Visual representations of (Syrian) refugees in European newspapers

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Abstract

Newspapers importantly shape our constructed realities. Based on this assumption, I analysed if and how (Syrian) refugees were represented on 1180 front pages of European newspapers in the period June – October 2015. There were significant differences among the various newspapers in their selection of articles, their pictures and their perspectives. I explained these differences by looking in which country a newspaper was published and whether it was a sensationalist or serious newspapers. Most attention was paid, however, on visual themes that were common to all of them. My research was informed by Grounded Theory and I used other theories from media and communication studies and Communication for Development (ComDev) for the analysis. I related my findings about the reporting on refugees to previous discussions on NGO reporting. I argued that, even though both NGOs and newspapers report about similar issues, there has been a surprising lack of reflection on representations in newspapers. Furthermore, the discussions that emerged in the ComDev-discourse did not seem to have affected newspapers much. Given that newspapers potentially influence many more people, I sought to connect ComDev-discussions to traditional media, which might be a starting point for a more ethic journalism.

Keywords: refugees, newspapers, reporting, representations, photographs
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**Introduction**

In 2015, news on refugees has dominated the European media for months in a row. A certain discourse, a way of representing knowledge, emerged by reporting on this theme. An example of this discourse would be the fact that the events came to be called a ‘crisis’. By studying a discourse, one inevitably looks at questions of power and authority: who decides that it is a crisis and how the events are represented? Media are an important factor that contributes to our assumptions of ‘what there is’ and ‘what can be done’ in the world. Journalists do not just report, but they are also engaged in constituting the social world: they shape, influence and create events that otherwise might not have existed. The imagined worlds that are shaped by the media are called ‘mediascapes’ by Arjun Appadurai. In the case of refugees, the media have shown us images that we would never have seen with our own eyes and media’s omissions can have broad ramifications. In this thesis, I investigate the mediascape of refugees in Europe.

Appadurai used another term – ‘ethnoscape’ – to describe “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live.” He writes that nowadays people operate on a much larger scale due to globalisation. An example of this is that a refugee in Syria might not just think of moving to Turkey in order to be safe, but that he fantasises about Europe too. At the same time, people in Europe have developed traditions of perceptions and perspectives for interpreting the events around them. There could therefore be a mismatch between the fantasies and realities of the two different groups. Whereas both groups would be physically separated previously, the refugee now makes the global (the Syrian conflict) local (a European crisis). In an interview a researcher said that “[This] is the paradox of globalisation: the world becomes a village, but the village also becomes the city. As a citizen of [a town receiving refugees] you are suddenly turned into a global citizen, even though it was not your choice to become one.” I found this encounter very fascinating, but I will study it merely from the

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perspective of media reporting ‘at home’ (in Europe). I will study this situatedness, the (conscious) choices and the resulting effects of the media.

As I will explain later, I decided to focus my research specifically on newspapers’ front pages, which “orient their readers to the world.”

They convey a message to their audience by text, photographs, and the visual arrangement of the page. The arrangement of the page imposes a hierarchy of importance on the stories, which can suggest how they should be understood. Admittedly, mass media reporting is only one of the many factors that informs people’s understanding of the crisis and newspapers only form a small part of all media. Nevertheless, newspapers remain an important source of information and can indirectly influence the (political) course of events as people react to their stories and images. They are thereby also involved in bringing about social change. I will study what ‘makes news’ in different countries and newspapers and how this has been visually represented by layout and photographs. My findings can complement other studies, such as that of Nandita Dogra, who has studied the representations in the imagery of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). I have decided not to study the messages of INGOs on the humanitarian crisis of Syrian refugees, but those of mainstream media.

The study of Dogra found that 27% of INGOs’ messages in the UK public press were about disasters. As INGOs’ messages were advertisements, it largely depended on the trustworthiness of the organisation (what she calls ‘Oxfam-effect’) and the pictures (which have a ‘truth claim’) whether the reader would be interested in the message. Nevertheless, many of her respondents said that they relied on charities messages for long-term information on disasters and crises, because the circulating discourses and power asymmetries isolate the developed world from the rest but not vice versa. Interestingly, as in the case of Syrian refugees ‘their crisis’ becomes ‘our crisis’, there is no lack of reporting in Western mass media: newspapers are suddenly reporting about humanitarian issues on their front pages on an almost daily basis. Newspapers, furthermore, already have an established legitimacy and vast readership and therefore can influence their audience’s perception in more profound ways compared to advertisements that only have a limited reach.

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10 Ibid., 187.
12 Ibid., 161.
It then becomes interesting to look at the criticism on communication about development and to apply the same arguments to ‘ordinary’ news reporting. For example, already in the mid-seventies, critics “began attacking the traditional ‘starving child’ appeals used by Oxfam and similar charities”, as these images are said to perpetuate “a patronizing, offensive and misleading view of the developing world”.13 As newspapers’ reporting on the Syrian refugee crisis is also dominated by pictures of suffering children, newspapers could be said to perpetuate a patronizing, offensive and misleading view of Syrian refugees too. I chose Syrian refugees as a case study to examine how newspapers represent a humanitarian crisis, because of the unique amount of attention that has been paid to a crisis in which its subjects are not from the developed world. It is rare to read about humanitarian issues on newspapers’ front pages continuously for such a long time, which makes questions of representation in ordinary mass media ever more relevant.

So far, most of media’s reflection on its reporting in the Syrian refugee crisis has been about issues such as what terminology should be used, or whether it should publish certain pictures. However, much less attention has been paid to questions such as how or why events were being reported. For example, there were many discussions about the picture of the dead boy on the beach, but each newspaper decided to cover the story (either with or without the picture). It was left unquestioned in this case whether the story deserved attention at all. However, in many other cases certain newspapers would publish a story on its front page whereas others would not. It could be argued that the choice whether something should be published contributes much more significantly to our constructed reality, than questions about how this should be done. The former considerations, however, did not receive the same reflection as the latter did. Unfortunately, I cannot study what has not been represented either, but I can study differences and commonalities in representation among various newspapers.

The thesis will thereby provide an answer to the question: “how have newspaper front pages contributed to our understanding of (Syrian) refugees in Europe?” I will answer this by looking at the following sub-questions:

- How have refugees in Europe been visually represented?
- How did attention for refugees differ among countries and newspapers?
- How can these differences and their underlying choices be explained?

Before moving on to the actual analysis, I will first introduce the concepts of agenda-setting, framing and ‘the Other’ in chapter 1. In chapter 2, I will describe how my research has been set up, the sample data that I collected, the Grounded Theory approach, quantitative content analysis, the limitations of my approach and the problems that I encountered. In chapter 3, I will discuss how representation differs among countries and newspapers. In chapter 4, I focus on themes than can be seen in photographs, and how these represent refugees in a particular way. Finally, I will wrap up all findings in the conclusion.
1. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will first elaborate upon the Communication for Development-perspective from which this research has been conducted. Then I will describe the theories and assumptions that form the basis for my analysis. As my theories emerge from different disciplines, I will – whenever possible – refer to examples of studies where these theories have been used to analyse or describe (reporting on) refugees in order to demonstrate how these theories can be used for the theme of refugees. The binding factor for all these theories is that, ultimately, they all explain parts of our so-called “imagined pseudoenvironment that is treated as if it were the real environment.” In this chapter, I will explain some of the underlying processes that constitute these mental images. In the two chapters after that, additional literature will be introduced whenever this is relevant for the particular topics that I would like to discuss.

1.1. Communication for Development

In the recent years, the field of development studies has merged into “a more broadly defined interest in social change […]”. The study of development is therefore no longer limited to ‘the developing world’. I chose to approach the refugee theme as an issue that itself triggers (calls for) social change and development interventions. The mere act of reporting on the topic is already a form of intervention and such communication interventions have started receive increasing attention in the field of development. The interest in communication has led to the emergence of a separate field of studies, that of Communication of Development (ComDev). There have been continuous debates about what ComDev actually entails, so I will use the term to refer to the study of both “programs designed to communicate for the purposes of social change” and how “social change projects articulate assumptions about problems, solutions and communities.” ComDev is based upon the assumption that communication interventions “may help to mobilize support, create awareness, foster norms, encourage behaviour change, influence policymakers, or even shift frames of social issues.” I will argue that newspaper

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14 The theories stem from political science, literature studies, media studies, and post-colonial studies. Throughout the thesis I will also refer to theories of development communication.


18 Wilkins, “Development Communication.”

19 Ibid.
reporting – albeit possibly less intentional, organized or aimed towards a specific goal – can have similar effects.

I consider the refugee crisis a development issue: the large amount of people coming to Europe pose a crisis for both the refugees and the host societies, resulting in (calls for) social change. As the subsequent communication interventions can have important consequences, it becomes very relevant to study these. ComDev analyses such communication to see, for example, what kind of ideological assumptions are communicated and what consequences this might have.20 As I consider traditional reporting in mass media as a form of intervention, I could analyse these media in a similar way as ComDev does. NGOs who engage in media advocacy might just attempt to have certain issues covered in the mass media; in that case, there would be no difference for the audience who is only confronted with the final article. In certain cases, newspapers even launched a campaign aiming to mobilize their audience in a particular way.21 Newspapers thereby sometimes clearly made intentional communication interventions. I therefore considered it relevant to study this subject from a ComDev perspective.

1.2. Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting theories rely on the assumption that media can influence what people think and that media can thereby set the ‘public agenda’. By emphasizing a certain issue, mass media can influence how people will conceive a certain subject.22 This means that if the media would report about refugees continuously, people would start thinking that this is an important topic regardless of whether this were actually true. On the other hand, media is not the only factor of influence and its power lies mostly in making an issue more salient. Bernard Cohen once wrote the now famous words: “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”23 The press is not a uniform body, as each media outlet covers news from very different perspectives instead. The audience can therefore actively “seek out information from various sources, and

20 Ibid.
21 German newspaper BILD very explicitly sought to engage its audience. It had a campaign ‘We help’ on its front page for several weeks in a row. It also published some of its editions in Arabic for the refugees.
interpret media messages according to their values and beliefs.” A certain news medium therefore has only limited control as to what information reaches the person.

Especially in the age of online media, people have even greater control over their personal exposure to certain news. Even on the same site, people can choose their preferred reading order. As a result, readers “focus on different kinds of information and [develop] different perceptions of important problems than audiences of printed newspapers.” This was proved in a study which compared readers of the paper version and the online New York Times: the two groups had “systematically different perceptions” on what were the most important issues facing the country. The personalisation that online media facilitates, can thus eventually “[erode] the ability of journalists to serve as gatekeepers of the public agenda.” At the same time, we can see that there is a “high degree of convergence […] regarding issues and sources” across the various media. Important news, after all, will be considered important in most media. Nevertheless, even if all media outlets would cover a certain story, not all of them can give the story the same sense of urgency.

As the study showed, the static and less personalized format of newspapers is particularly effective in imposing a certain hierarchy. Another study found that the placement of an article on the front page was the most important predictor whether an article would be read or not. The Ombudsman of Dutch newspaper NRC therefore writes that it is essential to choose an appropriate first page. He says that this became even more important after the newspaper switched to the tabloid format: “[t]abloid, with just one piece, doesn’t offer the choice [of choosing one’s own hierarchy]: boom, this is it.” Journalists can importantly influence people’s understanding, which “confronts journalists with a strong ethical

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26 Ibid., 196.
27 Ibid., 198.
responsibility to select carefully the issues on their agenda.”31 Teun van Dijk writes that “[the media] are the main form of public discourse that provides the general outline of social, political, cultural, and economic models of societal events, as well as the pervasively dominant knowledge and attitude structures that make such models intelligible.”32 Journalists thus have important structural influence.

At the same time, we should not look at news editors as if they were operating in a vacuum. The choices of editorial boards are also affected by the larger context or discourse. For example, an (unusual) key event can temporarily change the criteria for news selection. This can create a wave of attention, which will give the impression that a situation rapidly deteriorated into a crisis.33 The massive coverage then becomes news itself and journalists will hunt for ‘newer’ news on the story because the competition is also doing so.34 Such a situation is usually called a ‘media hype’ since it does not necessarily reflect the actual frequency in the real world. Journalists might not even be aware that they participate in this and thereby only sustain it further. I would say that in such a case, journalists are influenced themselves by external agenda-setting powers.

Once an issue has made it to the public agenda, this could influence the political agenda in turn.35 Political agenda-setting seems to be particularly strong in case of negative news: this “automatically turns all heads to politics expecting at least some form of policy reaction.”36 We can therefore also expect that negative news about refugees will make it easier on the political agenda (and thereby again in the newspapers) than positive news. When media coverage postulates policy decisions, scholars call this the ‘CNN-effect’.37 This concept has been used by Hanna Werman, for example, to explain the lack of Western involvement in the Syria conflict. She argues that the CNN-effect did not occur this time because mass media primarily employed a legal discourse about non-intervention, rather than an emphatic or humanitarian one.38 Even though the effect on politics is beyond the scope of my research,

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34 Ibid., 509.
36 Ibid., 94.
these studies demonstrate the relevance of studying how news is reported. Mass media can have similar ‘intervening’ effect as that of NGOs or social movements.

I will thus only focus on the newspaper’s direct audience, which needs to interpret news in an active and subjective way. Pictures are an important element to draw attention to issues in which they would otherwise not be interested. 39 Kress and Van Leeuwen write, however, that the front page’s articles might have an imposed hierarchy, but that it is ultimately up to the reader to determine which articles s/he will read in what order.40 They therefore say that newspapers are ‘interactive’ in some ways. A newspaper might create a hierarchy of importance and force its audience to read within its structure initially, but the reader is free to reject this order and to follow a different reading path.41 We can thus conclude that newspapers have the power to tell people what to think about, even though this is limited in various ways. The next section will look into media’s power to tell people what to think.

1.3. Framing

Framing is a widely used concept, but it has not been defined in a uniform way. Garrison and Modigliani define a media frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events […] The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue.”42 Another definition, by Entman, emphasizes the process of constructing this central idea: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”43 Entman identified five of such aspects that can be manipulated in media texts: “(a) importance judgments; (b) agency, or the answer to the question (e.g., who did it?); (c) identification with potential victims; (d) categorization, or the choice of labels for the incidents; and (e) generalizations to a broader national context.”44 Regardless of whether the author is conscious about the choices that s/he makes, all of these aspects matter for creating a particular narrative.

39 Moeller, Compassion Fatigue, 22.
40 Kress and van Leeuwen, “Front Pages,” 206.
41 Ibid., 190.
44 Ibid., 111.
Framing theory therefore leads us to assume that media texts are not a neutral instrument, but that it matters which words are chosen and how the story is told. This means that a specific event can be described in various ways and that choosing one way over the other carries a particular meaning. Sometimes it is easy to recognize that a story has been framed, for example, when politically loaded terms are used in the headline. It can also be more subtle when an event is explained in a seemingly objective way. For example, a fact-based article about the amount of refugees that have arrived in Germany can carry (concealed) judgements about whether this is an inevitable, dangerous, or laudable development. News coverage is therefore inevitably expressed in a particular frame. Depending on how an issue is framed, the interpretation of its audience can vary significantly. For example, a study found that including or excluding certain questions in a survey on poverty would produce significant effects on whether the respondent would be supportive of governmental assistance or not.

I assume that newspapers do not merely set the debate in the refugee crisis, but that they also play a significant role in the constructing of a particular understanding. This framing is often supported by pictures, which are used instrumentally to support a particular interpretation. For example, if an article is accompanied by photos of ‘innocent’ refugee children, people are likely to sympathize more with those portrayed than when they see pictures of strong young men with smartphones. Framing is thus not only done in the text, but it is also important to study the accompanying pictures and layout in general. Previous research of Semethko and Valkenburg found that the most significant differences among papers were between sensationalist and serious types of news outlets; the medium itself (e.g. television or press) turned out to be of much less importance. I will analyse whether different frames can also be recognized among the photographs in the newspapers in my sample.

1.4. The spectacle of “the Other”
Portraying refugees as ‘the Other’ can be seen as a particular way of framing their story. It de-individualizes them and portray them as a homogenous group in a non-participatory way. Edward Said has popularized this process in what he called ‘Orientalism’. He noted that in European popular understanding, art and literature Europeans had always though themselves

46 Ibid., 34–35.
to be superior to non-European – ‘backward’ – people and cultures.\textsuperscript{48} Although this process of othering is far from unique to Europeans alone, it can have important consequences for the self-understanding and behaviour of both groups. For example, it has importantly influenced development discourse, modernisation theories in particular, and their top-down approach.\textsuperscript{49} At the same time, an image of ‘the Other’ is necessary in order to define ‘the Self’ from a psychoanalytic and linguistic point of view.\textsuperscript{50} The problem is therefore not othering by itself, but that it often results in reductionist and over-simplified views that “[swallow] up all distinctions in their rigid two-part structure.”\textsuperscript{51} When all members of a group are reduced to their ‘essential’ elements, this will create a limited or purportedly ‘wrong’ understanding of reality.

Several studies, such as that of Simon Behrman, used the concept of othering to study the prevailing discourse on refugees. He writes that refugees are often presented as “an undifferentiated mass, lacking the skills and the sophistication of the settled citizenry”.\textsuperscript{52} Their image becomes one of “having no agency, described in elemental terms: flood, influx, swamping etc.”\textsuperscript{53} The ‘Self’ (the person in the host country) is that of a “bewildered Westerner struggling to cope with this unexpected and unreasonable demand for assistance.”\textsuperscript{54} A dichotomy is created between the entitled or deserving ‘Self’ and the non-entitled asylum seekers or refugees.\textsuperscript{55} Behrman writes that it is not only wrong to treat a whole group as if it were completely homogeneous, but that it is also plain wrong to portray refugees as being passive in the first place. Instead, they are actively moving and fighting for their survival and a better life.\textsuperscript{56} ‘Othering’ can thus result in narratives that are based on false presumptions; which can have implications that go further than representation alone.

In the past ‘the Other’- who was far away - was often patronised and portrayed to be in need of civilizing influence as could be seen in the development discourse. The situation with

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{51} Ibid., 235.
\bibitem{52} Simon Behrman, “Accidents, Agency and Asylum: Constructing the Refugee Subject,” \textit{Law and Critique} 25, no. 3 (June 19, 2014): 249.
\bibitem{53} Ibid.
\bibitem{54} Ibid., 268.
\bibitem{56} Behrman, “Accidents, Agency and Asylum,” 249.
\end{thebibliography}
refugees, however, is understood to be “far worse” because they are coming to us and are thereby “importing their otherness”. As the global becomes local, the ‘Other’ starts to pose an immediate threat to the inter-group. The persons in the inter-group then fervently try to construct and uphold images that help us separate ‘them’ from us. After all, if people would realize that they are actually not so different from the other, our fundamental ways of categorizing the world are up in the air. An online article summarized this feeling by stating that “[w]e don’t like to see an old iPhone in someone’s hand as they stand at a charging station in a refugee camp because we might have that same old iPhone in our pocket or purse.” When seeing pictures of iPhone’s, previous distinctions suddenly disappear. In chapter 3, I will analyse several pictures that show characteristics of Othering discourse as well as some that are in clear violation of it.

57 Breen, Devereux, and Haynes, “Fear, Framing and Foreigners,” 10.
2. Methodology

This chapter will give an overview of the research that I conducted, the methodologies and the material that I used and the choices that I made. Before moving on to the actual research, I have to explain my usage of the notation ‘refugee crisis’, because this notion might suggest an implicit value judgement. In the media, these two words have been used to construct a single narrative about events that would have little in common otherwise: stories on Afghan, Eritrean and Syrian refugees in Calais, Germany and Lesbos are all newsworthy because they are part of the ‘refugee crisis’. However, there seems to be no clear criteria for what makes a crisis. Susan Moeller quotes a news editor who tells that “reporters love the word ‘crisis’”, but the editor confesses that he cannot say what makes a crisis and that such a label is rather based on intuition. The word ‘crisis’ therefore seems to contain a certain judgement. I have thus been very hesitant to use the word in my thesis: whenever this is done, it is only for pragmatic reasons.

In order to limit the scope of this research, I decided to focus exclusively on the front pages of newspapers for a number of reasons. The most important one being that other mass media are much more difficult to study: there are numerous television channels that all broadcasting 24/7, whereas there are only few newspapers that are widely read. Furthermore, in the case of newspapers I would just have to study the front pages in order to know what the most important subjects were that day. Finally, it was also much easier to obtain previous editions of newspapers than television programmes. The combination of all these practical reasons led me to focus on newspapers alone. I selected several newspapers from different countries in order to see if there were differences among them.

2.1. Sample

The sample that I use for my analysis (both the quantitative and qualitative parts) consists of front pages of newspaper editions in the period June-October 2015. In an initial analysis on LexisNexis, I noticed a steep rise in September. I therefore decided to include editions starting from June in order to see if this ‘boom’ came out of nowhere or if it had already been receiving attention before (albeit to a lesser degree). I also wanted to see if the picture of Aylan indeed ‘awoke’ Europe or if it only became viral because it was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

59 Moeller, Compassion Fatigue, 17.
I stopped collecting sample data on the 1st of November, as at this point I had to start writing. Table 1 gives an overview of the final composition of the sample.

### Table 1 Composition of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th># of editions (days analysed)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telegraaf</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>7 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</td>
<td>151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Presse</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkskrant</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>6 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BILD</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Standaard</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Stampa</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouw</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(limited availability June-October 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Pais</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Times</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 days a week + limited availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice for these newspapers was mostly informed by the fact whether their front pages were obtainable from a (freely available) digital archive retrospectively. This turned out to be very difficult: I could access several newspapers through my university and work accounts, but their archives would usually last only one week. If I would have conducted only a textual analysis, the LexisNexis database would provide all I needed. For a study of visual representations, however, it only contained page scans for a rare few newspapers. Two free websites that contain today’s front pages from all over the world were more useful: Newseum and Kiosko.net. In both cases, unfortunately, one cannot see past editions due to copyright restrictions. Newseum, however, also archived papers on dates when something important had happened. There were twenty of such dates between the 1st of June and the 12th of October. I decided to collect the newspapers from those archived dates and started to download the front pages daily from the 12th of October on.

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61 The archived dates were: June (7-8, 19, 21, 23, 26-28), July (11, 15), August (27, 29-30), September (23-28), October (2). These dates were all special due to events in the United States, which often did not even appear in European newspapers. Thereby this selection seems not to have affected the selection of news in Europe.
In order to have a variety of newspapers to analyse, I selected both sensationalist and serious newspapers from different European countries. In the case of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom I analysed two newspapers per country. For the four other countries, I thought it would be interesting to include at least one newspaper, but I did not have the capacity to analyse more than one paper. In making the per country selection of papers, I attempted to include those papers which had the highest circulation. Whenever these were not available (e.g. in the case of France), I would choose the next (available) paper. Table 2 gives an overview of the initial selection.

Table 2 Selection of newspapers (■ = sensationalist, ● = serious, by own judgement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Die Presse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>De Standaard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) ●, BILD ■</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Ireland Times ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>La Stampa ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Volkskrant ●, Algemeen Dagblad (AD) ■</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>El Pais ●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Guardian ●, The Times ●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice for these countries was solely based upon the fact that I would be able to understand the content of the articles in their national languages. This was important because sometimes it was not immediately visible whether a picture or article concerned refugees. Only later I discovered that while Newseum classified *El Pais* under Spain (as it is produced in Madrid), it actually concerns the version for Latin America. The articles therefore pay only little attention to European events, but whenever an article appeared on refugees it must thus really have been ‘world news’.

As my analysis progressed, I realised that I would need more newspapers from the period before October 12, because the archived dates were insufficiently representative. At that point, I also discovered that both Kiosko.net and Pressreader.net displayed newspaper editions only for a limited amount of time officially, but that it is still possible to see earlier editions by changing the date in the URL. By doing so, I could retrieve all editions from Die Presse, De Standaard, De Volkskrant, The Guardian, Frankfurter Allgemeine Presse and BILD. Additionally, I decided to analyse one more newspaper, Telegraaf, which was previously not available on Newseum. I included this paper because I wanted to study one country in-depth for differences among the papers. Telegraaf was a useful addition as it is the most wide-read
paper and since is “closer to the sensationalist end, with the AD in the middle and the Volkskrant […] at the sober and serious end.”62 I particularly focused on the Netherlands, because I understand the language and news context of this country the best.

In total, I looked at 1180 front pages (952 of these were of the 7 newspapers of which I covered the entire period). Table 1 already showed that the sample contained much more editions for some newspapers than for others. This is partly due to their availability, but it is also explained by the fact that not all newspapers appear with the same frequency. There are some newspapers with Sunday editions and some would not be published on the different national holidays. Because of the varying amount of editions, I will work mostly with percentages. Whenever I need to make comparisons between newspapers, I will only use the seven newspapers that were covered during the entire period. When I show how often a certain theme occurred, I will use the entire sample.

2.2. Analysis

I have used a combination of different research methods for my analysis. My approach has been informed by Grounded Theory (GT), which is a set of guiding principles and practices.63 A GT research starts with the data itself and then uses this to develop an original theory instead of focusing on existent literature and arguments from the start.64 Its research process consists of a constant interplay between data collection and analysis. I found such an approach useful in order not to limit myself to the theories that I started with nor to the sample data that I collected initially. As the research progressed, I could supplement both in a more focussed manner. The theoretical framework thereby emerged in a later stage and was further refined during the process.65 This approach allowed me to engage in research without preconceived categories and to ground the research in the data rather than the theory.

I tried to supplement the qualitative research with quantitative analysis. Such methods rely on systematic assignment of content to categories and the analysis of these using statistical methods.66 It was relatively easy to conduct such an analysis additionally as I could code the front pages while going through them for the qualitative analysis. The quantitative data would

64 Ibid., 12.
65 Ibid., 23.
prove useful in order to analyse differences in the amount of news among the newspapers and countries and to show how frequently certain highlighted themes were shown. All my observations were noted down in a simple Excel spreadsheet and I analysed this with the PivotTables-functionality. Whenever I use data that I did not collect myself, such as from Google Trends or Eurostat, I will introduce the source and its limitations. Ultimately, I integrated insights from different sources and research methods into one single story.

Classifying front page articles

Each newspaper has a different format and layout. For example, The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) is larger than tabloid-sized papers such as the Volkskrant. The newspaper 20 Minutes, notably covers almost the entire front page with just one picture while other newspapers publish several smaller articles on the first page. These differences make quantitative comparisons among the various newspapers difficult. If I would decide to include only articles or pictures of a certain size, larger-sized newspapers would be overrepresented. I therefore decided that both an article and a line of text introducing an article further in the newspaper (I will call this a ‘reference’) are equally classified as ‘text mentions’. After all, an article in the FAZ could be just as visible as a reference in the Volkskrant. Furthermore, it also depends on the reader’s subjective interests whether a story is of influence or not. I therefore chose to limit the classifications to the most common denominators (listed in table 3): whether a newspaper mentioned refugees or not and if so, if this article was the opening story and/or if it contained a picture.

Table 3 Classifications for front pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture with caption/article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article/reference (only text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I decided that it was also relevant to count articles without a picture, as these add salience to the theme, which also influences people’s attitude when viewing pictures later. Sometimes a picture was attached to an article, but they could also be accompanied just by a short caption. I did not make further distinctions among this, except for when the picture or the article was particularly large. A special classification for ‘opening stories’ would be used whenever the story was particularly visible and catch the readers’ attention even if they just scanned the article at first. Such an opening story could consist of just a large picture without an article, but it could also be a large article without a picture. The only thing that mattered was whether it was the biggest element on the page. Most of the times there would be just one such story, but in some cases the front page would be horizontally or vertically divided by two opening stories. In those cases, both could qualify as an opening story. Whenever there were multiple stories about refugees, I would code the largest one.

I included all stories about refugees in Europe without focusing exclusively on those about Syrian refugees. In the first month, many articles were related to migrants in Calais that were trying to cross the Channel, whereas in the months after almost all news concerned the journeys of Syrian migrants or the host countries that had to cope with the ‘crisis’. I did not distinguish among the people in Calais – which were often called ‘migrant’ while the Syrians were ‘refugees’ – and the Syrians arriving to Germany, as I am of the assumption that media coverage for the former would also influence the latter. This meant that I also included stories about asylum seekers from Kosovo and Albania, which in Germany, for example, seemed to be a prelude to the later (discourse on the) ‘crisis’. I therefore looked at refugees in or coming towards Europe in the broadest sense of the word. I also noted down in which country a certain story took place, so I could distinguish between, for example, the Calais-stories and those about boat refugees on Lesbos.

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68 Ibid., 205.
I excluded articles when the theme of refugees was not the direct lead for the story. I therefore decided to ignore news about the situation in Syria when this did not mention refugees explicitly in the heading or introduction. It was, however, not always easy to apply these criteria consistently. For example, a couple of articles dealt with migrants in general. Arguably, these had made it to the front page because of the momentum and they might influence also how people think about refugees. Nevertheless, I decided that the ‘refugee-criterion’ should be decisive. Another tricky example is the front page of BILD on the 31st of October: its cover story wrote about two refugee kids that had been killed in Berlin. On the one hand, this news seemed to fit the pattern of continuous news reporting in Germany on attacks of (right-wing) protesters on refugee centres. On the other hand, the article was not framed in a way that it could be seen as ‘yet another attack’. I therefore decided that this article was not part of the news on refugees. Of course, it would be very interesting to study why the media put only little emphasis on the child’s refugee background, but it was more important to be consistent in my classifications for the quantitative analysis.

Coding the articles

I started my qualitative analysis by describing what I saw on the picture and initial coding by attaching all labels that come to one’s mind. As the research progressed, more and more labels emerged. This would happen whenever I noticed a new detail. It could well be an earlier pictures had the same detail, but that that suddenly I discovered a pattern in an ‘Aha! Now I understand’-experience. In that case, I would include the earlier picture as well. Due to my GT approach, I would sometimes also discover new elements as I had read new literature and saw certain theoretical assumptions to be either contested or confirmed. For the qualitative analysis it was however less important that all previous pictures would be included. After all, a series of three pictures or even a single one could provide just as much input for an analysis as a more frequently occurring pattern. As I worked chronologically, there are slightly more examples of pictures from the later period.

For the quantitative analysis, on the other hand, it was of utmost importance that the labels would be applied consistently on all pictures. I was therefore hesitant to add another label as a new coding variable: this would mean that all previous stories would have to be

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69 Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory, 47–48.
70 Ibid., 58.
reviewed again. Usually I would test whether it was worth to study a new aspect with a couple of articles, in order to see a quantitative analysis would be a welcome addition to the qualitative one. Sometimes I would change or stop using a variable when it was defined to narrowly or widely and would therefore not be suitable for analysis. For example, I noticed an increase of articles that questioned Europe’s acceptance of refugees over time. I therefore tried coding articles that wrote critically in order to see if I could confirm this observation and whether this differed among newspapers. It turned out to be very difficult however to use ‘critical’ as a criterion: an article about capacity problems was obviously not critical, but what if it contained a critical quote of a politician? In the end, I stopped using this variable. The constant justification of what the labels meant, was a process of continuous memo-writing.\footnote{Ibid., 72.}

Once I had made a final selection of themes that I wanted to highlight due to their (theoretical) relevance, I went once more through the whole sample to code the articles with these themes. This was necessary so I could supplement the qualitative part with quantitative analysis. In table 4 I describe the selection criteria for the final set of themes. Figure 3 shows how frequently these appeared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group / “Others”</td>
<td>Featuring people as ‘refugees’ rather than individuals (i.e. large groups of people, or a couple of them but taken from the back)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Having children as their primary subject or as the ‘special detail’ that makes a photo newsworthy rather than another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Taken somewhere along the journey and where people can be seen travelling (i.e. including people waiting for a border, but not when they are ‘staying’ in a refugee camp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>Concerning (an encounter with) a specific object (e.g. pictures in which empty boats or fences are photographed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects – mobile phones</td>
<td>Concerning mobile phones in particular (added as a subtheme of objects, because there was a lot of discussion on this matter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Emphasizing the miserable conditions (i.e. not when ‘miserable’ could still be an interpretation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals like us</td>
<td>Taken in such a way that refugees appear just as any other person, as if they are part of us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact (authorities / locals)</td>
<td>Showing encounters with police and local population (not when it concerns politicians; but also when we see police or local people without refugees). As most of these encounters were violent, I will later discuss this theme as ‘confrontation’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>Showing politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\footnote{Ibid., 72.}
For several of the themes such as objects, politicians and individuals like us, it would not be possible to recognize that they concerned the refugee crisis if it were not for their captions. I therefore needed to study also the text, even if I focused only on photographs.

Figure 3 shows that my selection of themes does not necessarily reflect what appeared most frequently. Only pictures of the journey and of children could be seen exceptionally often.

2.3. Google Trends

I also supplemented my data with that of users’ behavior Google. Its service Google Trends can give insights in how ‘trending’ a certain topic was beyond the media. It provides data on how often people search for a particular term over time. Admittedly, its data does not represent society as a whole (e.g. some people might not use a computer), but it provides interesting insights that other sources do not offer. There is also no way to check the validity of the data: only relative numbers are shown and there is no documentation about how the the data has been established. Nevertheless, the tool can be used to compare, for example, the popularity of two terms relative to each other, the popularity of one term in a country relative that in another, or the relative trend of popularity over time. The most popular moment of the most popular term is always set to be ‘100’ and all other numbers are relative to this moment. It could still find ways for a useful and interesting analysis, which will be presented in chapter 3.1.

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73 Ibid., 35.
3. Different papers make different news

In my introduction to agenda-setting and framing, I showed how physical constraints and editorial choices (or assumptions) can significantly influence whether and how news will be covered. This chapter will apply these concepts to the reporting on the refugee crisis.

3.1. Selection and news-making

Before considering how a story was told, I will first look if the story was told at all. As predicted, there were significant differences among the newspapers. For example, Volkskrant and Telegraaf – which I both analysed during the entire period – contained a story on refugees in respectively 40% and 22% of the cases. Between Trouw (41%) and AD (38%) the difference is much smaller, although this could be explained by the fact that most of the editions analysed were during the real ‘crisis’-period. In any case, these examples clearly show that newspapers do not necessarily mirror the ‘important’ events that happen in the world; as has been discussed in the theory, importance is also a social construct. The difference between Volkskrant and Telegraaf might be explained by the sensationalist-quality dichotomy, but this does not seem to work in all cases. Figure 4 shows amount of attention for all seven newspapers. Noteworthy is BILD: traditionally a sensationalist newspaper, which was now on the forefront of covering the refugee crisis. Whereas in the past it would be critical of migrants, it now even engaged in forms of activism. This change even became a news subject itself, as other media noticed its softer stance.74

The newspapers’ political ideology is thus not a predictor for the amount of news on a certain topic, but it rather influences what kind of news is chosen. This can be seen on, for example, October the 19th, when all (4) Dutch newspapers featured an article about refugees on their front page. Apparently, there was no major event that had occurred (as in this case there would have been a consensus on what was news) so instead they all chose a story that fitted their position in the sensationalist-serious dichotomy. *Telegraaf*’s cover story uncovered that politicians had prevented refugees from being housed in the neighbourhood where many of the politicians live. *Algemeen Dagblad (AD)* published a short article about three refugees that were stopped on the highway while trying to reach the registration centre by bicycle. The article was clearly meant as a funny note, because the centre was 200 kilometre away and the refugees were following the ‘shortest route’ on their smartphones. The *Volkskrant* dedicated its entire front page to the political and social pressure that refugees were putting on Germany. *Trouw* opened with a headline stating that there is plenty of space available but that public support is lacking.

This choice of articles show that newspapers have very different perspectives on what makes important or relevant ‘news’. In this case, all four stories can be mapped perfectly across the serious-sensationalist dichotomy. The story on the front page of the *AD* (which later even needed to be rectified because it was reported wrongly) did not appear in the *Volkskrant* at all, let alone on the front page. The events taking place in Germany, on the other hand, might not be interesting for the average reader of the *AD*. The article in *Trouw* was a nice example of its...
‘caring ideology’ and of an almost activist agenda. The article is again an example of the difficulty to define ‘critical’: on the one hand, it deals with the criticism in the society at large but, on the other hand, the article itself is rather critical of the society instead of the arrival of refugees. The newspapers thus differ in content nevertheless, albeit not necessarily quantitatively.

An important factor that contributes to the relative attention that all newspapers pay to a particular news theme is the occurrence of a major event, which can give new importance to related stories. This is what I have previously discussed as media hypes. If one looks at the actual number of refugees, the crisis could hardly be said to be just a hype. Nevertheless, we can see certain parallels. For example, *De Standaard* had a four-week series on migration in its weekend specials; of which were references on its front page. Each edition contained a report from a different location: Niger, Libya, Melilla and the Serbian-Hungarian border. While only the latter two were about refugees in Europe, the first two articles can also be said to have made it to the front page because of the on-going events. This is not only the case for background stories: there were more articles that might have not have made it to the front page in a normal situation. For example, *Volkskrant*’s first page was covered almost entirely with a picture of a young Angolan asylum seeker that was now forced to return to her country after spending almost her entire childhood in the Netherlands. It is impossible to tell whether this story indeed gained more attention because of the refugee crisis, but I find this assumption very plausible. This would mean that whether a story becomes news depends both on the paper and the context.

Furthermore, whereas refugees did not show up from one day to another, the reporters did. For a media hype, it is typical that a key event triggers a wave which rises steeply and fades slowly, and that this wave is not linked to the frequency of the actual occurrence of the events. As can be seen in figure 11, the amount of incoming refugees had risen steeply since April already. Admittedly, there has been continuous reporting on the issue all along, but the explosion of media attention that can be seen in figure 5 did not mirror the actual amount of refugees. In the month July, there was virtually no coverage on the issue except in Germany and Austria despite the fact that also in other countries the amount of asylum applicants was

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increasing by the day. The later explosion was thus unrelated to the actual frequency of events and shows much likeliness of a hype.

Figure 5 Graph showing absolute amount of opening stories per newspaper (N=952)

The discussion whether the media created this hype via agenda-setting, or that other forces have put it on media’s agenda cannot be answered easily. It is possible to show with other data, however, that media did not operate in a vacuum. Google Trends is a relatively easy and reliable method for measuring how much attention people paid to a particular subject. Figure 6 is such an analysis, which shows how often people searched for the term ‘refugees’ in the language of the five respective countries. All numbers are relative to the maximum amount of queries (which is set at 100) for each country in the period June – October. We can see that only few people searched for refugees until the beginning of September, the week of Aylan and the decision to open up the borders in Germany. Nevertheless, there are small variations among the countries: some peak earlier and in some the peak lasts longer than in others. These patterns often seem to match the attention in newspapers of figure 5: we see a peak and slow decline in September and the period after in both figures and, for example, the relatively low interest in the United Kingdom can also be seen in the infrequent coverage in The Guardian.

Unfortunately, Google does usually not allow good comparisons between two countries as it does not translate the search term to their local languages. I therefore had to make separate analyses for each country and combined the data into a single graph. The data therefore does not show how much attention each country paid to refugees in absolute terms. As search terms, I used the words that were most frequently used in the media I studied: ‘Flüchtlinge’ for Austria and Germany, ‘vluchtelingen’ for The Netherlands and Belgium (thereby focusing solely on Belgium’s Flemish speaking part) and ‘refugees’ for the United Kingdom. As UK media also frequently used the term ‘migrants’, this could explain the peak in searches for refugees, as suddenly the migrant became a refugee. The peak, nevertheless, is similar (albeit for a bit shorter period) to the peak in newspaper attention that I witnessed, whereby I considered the story regardless of the terminology. I therefore do not think that this hypothesis has been of (significant) effect.
Next to the selection of stories in newspapers, there were also differences in the pictures that were chosen. Even a single story, such as that of Aylan Kurdi, could have different pictures in each paper.

![Google searches for the word 'refugees' in the respective languages](image)

*Figure 6* Per country Google searches for refugees (source: Google trends)

*Figure 7* shows how frequently the highlighted themes occurred in each newspaper. One can see clear differences. For example, in the rare occasions that a picture would turn up on the *Guardian*’s first page, this would almost exclusively show people during their journey, and in many cases children would play a special role. The *Volkskrant* and *De Standaard* would show relatively many pictures that emphasized the desperate conditions. This does not mean however that these newspapers were more ‘engaged’ with the refugees. In the case of Aylan, for example, the *FAZ* decided not to publish the picture because of ethical reasons. Such a policy might explain why there are relatively pictures of objects in the *FAZ*. Interestingly, there seem to be no apparent differences among the sensationalist *BILD* and *Telegraaf* when compared to the other, more serious, newspapers.
3.2. Choice of words

Once a story has made to a newspaper, it can be presented in various ways – this is what I have discussed as framing. An example of this can be seen in the research of Turkish scholar Yücebaş who researched how local newspapers in Gaziantep reported about refugees. He argued in a paper that there was a transition over time: “perceptions about Syrian refugees changed from ‘innocent and demanding guests’ to ‘economic opportunities’ [sic] as well as ‘economic rivals’ and ‘disobedient threats in peaceful neighbourhoods’.77 Another Turkish research found that there were differences among the newspapers: pro-government newspapers talked about refugees as ‘helpless’ and ‘should be taken care of, while Turkish pro-Assad newspapers talked about ‘terrorists’, ‘criminals’ and ‘burdens’ instead.78 It can therefore be concluded that “rather than informing and presenting the humanitarian aspects and realities of the refugees and war”, newspapers were more concerned “to produce and reproduce their own political and ideological discourses and present what their target groups expect to read”. 79 The political standing and attitudes of newspapers thus importantly influence how they cover news about Syrian refugees.80

80 Ibid., 238.
Framing can also occur in more subtle ways than in the Turkish example. Seemingly neutral terms can hide underlying opinions and ideologies. An often-discussed example is the difference between calling a person a ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’. Certain media, such as Al Jazeera, decided to stop using the word migrants for refugees. One of its editors wrote an explanation in a blog:

It is not hundreds of people who drown when a boat goes down in the Mediterranean, nor even hundreds of refugees. It is hundreds of migrants. It is not a person – like you, filled with thoughts and history and hopes – who is on the tracks delaying a train. It is a migrant. A nuisance.

His argument is not just that of framing but also of ‘othering’: using the term ‘migrant’ makes it easier to portray a refugee as ‘the Other’, thereby creating a distance and precluding the need for empathy. Even the UNHCR warned against using the word migrant:

Conflating refugees and migrants can have serious consequences for the lives and safety of refugees. Blurring the two terms takes attention away from the specific legal protections refugees require. It can undermine public support for refugees and the institution of asylum at a time when more refugees need such protection than ever before.

They warn that a word is not just a neutral label; it can even have real-world implications on the ‘lives and safety’. The discussion that emerged showed, however, that one cannot change one term for another. On the one hand there are those who say that it is not possible to distinguish the difference in any case and that we therefore should be pragmatic, while on the other hand, there are those who emphasize that differences matter and that newspapers carry a responsibility for using them appropriately. Regardless of whether a journalist uses one term or the other, this choice has been made consciously and can importantly influence how the story has been represented.

81 van Dijk, News as Discourse, 177.
3.3. Different country, different story

Semetko and Valkenburg concluded that news differs from country to country and that news frames are importantly influenced by the national and political culture and context. In chapter 3.1, I have shown that also in the case of refugees there has been significant differences in the amount of attention that was paid to the refugee crisis both by newspapers and by Google users. In this section, I will show that also content-wise there are significant differences among different countries. I chose to highlight Austria and the Netherlands, because they show almost opposing trends: whereas the former started to pay relatively less attention to refugee-related stories from the national perspective, the latter started to report increasingly about itself.

![Graph showing country concerned in refugee-themed articles in Dutch newspapers](image)

*Figure 8 Graph that shows about which country the Dutch refugee news is in the AD (N=12), Telegraaf (N=34), Trouw (N=13) and Volkskrant (N=53)*

*Figure 8* shows in which country stories on Dutch front page articles (primarily) took place. One can see that there was a significant shift over time: whereas in the first months most attention was paid to refugees in Greece, France (Calais) or Italy, this later changed to the Balkan (coded as a region), Hungary and Germany. The peak of stories that took place in ‘no country’ (e.g. about EU meetings or refugees in general), can be explained by the fact these numbers are relative and that there was almost no news in July. The most visible trend, however, is the emergence and later dominance of Netherlands-related news. In September this supressed almost all news from other regions. Interestingly, I did not come across a single article about the Netherlands in any of the non-Dutch papers. This shows that, although the

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86 Semetko and Valkenburg, “Framing European Politics,” 106.
news might have been very relevant for a Dutch audience, it was not considered equally important in other countries.

Figure 9 of Austria’s *Die Presse* shows a very different trend. Not only did the attention for national issues decrease over time, it also covered very different countries to start with. Whereas Dutch newspapers published mostly about Greece and France in the first months, *Die Presse* wrote about Hungary and the Balkans. In July, it also featured several stories about Slovakia, a country that did not appear once on a Dutch front page. Obviously, Austria – as a neighbouring country – is more interested in Slovakia than the Netherlands. This shows that also foreign news is not considered as important on each national agenda.

Most strikingly, however, over time Austria started paying relatively less attention to Austrian news. I would argue that this is because of two reasons. The first can be seen in figure 10: this graph is based on the same data, except that it shows the amount of attention relative to all its front pages, rather than only to those which contain an article about refugees. We can see that once other countries’ stories
became also news in Austria, this supplemented the existing Austria-situated news. The decreasing attention was thus only relative rather than absolute.

The second reason that could explain why initially Die Presse was reporting mostly about Austria (unlike Dutch newspapers about the Netherlands), can be seen in the statistics on incoming refugee flows. Figure 11 shows that in early 2014 both countries received almost an equal amount of asylum seekers, but that the inflow increased much sooner in Austria. This could be a good reason why there were already more stories about refugees before the summer: it became a problem earlier there than in the Netherlands. In this case, the media’s agenda thus reflected actual developments. Later, once refugees came to be perceived as a ‘European crisis’, the extra reporting just added up to the existent one. There was, however, almost no article about the Austrian situation in the newspapers of other countries, just like in the case of the Netherlands. National agenda’s thus do not easily influence those on an international level. Newspapers mostly remain a national matter.

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87 The data for this graph was obtained from Eurostat’s table called “migr_asydcfstq”. At the date when I accessed this data, 24-11-2015, the numbers were only accurate until the July 2015. Therefore, I do not show what happened in the months afterwards, which is also not necessary to show the initial divergence. I exported the data to Excel, so that I could present a graph in a similar style as the ones based on my own analysis.
4. The Role of Photographs

Pictures in newspapers are not just an illustration, but can have a determining influence in “what catastrophes and crises we pay attention to, what we care about, and ultimately what evaluations are attached to [them].” 88 They are a particularly powerful means of communication: whereas narratives help us to understand, pictures do something else – they haunt us. 89 Ask a person to recall a story of refugees that s/he has seen in the media, and many will remember particular pictures. The most famous of all of them, that of the dead boy Aylan on the beach, will even be analysed in a separate section in this thesis. However, there are many more photographed events (note: there are usually also multiple pictures of the same story) that continued to circulate beyond the initial story. For example, after a recording went viral in which a Hungarian television reporter tripped a Syrian football trainer and his son, both the father and the son were invited to live and work in Spain. In case of the football trainer, the recording of the event in the form of a photograph allowed it to become a story that could circulate and affect its audience emotions. The fact that the trainer was later invited to Spain shows that the picture had real-world effects. It is thus important to study how the crisis has been documented or represented in pictures.

Interestingly, just before Aylan’s picture shocked the world, scholar Marco Bohr wrote that media “run the risk of creating a photographic imbalance towards feel good stories, while the true horror of the [refugee] crisis remains rather unrepresented.” 90 He juxtaposed the pictures of the truck on the Austrian highway in which 71 refugees had been found dead with photographs of refugees with tears of joy in their eyes upon their arrival in Europe. He said the latter were powerful images that one will remember, whereas the Austrian truck was ‘almost banal in its simplicity’. He therefore concludes that:

The photographic juxtaposition between survival and death in the refugee crisis is very clear. Survivors have faces, they have emotions, they have stories and names. The deceased, on the other hand, remain anonymous. 91

89 Ibid., 80.
91 Ibid.
Even though this observation might have been true initially, the picture of Aylan gave a refugee a face, story and name only two days after the blog post. Most certainly, Aylan was not the first child to drown, so what made the newspapers decide to publish it this time? Was it the result of a ‘compassion fatigue’ – the “need to find ever more sensational titbits in stories to retain the attention of their audience”92 –, or was the picture so powerful all by itself? Another explanation could be that he did not drown in Austria, but further away. Susan Sontag writes that the closer the victims are to us, the more discrete the picture will be, whereas “[t]he more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying.”93 This leads us to question whether we would have seen Aylan’s picture if he had died on the beach of Calais.

Bohr was surprised with the sudden turn of events too, as he noted that two of his three observations had changed within 48 hours. He now stated, “a very strong argument could be made that only through actually publishing such horrific images does the mainstream media (and the people consuming this media) begin to appreciate the subjects’ status as refugee.”94 He thereby seemed to argue, in the words of Sontag, that pictures are not mere representations but a ‘species of rhetoric’: they reiterate, simplify, agitate and create an illusion of consensus.95 They create a consensus because they seem to function as ‘incontestable evidence’ that represents events as they actually were.96 It was incontestable, for example, what had happened to the small boy Aylan. The Times therefore already attempted to assess its impact just four days later: “[t]he horror of that image has done more than move public sentiment. It has shamed policymakers into considering the humanitarian catastrophe that is the predictable outcome of inaction.”97

However, pictures do not always speak for themselves and can be framed in various ways. For example, one could see the pictures of thousands of Germans welcoming refugees as a positive expression of hospitality, whereas Victor Orban uses the same pictures “to argue

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92 Moeller, Compassion Fatigue, 3.
93 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 63.
95 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 5.
that the refugee crisis was caused by the German decision to let the refugees in.”

This might be why Sontag talks about the ‘illusion of consensus’ of photos: pictures are used to invoke a hypothetical shared experience as if they were a piece of evidence, but others can have very different understandings. Sometimes the photographer can have purposefully induced a picture with a certain meaning by framing it, other times it is clear how an image is meant to be understood because of the accompanying caption or story. In this chapter, I will attempt to make these “fundamental processes explicit, render hidden assumptions visible.”

4.1. Aylan Kurdi

Many people immediately declared the photograph of Aylan to be iconic and stated that it would shift our views on refugees. Scholars would even write later that it was not until this picture that “people and governments in Europe began discussing and offering help.” Its ‘success’ might have had to do with the CNN-effect: continuous sympathetic reporting and the fact that it concerned negative news made people look towards politicians for a solution. However, as I have shown previously, the issue was already higher on the agenda in some countries than in others. For example, when asked why this picture had such a high impact, a German media ethicist responded: “it is because for quite some time we already got used to this theme and therefore this shocking image strikes a particular sensitivity.” It is however not possible to make the same argument for the United Kingdom, for example, where there had been much less reporting on the crisis and the audience was thus much less used to the refugee theme (at least through newspapers’ front pages). We therefore have to conclude that the picture hit a chord in all countries, regardless if they had seen much reporting on refugees.

The news value of the photograph might have to do more with its content than the sensitivity of the audience. Sontag writes that “for photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter

99 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 5–6.
100 Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory, 55.
conduct, they must shock.”\textsuperscript{104} This picture was indeed shocking, but its primary strength might also have been its simplicity. According to Moeller:

\begin{quote}
Didactic images can overload the senses. A single child at risk commands our attention and prompts our action. But one child, and then another, and another, and another and on and on and on is too much. A crowd of people in danger is faceless. Numbers alone can numb.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

In this case, we just saw a single child, one that we could empathise with, whereas this could have been more difficult with a crowd. Moeller writes that particularly photographs of child victims keep the compassion fatigue longer at bay: in the case of adult victims, we could still question their innocence, but it is difficult to justify the death of a child.\textsuperscript{106} She also writes that we do not want to be confronted with pictures of dead children continuously; we prefer to see pictures of children that can still be helped. This conclusion raises the question whether a similarly ‘iconic’ picture as that of Aylan would receive the same attention in the future.

Another factor that could have contributed to its ‘success’ might have been the imperfection of the photograph: there is no aesthetic composition except for the boy who peacefully ‘sleeps’. Sontag writes that pictures of suffering people should not be beautiful, as that would draw attention from the subject to the medium itself.\textsuperscript{107} In this case, the photographs were simple and all attention was drawn to the boy. It is interesting to note hereby that there is not one single Aylan picture that became famous, but there were multiple pictures taken of him and each media outlet decided to publish a different one. There is no such thing as ‘the’ iconic picture of the boy on the beach. However, the fact that there were multiple pictures might have added to the authenticity of the picture: it proves that it has not been manipulated or taken out of context.

Moving beyond the actual content of the picture, it leads us to question issues such as whether we actually have the ‘right’ to watch such pictures if they portray real victims. Sontag writes that we continue to display pictures of others oblivious of the considerations that deter us from displaying similar pictures of our own victims; the Other is “regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees.”\textsuperscript{108} She notes that one day however friends or family might come across the pictures, if they have not already done so. This is exactly what

\begin{flushleft}104 Sontag, \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others}, 72. \\
105 Moeller, \textit{Compassion Fatigue}, 36. \\
106 Ibid., 110. \\
107 Sontag, \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others}, 68. \\
108 Ibid., 65. \end{flushleft}
happened in this case: Aylan’s father told journalists that he felt abused and did not want to talk “about that picture on which the whole world has seen my little boy”. The *Volkskrant* journalist who conducted the interview with Aylan’s father expressed the double feeling that, on the one hand, you want to tell a story that serves a higher purpose, but that by doing so you profit from someone’s suffering. News reports are about real people, so interviews or pictures can have real consequences for them. If mass media’s news would be constructed in a more participatory way, those affected might decide that Aylan’s picture was not worth the higher purpose or they might believe that another story would serve the same purpose much better. Such arguments have indeed transformed the field of Communication about Development, which has switched from a top-down mobilization for development discourse to the notion that only participatory development can be effective.

Now the pictures are often based on what the audience wants to see rather than what those affected want the audience to see. As a result, horrific pictures are shown that do not even serve any purpose: many people actually wish to see something gruesome. For example, many people slow down on the highway when they pass a car crash. This does not necessarily have to be voyeurism: some people will experience this as a sincere form of empathy. Similarly, many people felt that the pictures deserved to be published; not just as a wake-up-call, but also because the boy deserved to be remembered. A hefty discussion unfolded however, and all media outlets took different decisions on what was the right thing to do. For example, the BBC chose to publish only one picture, where Aylan’s head was hidden behind the police officer carrying him. Other newspapers gave an explicit justification for their decision to publish it, thereby turning to it into an (almost) political statement. In the days after, the Ombudsmen of the newspapers would reflect on these decisions. Did they not just publish it for their own

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110 Volkskrant Ombudsvrouw, “De Rauwe Versie van de Vader van Alan.”


113 Volkskrant Ombudsvrouw, “De Rauwe Versie van de Vader van Alan.”


115 For example, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/if-these-extraordinarily-powerful-images-of-a-dead-syrian-child-washed-up-on-a-beach-don-t-change-10482757.html
benefit and should it be considered “pornography of suffering”? Even though it might be unquestionable that the picture was ‘iconic’, its publication was not inevitable.

After all this respect to the victim, it was interesting to see how certain media outlets reframed the story of Aylan a couple of days later. After an interview with his father, doubts were raised about whether the father was a ‘real’ refugee or a fortune-seeker instead. He supposedly wanted to move to Europe in order to get new teeth. Whereas the impact of Aylan’s picture was due to the little boy’s unquestionable innocence, newspapers now started to receive op-eds stating that the little boy only died “as a consequence of his father’s acting and therefore does not deserve to be presented as a compassion story on the front page of a newspaper.”

We see similar doubts about communication about development: the general audience questions whether “the distribution of aid and […] if it was going to the right people.” It could be said that similar doubts started the discussion about Aylan’s father. By leaving out the fact that he had wanted new teeth because ISIS had pulled them out (allegedly), some media turned the victim in the perpetrator and the father of the drowned child into an egoist. Even if a picture can tell more than a thousand words, the words still matter.

4.2. Highlighted themes

Each newspaper publishes different pictures on its front page. This does not only reflect different selection criteria for the news, but it also shows differences in the newspapers’ perspectives. Nevertheless, I also recognized several common patterns or themes in what kind of pictures would be shown, how these picture were taken, what they portrayed and how they were framed. I chose to highlight the following themes because of their theoretical relevance or because they seemed to fit the dominant discourse. The themes do not necessarily mirror what the journalists intended with the picture. It should therefore rather be seen as a useful starting point to discuss some of the possible framing and agenda-setting that might have influenced their choices.


117 For example, Volkskrant Ombudsvrouw, “De Rauwe Versie van de Vader van Alan” (own translation).

118 Dogra, Representations of Global Poverty, 159.

One of the most visible themes is that of children: they play an important role in 37% of the pictures in which we can see refugees. I already discussed the example of Aylan, but there are many other (less shocking) examples where they play a prominent role in a picture. The editorial interest in pictures of children is not unique to the portrayal of refugees: journalists, INGO’s and politicians have often used pictures of children as a ‘news hook’, because “the other option is often to be completely ignored.” Dogra also found children to be the most popular character in INGOs’ messages: they make up 42% of all characters. This often leads to double feelings, because they are effective at capturing the attention of an audience but one also wants to protect children. Among the pictures of children, there were still many variations: sometimes the child was the primary subject, sometimes they figured prominently in a story about something else.

An example of a child playing a side role can be seen in figure 13: it shows a queue of refugees waiting at a Dutch train station to continue their journey. The story is about them, but there is – very visibly – a child standing in the foreground with a teddy bear in her hand. Is she put there on purpose and if so, with what intention? She is the only child in the line, except for a smaller child that is being carried by a man. Interestingly, she is one of the few people looking directly into the camera: it seems as if she is directly appealing to us, the viewer. Is she just a detail on the photo or is she conveying a message? In other cases, it is even more obvious that the child is just there in order because they make a nice picture without carrying a deeper meaning. This can be said about figures 14 and 15.

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These pictures are a joyful change in comparison to the more serious pictures, but there is no news relevance and they are unrelated to the articles that accompany them. The fact that they are children is most likely the only reason why these pictures even appear on the first page at all. Moeller remarked that non-white people are usually pictured in large groups with the chief exception of children: “all children, no matter their race, are typically photographed alone or with only one other person—usually the mother.” 122 The fact that we see a picture of individuals instead of a group in these examples could thus explained by the fact that they are children. This assumption is confirmed by my own findings: whenever a photograph is about children, they are not shown in a (large) group in 88% of the cases (N=49, all newspapers). This number is significantly lower if we look at all pictures with refugees: there only 46% is shown in a way that pays more attention to the individual.

122 Moeller, Compassion Fatigue, 68.
At other times, pictures of children are used with a specific purpose. For example, children can be used to show ‘weak victims’ that are in need of help. Susan Moeller talks about a ‘hierarchy of innocence’ in which children are the most deserving of compassion.\(^\text{123}\) Children have filled the vacuum of who is indisputably innocent that was left in the post-Cold War world: earlier there were divides between us/them and good/bad and we knew with whom we had to sympathize, but now absolute innocence can be only be established immediately with children.\(^\text{124}\) Figures 16 and 18 are clear examples of pictures that fulfil this purpose.

Children can carry a message that cannot be conveyed with pictures of massive groups crossing the borders: they bring the abstract refugee crisis back to the individual level, to the weakest and most emotionally appealing. The pictures fit the captions (translated: “we help” and “who gives them shelter?” respectively) perfectly. Children are both innocent and the symbol for a country’s future; their pictures are “so powerful that it short-circuits reasoned thought.”\(^\text{125}\) It is thus not a coincidence that newspapers are full of their pictures.

The previous two photographs directly appealed on us – host societies – for help and compassion. However, there are also many pictures of children during the journey: the accompanying stories are usually then not about the children themselves, but children’s’ pictures are used to underline the horror of it all. Moeller writes that children are one of the few ways to attract attention in today’s competitive news environment for issues that are “considered to be overexposed, merely boring, or of only tangential interest to an audience.”\(^\text{126}\)

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 38–39.
\(^{125}\) Ibid., 39.
\(^{126}\) Ibid., 37.
This has led children to become projections of adult agendas. *Figures 17 and 18* are examples in which children only play an instrumental role.

Both pictures are accompanied by stories of which these children are not the primary subjects, which tell about the circumstances in which the photo was taken. Unlike Aylan, these children therefore remain anonymous and are only used to tell a story that transcends their individual horrors.

In similar ways, children can also bring joy and make feel-good news. For example, in *figure 19* where a German policeman offers his cap to a small boy or *figure 20* where refugee children thank the German national football league for supporting them:

In the end, happy children might be more effective at capturing our attention than horror pictures. A study compared people that saw a picture of a positive picture of a child with those who saw a negative one in a fundraising campaign of a NGO: the former would give
significantly more money than the latter.  It is much easier to sympathize with these kind of pictures and one is much more inclined to look at them instead of quickly ‘protecting’ ourselves by looking away. At the same time, we should be careful of not over-using pictures of children. For example, Dogra mentions that NGOs have been criticized for infantilizing the developing world by their overrepresenting children, as children carry connotations of “paternalism, ignorance and under-development”. The developing world is portrayed different from us as if it were “inhabited mainly by children and women and usually without men” The same argument cannot be made for Syrian refugees as it is clear that children only make up a small percentage, but we should be aware of the possible consequences for this over-representation. For example, how will it affect our understanding if only children are used to portray the innocence of refugees?

**Journey**

The most common theme in pictures is the journey: about 63% of the refugee-related pictures were taken during the journey. They were used in various settings. For example, the accompanying article of figure 21 is not about the picture, but the photograph is merely used to illustrate the refugee crisis. In other cases, such as figure 22, the article was about the picture, so the picture itself was ‘news’. During the five-month period that I analysed, newspapers in my sample showed journey-related pictures most frequently in June (86%) and September (76%). It was interesting to note that over time, both the photographs and the content of articles would change as refugees moved westwards. For example, in October picture of boats in Lesbos (figure 23) became rather an exception whereas many of such photographs had appeared in June and July. The journey theme thereby seemed to be less static than that of children: the pictures would match what was currently happening (‘the news’).

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129 Ibid., 32.  
130 Percentage of editions of the total amount of newspaper editions that had a refugee-related stories on its first page which concerned the journey.
‘The journey’ might be a broad theme, but I discovered various sub-themes. One of them being that of seemingly endless flows of refugees. As can be seen in figures 25, 26 and 27 this theme gives an impression of the magnitude of the events. They are also examples of what has been discussed earlier, that ‘the Other’ is usually portrayed in groups. It has to be noted that these three photographs were all taken in Hungary and published on the 5th of September, but examples can also be found on other days (just not as massive).

On all three pictures, the refugees are looking towards the camera: possibly implying that they are coming in our direction. Figure 26 is cropped in such a way that we lack all context; it has
been framed in the literal and original meaning of the term. Its caption only explains that these refugees are moving on foot to Austria, but it does not explain where in Hungary or in what situation the picture was taken exactly. None of the captions explains whether there is, for example, such a big flow all the way from Greece to Germany or if the pictures were taken at a spot where people were stopped but could now move on. The absence of this information contributes to a certain understanding of the events.

In some pictures, the framing is more explicit than in others. Figure 28 is an extreme example, where the headline is larger than the actual picture. The photograph has been cropped in order to create a panorama effect: all irrelevant environmental details are cut (grass, sky) so that refugees fill the entire image.

Figure 28 BILD, 16-10-2015.

If the viewer was wondering how to interpret this event, the headline explains that this is not a single occurrence but that it is ‘a very normal day’. BILD uses such a combination of text and picture more often so that both reinforce each other and communicate a very clear message. This picture is yet another example of the ‘endless flow’-subtheme. The theme also moved along with the refugees, as by October it showed the flow in Germany.
Another subtheme of the journey is that of pictures taken at the various border in Europe. It is interesting to note how accustomed we became to watching these pictures, while borders had practically disappeared in the Schengen area in the last two decades.

In figure 29, where police officers are guiding a group of refugees across the border, there seems to be again an endless (emphasized by the blur) group of refugees. Figure 30 shows a physical border separating the small number of police officers from a group of refugees that does not even fit the picture. The viewer who pays closer attention sees that it is an improvised border as it has been placed on the middle of the highway, but this fact is not mentioned in the caption. Figure 31 shows a collage of border pictures. The newspaper thereby also identified borders as a common theme.

Objects

Even though all pictures in my sample have to do with refugees, about 17% of these have an object taking up a central role. Objects can show, for example, the magnitude of the refugee crisis in other ways: figures 32 and 33 do so by showing the boats or life jackets left behind on the beach after the sea journey.

One of the reasons for choosing such pictures could be the compassion fatigue, when newspapers need other images to draw people’s attention. Objects can also serve as symbols or portray something more abstract. Figure 34 shows the result of violence of native Germans
against a refugee centre. The accompanying article is not about this particular event, but about the trend. Figure 35 illustrates the formal arrival procedure in Germany.

A particular series of objects became a news theme on its own right: that of smartphones. Although in my sample smartphones only appeared in the three photographs, it has become a widely discussed issue. The article accompanying figure 36 is mostly informative: it is a reflection about how refugees rely on their smartphones just like any other person in the modern world. Figure 37 has a very different caption that rhetorically asks, “Why do they all walk with such a nice smartphone?” By using the words ‘they’, ‘nice’ and ‘smartphone’ it sounds like a judgement, as if ‘they’ are not supposed to have such fancy phones. It does not fit in our picture that ‘the Other’, a poor refugee dependent on our graciousness, might have a phone just like us. An online blogger writes, “smartphone usage gets understood as a factor that refutes an individual's refugee status.”

Nevertheless, it seems as if the AD is merely trying to answer a question of its readers. In that case, earlier pictures – possibly without explanation – of refugees with phones had raised such questions that the newspapers now found it necessary to answer them on its front page. The earlier pictures then have been very powerful in shaping and influencing people’s perceptions.

Figure 36 FAZ, 20-09-2015. Figure 37 AD, 12-09-2015. Figure 38 20 Minutes, 16-10-2015

131 Williams, “Stop Shaming Syrian Refugees for Using Cellphones.”
Conditions

About 13% of the pictures emphasize the misery refugees have to go through. It is a very interesting theme, because its ‘news value’ does not relate to a particular event; the most horrifying pictures can therefore be selected. All three pictures below have grey surroundings and show people in the mud. Figures 39 and 40 also show the familiar children theme (almost 30% of the conditions-images have children as its primary subject). In these images, we see children with their moms. We are likely to feel more compassion for these children than for the people in figure 41. Except for the children, the people on the latter image are also still moving, possibly to a better place, whereas people seem stuck on the former.

The conditions upon arrival in Western European are not necessarily much better. This can be seen on figures 42 and 43. They are notably already more colourful, but the people are still faced with harsh circumstances. It is also interesting to note that in none of these pictures we can see any help. The refugees are literally left on their own. This is also how these pictures are framed. Most notably in the case of figure 43, one needs to read the caption in order to know that these people are about to receive food from volunteers. The image thus purposefully leaves out these volunteers and focuses only on the refugees. If one would not have read this explanation, it could even be seen as a photograph of people locked up behind a fence desperately begging for food. These choices matter for the first impressions, even if the context is explained in the caption.
Individualized people like us

Whereas usually (about 54% of the cases) we see refugees in groups or without a focus on the individuals, there are also photographs (12%) where almost the contrary has been done: they picture refugees in such a way that we cannot see the differences with other people in the West. These pictures usually accompany articles that write positively about acceptance and inclusion. In this theme, refugees are no longer understood as ‘the backward Other’ but rather as persons like us. This could also explain why the focus in their accompanying articles is often on individuals rather than groups. Dogra identified a similar theme in INGOs’ messages that carry the humanistic or cosmopolitan idea of ‘one family of man’ and ‘world citizens’. Nevertheless, this theme can be presented in various ways.

Figure 44 (‘Red carpet for migrants’) frames the refugee crisis in a larger discussion. It is not necessarily about refugees, but it is a direct consequence of the on-going events. Figures 44 and 45 still ‘use’ the people without paying attention to them as subjects. It is therefore interesting to see that even in such a situation, individuals are shown. Figure 46 was attached to a story about ‘the suppressed refugees’ (Afghans) and featured the photographed family in particular. It is interesting to see that this story made up the entire front page and that the editors

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decided to tell it by the example of a family, thereby stressing that each single refugee is a person, rather than presenting a graph with statistics.

Even though all articles about refugees are – ultimately – about individuals, we have seen that such an emphasis is far from obvious and therefore worth mentioning. Figures 47, 48 and 49 are more typical of the imagery of refugees upon their arrival in Western Europe.

Figure 47 Telegraaf, 3-10-2015.  Figure 48 Die Presse, 1-8-2015.  Figure 49 Die Presse, 23-10-2015.

We see no faces in any of these pictures. By the context, we know that we are looking at refugees but we do not know who they are. The articles are not about the people in the picture but about the circumstances or policies in general. Therefore, it seems that it does not relevant to know who these people are. The lack of attention can sometimes also be seen in how the accompanying articles address the motives of the refugees. For example, the headline of figure 47 states that the shelter was “below their standards”. These people walked away once they learned that they would have to sleep in tents in the forest. However, the newspaper does not show these supposedly bad conditions; it rather shows that these refugees turn their back to the camera, and thereby to ‘us’ and to ‘our’ offer (the shelter where they were supposed to stay).

There are differences among the newspapers regarding how much attention they pay to individual refugees. In The Guardian and BILD we can see the ‘individuals like us’-theme in respectively 16% and 20% of the cases, whereas in all other newspapers this is around 10%. For example, Telegraaf barely even pays attention to individual refugees. The first time it did so was on the 12th of October, after a family suddenly turned up at their office after coincidentally being dropped off there by a human trafficker. The Guardian was the first to do so at June 10th.133 The accompanying article in Telegraaf only mentions the name of the father. It is written as “Rashed A.”: a form of writing that is commonly used to protect the privacy of

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133 It was the first to do so after the 1st of June: other newspapers might have published stories of individual pictures earlier. The fact that The Guardian published in June is therefore merely to emphasize the difference with Telegraaf.
criminal offenders, but the article does not explain why the surname was not written in full in this case. The accompanying picture (figure 50) only shows the family from the back, except for a small part of the mother’s face. It seems as if the focus of the story is more the newspaper’s office than the refugee family itself.

Confrontation

In about 14% of the pictures both ‘the Self’ and ‘the Other’ are shown as refugees encounter European authorities or the local population. Except for the rare pictures of refugees being welcomed by the local population, these encounters are almost always violent – I will therefore discuss this theme as ‘confrontation’ (either in actions or in words). Figures 52, 53 and 54 show violent confrontations with (border) police. The pictures carry ambiguous meanings: is the violence justified? This is especially the case in figure 54 where a policeman is pulling a young family on the Hungarian rail track.

These pictures were possibly intended to arouse such ambiguous feelings: they do not show who is right or who is wrong, however it seems as if they speak out against the violence. They thereby convey a sense of urgency on the viewer, regardless of his political orientation. Most likely, the pictures are chosen for this purpose, because if one watches a video of the event on
the Hungarian rails, this particular moment seems more of an exception than a pattern. When watching the video it is much easier to judge whose side you sympathise with; the power of the picture thus lies precisely in the fact that it can be framed in such ambiguous ways.

The confrontation with local people is condemned equally in each newspaper. Even though this confrontation concerns groups of people, it is interesting to note that several newspapers highlighted individual persons. This is something that we would not see with refugees, unless the story was about these individuals or when it concerned children. Furthermore, as this concerns (violent) incidents, it is questionable whether it is fair to display people, as has been done in figures 57 and 59, as this could be understood to be a violation of their privacy.

None of these pictures is self-explanatory, except for the Pegida demonstration where we can see a banner. None of the pictures shows the confrontation between refugees and hosts societies itself, nor do any of the headlines refer explicitly to the refugee problem. Nevertheless, it could be argued that at the time when they were published, people might have understood them without further explanation due to their familiarity with the theme. Newspapers were very explicit, however, in their judgements: BILD talks about ‘a disgrace’ and AD refers to ‘them’ (talking about the people of the host population) who could ‘let of steam’.

Politicians

The refugee crisis is not only about refugees themselves. In 42.5% of the pictures without refugees (N=40), we see the politicians of Western European countries. Dogra also studied this theme in charities’ messages: there we would see leaders or celebrities of the developed world in 3% of the messages. As the refugee crisis has much more to do with the developed world than humanitarian issues (which could be seen by the large portion of news about national events), it is not surprising to see relatively many pictures that were related to national politics.

This did not mean however, that all refugee-related articles about politics would have a picture of the politicians involved. Their photographs were rather used when it concerned an interview or when the article discussed specific acts or policies from a politician. Figures 60, 61 and 62 are examples of this theme.

It is interesting to note that that none of the three pictures, shows the subjects of the political policies – the refugees. Only in figure 62 we might see some refugees in the distance, as this picture is also taken at a relevant location (on the border). The other two only show heads of government taking care of the crisis in their offices or on the road. It is interesting how in all three pictures, the politicians are portrayed alone: as if they are making decisions solely by themselves. Figure 62 almost gives the feeling of an ‘ivory tower’: a ‘field visit’ is an observation from a distance.

Politicians and their policies can also become a symbol. For example, figures 63 and 64 show a European Commissioner and a Dutch politician, whose views are framed in Merkel’s “Wir schaffen das”-discourse. It is not written whether these two people actually used these words, or if the editor decided that this would be an appropriate summary of the content. In any case, it is interesting to see how such a frame is (re)used. Figure 65 also uses such symbolism, having “the refugee march to Merkel” as a caption to the picture. The refugees are no longer walking to Germany: they are going to Merkel who has said, “We will manage it”. Figure 66 shows the German chancellor in an almost extreme as a symbol for a certain policy. She is only a symbol for Germans but – judging by the Arabic script – also for the refugees.
5. Conclusion

We have all seen pictures of Syrians coming to Europe. The pictures that are shown in newspapers depend on what the news editor thinks is important or what s/he wants to convey to the paper’s audience. One will see different images in the various European countries and each kind of newspaper. I have argued that the choices of editors can have important consequences: for their audience, the victims and their families, but it can also impact politics. It is therefore surprising to see how little newspaper reporting has been affected by discussions in the field of Communication for Development. There have been extensive discussions in ComDev about the usage of certain photographs, but I did not notice the impact of its ‘lessons’ in newspapers, even if I believe that these arguments are just as relevant for traditional media.

I believe that representations in newspapers should be subjected to even more scrutiny than those of INGOs, as they have a much larger audience and influence on societies’ constructed realities. Furthermore, I would argue that newspapers have fewer incentives to report ethically: whereas INGOs report both upwards (to their donors) and downwards (to the beneficiaries), newspapers communicate mostly to their readers. This does not automatically mean that they do not feel a similar responsibility to the people about which they report: for example, the discussions about the publication of Aylan’s picture shows their sincere commitment to ethical standards. As could be read from the interviews with Aylan’s father, however, the pictures would never have been published if newspapers would have to be more accountable to those directly involved. I therefore argue that, on the one hand, newspapers need to learn from ComDev’s lessons while, on the other hand, ComDev should pay more attention to traditional media so that media will have to respond and can develop itself.

In my research I have highlighted some visual themes that particularly struck me. Some of the photographs showed a surprising similarity to traditional – in case of NGO reporting much criticized – patterns. For example, in European literature and art, it has been common to portray ‘the Other’ in groups while paying little attention to member’s individual differences. I have shown that also refugees were often portrayed in large groups, but that a clear exception to this were pictures of children (often with their mother), just like has been the case traditionally. Pictures of children, in turn, are often used merely to draw attention to an issue. Dorgra showed that also in INGO messages we see children most often, but that they thereby run the risk of being used to project adult agendas. The overrepresentation of refugee children might have consequences on the audience who, for example, might feel manipulated when it
only sees cute little children while it actually fears terrorists who cross the border daily. The large amount of pictures with young men, on the other hand, does actually mirror reality. During my research period, however, I found this to be such an obvious fact that I did not even consider to study it (clearly showing my bias). 135

Most of the times the media did not reflect upon the pictures it showed, but there has been quite some discussion on pictures of refugees with smartphones. Whereas these photographs barely appeared in my sample, the fact that AD dedicated an opening story to it shows that it was a topic that was interesting to many of its readers nevertheless. Some people probably had the same feelings as with development aid: that their help and empathy should be directed at the ‘right’ people who actually deserved it. People with smartphones, however, did not seem to need our support. I have argued that the image of refugees possessing smartphones did not fit in our constructed difference between ‘the Self’ and ‘the Other’: the refugees were no longer any different from us and therefore no longer in need of our support. I also identified a theme in the pictures that aimed to show the contrary: that we are all part of one cosmopolitan family. This is a theme that also Dogra frequently found in INGO’s messages. As both the themes of inclusion and that of smartphones show refugees to be ‘just like us’, the differences in these pictures are minimal. Nevertheless, they carry very different messages that will in turn impact people’s understanding and attitudes. I have argued that news editors have to make important decisions whether we will continue to see pictures that emphasize differences or those that show commonalities. Their choices will influence many people’s minds and – indirectly – refugees and politics.

The starting point for this research has been the extraordinary amount of attention that has been paid to this crisis. I have argued that this has been due to the fact that a situation far away (the global) suddenly became local. Even though refugees became a true European ‘problem’, the media continued to play an important role as most people would not meet with refugees themselves. People only learned about the events from the images that they saw in the media. I would argue that the Western mediascape might in turn have global consequences: take a look at – for example – the large amounts of development aid that have been promised to Syria’s neighbouring countries. This means that the European crisis has consequences beyond its borders as well. Furthermore, the photographs that Western audiences were

135 I would argue that it is fair to say that it emerged as a theme on its own right only after the events in Cologne on 2015’s New Year’s Eve. Before it was a known fact that most refugees were young men, but after this it was continuously stressed and much discussed.
confronted with might shape their understanding of humanitarian crises, aid and development elsewhere in the world too. This makes it even more important to critically look at newspapers from a ComDev perspective.

I did see however significant differences among newspapers. I used the sensationalist-serious dichotomy, across which all newspapers had a particular way of covering the events. Furthermore, I noticed that it matters in which country a newspaper is published: most of the news was either about the country itself or it discussed foreign events from a national perspective. I have even argued that we might not have seen the picture of Aylan if had he died on Calais’ beach: as we usually feel uncomfortable showing shocking pictures from locations near us (take a look at, for example, the very ‘clean’ pictures of the truck full of suffocated refugees in Austria). Regardless of these differences, however, the themes of my analysis appeared in all of them. By repeating all of these pictures and showing new ones to the reader of this thesis, I will added another tiny bit to our constructed social world.
Bibliography


