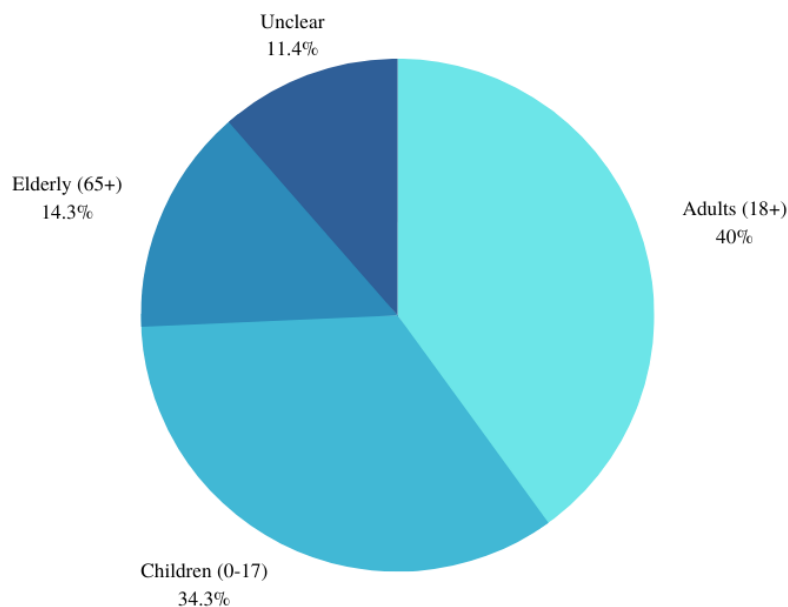
Odessa förbereder sig för en attack

■ Morgonens flykt från Cherson till Odessa var dramatisk, de gjorde allt för att framstå som ryssar när de stoppades. Om även Odessa intas reser de så långt bort de bara kan, säger familjen som SvD möter på en restaurang. *Nyheter* | Sid 6-7

The high frequency of images coded as neutral coheres with the fact that there may be, as Christopher Collins (2016) argued, more to neutral facial expressions than one might first expect. As has been stated earlier, front-page images are important and carefully chosen. The frequency of sad facial expressions was not low, especially in DN, and some images had happy expressions. That the recurrence of happy-coded images was almost as high as sad ones in SvD was surprising. Sad-coded images were expected before the coding to be much more prevalent than they were, especially compared to the number of happy ones. Image 3 from the fourth of March illustrates a good example of a happy-coded image. Three young women, safe, in a cabin in Sweden. The sun is shining through the window, and coffee cups and a half-done puzzle are on the table. This image could be an example of how Septianto and Paramita's (2021, 91) study also could apply to other sorts of pictures and that this sort of image works in favour of making the readers believe that this is what they could accomplish and help with if they open their door and home for refugees.

Image 3: (*Dagens Nyheter* 2022)

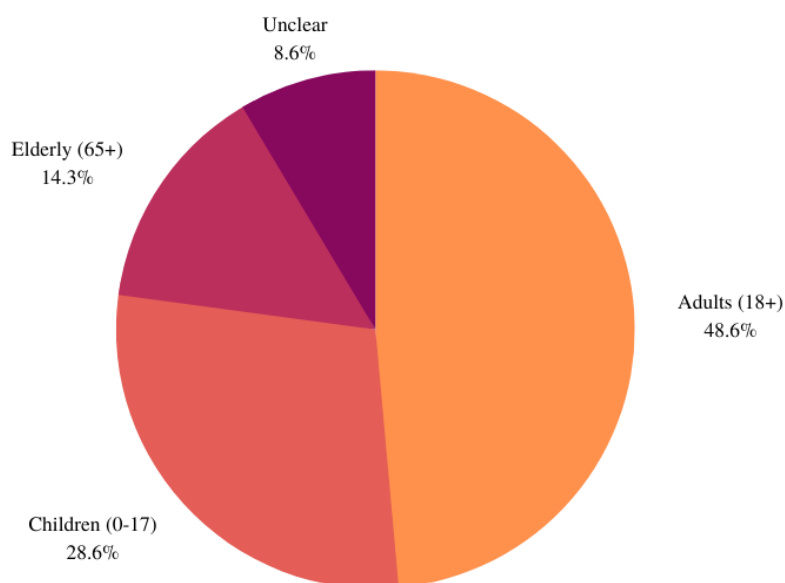
If one thinks of front-page images as a whole, the newspapers might not want to only have ones that have the same theme. Rather, they might want to show a multiplicity of images that could more realistically demonstrate what the refugees' situation since fleeing actually looks like. Also, images of the same kind might not sell as well compared if there is more diversity in the images. If the monetary aspect is considered to a further extent then it is somewhat surprising that the frequency of sad expressions and even sad scenes are not more occurring than they actually were. One could expect that genre of images usually sells better. One argument that in some ways could defeat the preceding reasoning is that this thesis only considers images of refugees and misses out on other front-page images of the war in Ukraine that fill the gap. For example, images of destroyed homes, cities, and institutions. Another angle could be there is not a definite way to always depict Ukrainian refugees and perhaps there is not some kind of agenda-shaping happening behind the scenes. There did not seem to be a particular perception of Ukrainian refugees that the newspapers wanted to push, intentionally or even unintentionally, except the one they did, with some sad, happy and neutral expressions. This study cannot confirm the different premises as being the underlying reason with the help of the numbers and frequencies it has put forth but it shows the gathered outcomes of what the newspapers did publish.

Figure 6: SvD - Age group

Figures 6 and 7 present the different age groups visible in SvD and DN respectively. What aspect the two figures show well tied to the theoretical framework is the occurrence of elderly and children in the front-page images. The amount of women compared to men in both newspapers is found in figure 8. The idea of ideal victims was introduced earlier in the thesis and they are usually women, children, and the elderly. The frequency of children was quite high and consistent in both newspapers but that the elderly were not more frequent was not predicted. Other front-page images depicting different aspects of the War in Ukraine often told stories of the elderly in Ukraine not being able to flee the country or choosing to stay in their war-torn and occupied part of the country. The data cannot tell us with any certainty about the number of elderly that fled but if one would only look at the sample then it would seem like the elderly were in the minority of age groups fleeing. Strictly looking at the data would also suggest that adults and children were the main groups of refugees. But which group actually was the most occurring is not what is most important or the focus. The numbers only tell us the distribution the newspapers decided on. There was a relatively large number of front-page images depicting children who could not leave the country for different reasons. A lot of images and stories about orphans, especially in SvD. These images were not

used in the data set for they did not specifically depict refugees in the way it was operationalised and it was made clear that the children could not and would not flee from the country. If these sorts of images had been coded, and the perspective had been wider, then the amount of children would have been even more recurring than they were in the dataset.

Figure 7: DN - Age group



The expectation of figure 8 was before the coding that men would not be as frequent as they in fact were. The martial law prohibiting men of fighting age from leaving the country was expected to be more prevalent in the images than it was. In some ways, it was obvious that they could not, in most cases, leave. The majority of the images had only women and children in them but the accompanying text told the reader about the fact that they were leaving their father or other male family members behind. An example of this is image 4 from the 18th of March. Visual content analysis misses out on details such as this in the statistics. When men were coded, they did not have to be refugees themselves. What mattered was that the image itself portrayed refugees, because of this, men were quite often included in the images. Usually, they were helping others to flee, image 4 is also a good example of this, with the man to the left, seemingly directing the women and children on where to go. There

were also some images where men were in the image but they were not refugees but instead saying goodbyes to their families.

Image 4: (Svenska Dagbladet 2022)



Sjuåriga Angelika blev helt förkrossad av gråt när mamma Daria gick och skaffade mat när tåget skulle gå. Foto: Magnus H. Neideman

Män tvingas ta farväl av sina flyende familjer för att kriga

■ Vid varje tåg syns gråtande män när familjerna åker – Lviv har blivit avskedens stad under kriget i Ukraina. *Nyheter | Sid 10-11*

■ Allt fler civila liv skördas i kriget. President Volodymyr Zelenskij försöker nu få mer stöd för att hålla emot ryssarna. *Nyheter | Sid 6-7*

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till 35 procent av svenskarna har en fast läkare på vårdcentralen, enligt mätningar från Läkarförbundet och Vård- och omsorgsanalys. I Norge och Danmark ligger siffran på 98 procent.

■ *Nyheter | Sid 20-23*



Foto: Johan Nilsson/TT

Förslag: 260 000 fler kan ta del av nytt reseavdrag

På torsdagen meddelade regeringen att man föreslår ett nytt reseavdrag som ska vara lika oavsett om man tar bil eller kollektivtrafik till jobbet. 260 000 fler personer än i dag skulle i så fall kunna ta del av reseavdraget.

■ *Näringsliv | Sid 5*

However, the rather high percentage of men in the images was not only helpers, soldiers or men saying goodbye to their families. A lot of them depicted male refugees, for example, arriving in Sweden or already having found a place to stay in their new country. Image 5 depicts the latter example. To even code for men in the early processes of the thesis was debated if it would be necessary, much to do with the martial code and the preconception that it would mean that there would not be front-page images of male adults that were the refugees. This was clearly not the truth and is a good illustration of when it is better to code for something and having it turn out to not have a larger importance than not coding and missing out on an essential aspect. Even though the images with men could have been directed in a negative light considering that, some of them at least, must have left Ukraine even though they were not supposed to, the images never seemed to have that intention. This holds true for almost all of the images, disregarding what the focus of the image was. The images never conveyed the impression of any sort of negative or unsympathetic ways of thinking, both in choosing the images and the messages the images would send out.

Image 5: (Svenska Dagbladet 2022)



Sasha Moshkovskiy och sönerna Andrey och Pavlo har flytt kriget och bor nu i Broby. Foto: Emil Malmberg

Ukrainare sedan länge välkomna i skånska byar

I över 20 år har barn från Ukraina kommit till sommarläger i Östra Göinge. När en del av dem nu tvingas fly kriget, vet de vart de vill åka. "Jag älskar Broby!", säger Tanya Moshkovska, 37 år.

Nyheter | Sid 8-10

Storbritannien varnar för ökat ryskt våld

Enligt Ryssland ska man för första gången ha använt ett nytt hypersoniskt vapen i Ukraina. Storbritannien varnar i en underrättelseanalys för att de ryska styrkorna kan inleda en mer urskilningslös beskjutning i Ukraina.

Nyheter | Sid 12

"Rädslan är värre än under Sovjettiden"

Kriget i Ukraina har inneburit ökad censur och likriktning i Ryssland. Många ryssar har tappat hoppet. "Rädslan som på kort tid spridits är enorm, kanske till och med värre än under Sovjettiden", säger Moskva-bon Marina.

Nyheter | Sid 16

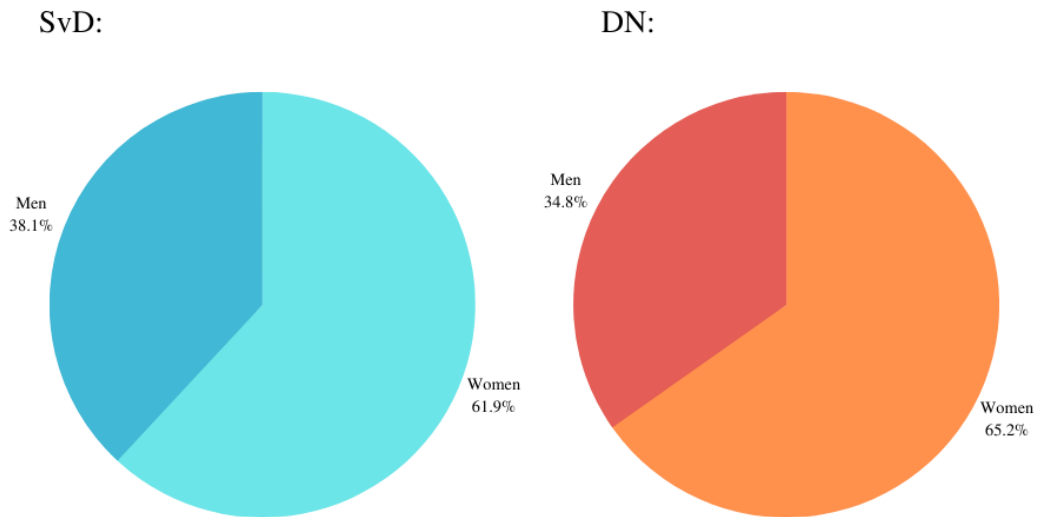
Therese Larsson Hultin: När den ryska oljan och gasen ska ersättas blundar västvärlden för avrättningar och stulna val.



Nyheter | Sid 14

KONTAKTA SvD ■ **Vt. chefredaktör och ansvarig utgivare** Anna Carberg ■ **Politisk chefredaktör** Tove Lihvendahl ■ **Redaktionschef och stf ansvarig utgivare** Maria Rimpel och Martin Ahlqvist ■ **Växel** 08-13 50 00
 ■ **E-post** för namn- eller namn@svd.se ■ **Postadress** SvD, 105 17 Stockholm ■ **Besöksadress** Västra järnvägsplan 7, Stockholm ■ **Ny prenumeration** 08-698 00 20, SvD.se/prenumera ■ **Prenumerations-
 brenden** 08-698 02 20, SvD.se/kundservice ■ **ANNONSERA** Företag 08-13 50 00 annonsbokning@svd.se ■ **Privatannonser** 08-13 00 10 privatannonser@svd.se ■ **Tryck** V-TAB Göteborg och Södertälje © 2022

Figure 8: Gender of the adults



A lot of ideal victims were present in the front-page images. The people depicted most often were women and children. Few images had a larger amount of people in them, and if they did, the focus was still on a selected few. Essentially, there was not a single image with an unfavourable look on the refugees or the refugee situation. This is not surprising and it would most likely be very controversial if any of the newspapers printed something that had a completely different outlook. As newspapers can influence both common people and politicians with perspectives and thoughts, people could perhaps also have a similar effect the other way around. Several other front pages concerning refugees indirectly and therefore were not used in the dataset were pictures of volunteers and people in Sweden expressing their support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Perhaps the understanding and viewpoint of the refugee situation work in a sort of symbiotic relationship and evolve with the help of each other, both newspaper and people.

6. Discussion

How are Ukrainian refugees depicted in the Swedish media? This has been the core of the thesis and its purpose. To a degree, the question has also been answered, but of course, not all media's depiction, not on social media, tv-news stations, or from other platforms, has been included. But the analysing of two of the main newspapers in Sweden has provided us with an adequate answer with regard to if the hypothesis described earlier could be based on truth or not. The visual depiction of Ukrainian refugees does not look like the case of refugees in Australia as Bleiker et al. (2013, 398) found. So if the visual dehumanisation of refugees is as they described then the data in this thesis can assert that Ukrainian refugees were not dehumanised. If that would mean that they were humanised instead is another question. Something that held true for a lot of the images in the dataset is that they did not push as much as anticipated on being emotionally evoking. Some images definitely did evoke strong emotional responses and did so in an effective way, but these kinds of images felt as if they still were in the minority. Throughout the analysis, the sense that looking only at refugees could not grasp the whole depiction grew. The need to look at the bigger picture felt more relevant, at least in further research into the subject. To understand how people and

politicians react to the images of refugees by only looking at those images could most likely tell us, at the least, part of the story, but there are also so many other kinds of images that possibly could influence the reaction. Imagine you read a newspaper almost every day, or even just look at the front page, and you see images and stories from and relating to the war in Ukraine. You see the Ukrainian leader and the country's people standing strong against what first seemed like impossible odds. You see the destruction of the infrastructure and ordinary people doing everything they can to defend their country. You see Swedish politicians discussing and declaring how they can best help Ukraine. You see how countries around the world condemn Russia and their leader. Then, you also see images of people fleeing Ukraine to save themselves and their loved ones while some stay and fight. What could all these different images add to? Would they not affect both the depiction the media is responsible for and the response from the public and even politicians regarding the refugees? So even though a lot of the images portraying refugees were not extremely dramatic, perhaps other images depicting other aspects of the war enhance the emotional effects.

Another angle to consider that has been mentioned before is there was not an overwhelming amount of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Sweden. The countries bordering Ukraine received the brunt of it. This could also have heavy importance on why the depiction looked as it did. It may be that the refugee situation was not severe enough in Sweden for the newspapers to make the depiction more emotional and dramatic than it was. It could also be a reason why the results of the study would have looked different and perhaps more humanising than if you did the same study on, for example, the 2015 refugee crisis. That is not to say that there were no humanising images of the refugees in 2015 and 2016, one example is of the deceased three-year-old Alan Kurdi's body, washed up on the shore of Turkey (Zachariasson 2015). That was an image that affected the world to an enormous degree and in some ways gave the refugee crisis the emotionally evoking aspect it needed at the time. A lot of other images from that crisis were also of overcrowded boats and other images that gave the understanding that a lot of refugees were trying to get to Europe and a lot of them to Sweden. What Bleiker et al (2013, 413-414) showed very well was the fact that newspapers can present the same sort of images with large groups and boats even though, in reality, there was not a large amount of refugees coming to Australia, especially compared to some countries in Europe and Africa. Even so, the refugees were portrayed as a big threat to Australia. It is a bit doubtful that Sweden and Australia can be compared completely without considering how

their view on refugees is and have been very different for a long time. Nonetheless, the Australia case is evidence that the media, and perhaps even politicians through the media, can angle a situation to look a certain way and get a certain response with facts that are not based on the entire truth or are blown out of proportion. Worth mentioning is also a quote by the previous Minister for Integration and Migration in Sweden, Anders Ygeman, published on the sixteenth of March in SvD on the front page of their digital paper. “Det är lättare att känna sympati på avstånd”, in english, “It is easier to feel sympathy from a distance”. What Ygeman exactly meant by this is impossible to figure out only from the quote but it seemed to connect to the discussion that has just been held. Would the depiction have been more negative if the refugee situation was more severe in Sweden?

The high amount of neutral facial expressions the analysis made clear came as a surprise. An interesting aspect that grew had less to do with what the neutral expressions are and what effects they can have on the viewer and more to do with why they were as frequent as they were. Today, a lot of people working with pictures and visuality are more aware of the ethical dilemma that comes along with it. Publishing images depicting people in moments that may be some of the worst they have ever been through, sometimes without their consent, is it really right? It is at the least worth considering for perhaps that is exactly what some newspapers consider today. Sometimes it can probably also be considered that it is necessary to show those kinds of images to really be able to demonstrate exactly what is happening. Of course, sometimes words could work in the same manner, but images have an influence that often can tell much more with much less effort. This is after all one of the core values of this thesis, that the power of images should not be underestimated. If newspapers in most cases chose to not use images on front pages that could be considered intrusive then it could be an explanation for why the results looked as they did, at least partly why.

The results of these studies are dependent on both the chosen material and method. If another method had been chosen and different material then there is a chance that the results could look different. What is working against this happening is the fact that the thesis is tied to the visual depiction. But looking at the depiction from alternative ways, for example, with discourse analysis, perhaps a deeper understanding could have been accomplished. The disadvantage then would have been the possibility of missing out on the wider view that content analysis gave us. Using other material than the two chosen newspapers could have

given a different result, especially perhaps if one used newspapers of completely different political realms. Alternatively, if the material had only consisted of images circulated on social media then they might have been more dramatic and emotion-evoking considering there might not be as many people aware of the ethical predicament.

7. Conclusion

When discussing this thesis with fellow students and friends, both before and during the research process, the hypothesis seemed to resonate with most people. This made it even more interesting, and important, to figure out how true it actually was. The results of the study made it clear, connected to the codes, how the depiction had looked during the year 2022. A lot of aspects that can heighten the emotional response in the audience were found in the images. The images most often portrayed smaller groups and it was rare for the picture to show a large group. Still, very few images of only individuals were found. The results for facial visibility came out noticeably high, especially in the newspaper SvD. In fact, in SvD there was not a single image with no facial visibility. The newspaper DN had more mixed results, even so, most of the images had some degree of visibility. How the visibility was expressed brought to mind more humanising effects rather than dehumanising ones. Facial expressions were the most difficult code in the way it seemed to depend on the researcher's interpretation more than the other codes. Furthermore, facial expressions were more complex to code than what was first expected. In the end, a lot of the facial expressions were coded as neutral as a lot of them a sort of "lacked" expressions. No smiles but no clear signs of other expressions either. The division between happy and sad expressions was not as distinct as it was thought it would be. The analysis then considered different reasons why the division looked as it did. Children and the elderly were depicted quite often in the images together with women. That these three groups were depicted recurrently did not come as a surprise and rather confirmed the idea that the so-called ideal victims would be present in the images to a large extent. However, what did come as a surprise was the fact that men were also quite often in the images. A lot of times, they were not refugees but rather volunteers or soldiers, still, more times than expected they were refugees. It was never shown in a negative light that they had fled the country with the immediate text or in the image itself. To sum up the thesis and the results, there did not seem to be almost any sort of negative view of Ukrainian

refugees. A lot of images had the right aspects and looked the right way to be able to evoke empathy and compassion.

Possible future research could focus on why the depiction looked as it did. The analysis and discussion tried to find some possible answers but it would be interesting to go even more in-depth. One study could perhaps interview employees at the relevant newspapers to see if some of the answers could be found there. It might not tell the whole truth but it could show the intentional part of the proceedings at the least. More research on why neutral expressions seem to be highly used in the media would also be relevant and interesting.

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9. Appendix

Links to the forms that was used for the coding:

SvD:

<https://forms.gle/Eh643GG9gZRx4xbN6>

DN:

<https://forms.gle/jHNMyX7DFPJVXACC6>