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Loners, Criminals, Mothers: The Gendered Misrecognition of Refugees in the British Tabloid News Media

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Abstract

Misrecognition has been conceptualised as an act of recognition that is 'distorted' or 'incomplete', and can be used to capture the differentiated experience of social and/or political phenomena by different individuals. In this article, we apply the concept of misrecognition to the visual representation of refugees in the British tabloid news media. The article presents a novel two-step analysis which combines visual analysis of a representative sample of British tabloid newspaper coverage of refugees with an analysis of a representative sample of this coverage by two focus groups of tabloid newspaper readers. In taking this approach, we capture the role of audiences in constructing the meanings of the images, a perspective largely absent from the literature to date. The findings show that a gendered misrecognition shapes the visual construction of refugees by this media and its audience, with women more likely to be recognised as refugees and (mis)recognised as vulnerable mothers, and men more likely to be misrecognised as loners and criminals and less likely to be recognised as refugees. Reflecting on the findings, we argue that misrecognition is a critical concept in understanding the politics of marginalisation constructed by the tabloid news media.

Keywords

asylum, gender, misrecognition, refugees, tabloid news media, visual analysis

Introduction

We argue that 'misrecognition' is a critical concept in capturing and understanding the visual construction of refugees in the tabloid news media. To put forward this argument,

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we present the findings of a two-step analysis of a dataset of 414 images drawn from British tabloid reporting on refugees which involved a visual content analysis of the images, followed by the analysis of a sample of these images by two focus groups of tabloid newspaper readers. In adopting this approach, we capture the role of the audience in constructing the meaning of the images, a perspective missing from the literature on the visual construction of refugees.

This two-step analysis reveals a gendered misrecognition of refugees by the British tabloid news media and its audience. Men experience misrecognition as invading criminals and with regards to refugee status, while women experience misrecognition as vulnerable mothers. In both cases, age is a crucial intersecting dynamic affecting the shape of this misrecognition, with gender only a significant factor affecting the portrayal of adults. The article argues that misrecognition as a concept captures the harms of these constructions, as well as the power relations between the subjects of the images, those capturing the image, and those consuming it.

Refugees and the tabloid news media

The public relies on the news media for information about migration, particularly when they have limited day-to-day contact with migrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum (Saxton, 2003), yet media coverage of migration is deeply politicised (McNeil and Karstens, 2018). The tabloid news media in particular holds significant sway over public perceptions surrounding migration, given its large readership which has increased with the help of digital technology enabling new generations of readers to access content online (Cheregi, 2015), and the advent of social media meaning that news stories are shared in a few clicks (Lewis and Molyneux, 2018).

Central to the aims of the tabloid news media is the generation of profit, and consequently, tabloid newspapers frequently rely on presenting sensationalist, emotionally charged news stories to grab the reader's attention (Greenslade, 2005). The public reliance on the tabloid news media for information, coupled with that media's focus on producing sensationalist news, has been shown to have the effect of promoting 'fear and moral panic', leading to 'the widespread expectation that dangers and threats are everywhere' (Croteau and Hoynes, 2014: 17).

Refugees are defined, legally, as individuals fleeing persecution in need of safety and protection. However, a substantial body of research shows that refugees are constructed and re-constructed through media, political and public perceptions of 'refugeeness'. This process has resulted in a dominant view of refugees seen through negative stereotypes (Nagarajan, 2013). Tabloid newspapers are a prominent source of this negative construction. They present refugees as dangerous by 'othering' them as threats (Philo et al., 2013) and dehumanising them through the use of statistics and the language of illegality, silencing their voices (Sigona, 2018). This leads to refugees being scapegoated for a range of social problems such as crime and economic insecurity, and this portrayal is capitalised upon by governments in order to justify exclusion. This process is racialised, with refugees of colour more likely to be treated negatively by the media (Park, 2008), and gendered, with women more likely to be portrayed as victims and men as a threat (Gray and Franck, 2019). In addition, tabloid newspapers over-report on issues related to refugees

and people seeking asylum, meaning that the audience is inundated with negative stories (Carter, 2013).

In contrast to text-based analyses, the visual aspects of tabloid news reporting on refugee-related stories – and in particular the ways in which audiences construct the meanings of the images – had been less extensively explored until relatively recently. When an image of a toddler named Alan Kurdi, who was found dead on a Turkish beach in September 2015 having drowned attempting to reach European shores, was widely published across news media, it stimulated significant academic interest in the visual representation of refugees. Binder and Jaworsky's (2018) analysis of images of Alan Kurdi shows that such images have a profound effect on public attitudes towards refugees (see also Adler-Nissen et al., 2020; Mortensen, 2017), and wider research has shown the power of gendered visual portrayals of refugees in silencing women's experiences (Amores et al., 2020) and criminalising men (Banks, 2011), as well as the mainstreaming of such imagery across news media (Wilmott, 2017).

Our aim in this article is to contribute to this growing literature, examining how British tabloid newspapers visually construct refugees, placing particular emphasis on the role of the audience in constructing meaning. Images are seen as powerful because they claim to depict reality (Rose, 2016), yet this reality is constructed by a photographer deciding which parts of a scene to capture, at what moment, and through which frame (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015). Further aspects of the scene may be excluded when the photographer or editor chooses which photograph to present to the audience and how to present it (Olesen, 2020). Finally, while images are produced to portray a 'preferred reading' that an audience can easily understand (Batziou, 2011), audiences may adopt or contest the producers' preferred reading to varying extents depending on their sociodemographic profile (Rose, 2016) and pre-conceived ideas (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015).

Misrecognition

In order to analyse the visual representation of refugees in tabloid newspapers, and in particular the role of the audience in constructing meanings, we adopted a conceptual framework rooted in 'misrecognition'. Following Thompson and Yar (2011), we understand misrecognition as a 'resource for understanding substantive domains of political and social experience' (p. 171). While non-recognition entails the absence of recognition of a person as a human being, misrecognition 'entails an act of recognition that is "distorted" or "incomplete"' (Yar, 2011: 129) and can be understood as an inadequate response to the 'normatively relevant features'[1] of a person or group of people (Laitinen, 2012: 26).

The extent to which such dynamics can be objectively known is the subject of debate. Misrecognition is understood both as a subjective experience resulting in psychological harm to the individual (Honneth, 2004; Taylor, 1992) and a more objectively observable experience of 'institutionalised patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem' (Fraser, 1997: 280; see also Zurn, 2003). Our central focus in this article is on the systematic misrecognition of equal status as it plays out in our dataset while still acknowledging that misrecognition is experienced at the level of the individual. In other words, our interest is in identifying the patterns of

misrecognition (the act of labelling someone as somehow unworthy of respect or esteem) affecting refugees in the tabloid news media.

Misrecognition is central to Bourdieusian social theory, where it is understood as a feature of taken-for-granted power relations which reproduce socio-economic inequalities (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; see also Webb, 2015). The media holds 'symbolic power' which can become misrecognised (rendered subconscious) as part of those power relations structuring society (Crossley, 2001). While we draw on this conceptualisation of the media in our analysis, we also seek to expose the role of misrecognition in the micro-political relations of power which structure the ways in which audiences construct meaning from images presented in the media. As such, we understand the role of the media to be one of symbolic power, shaping the everyday social interactions and taken-for-granted power relations in society. We understand the media to shape, at a deeper level, our participants' interpretations of the images they were shown in the focus groups, beyond those specific images.

Misrecognition of refugees is of fundamental importance because it can shape the construction of state obligations towards them. The 'categorical fetishism' through which 'migrant' and 'refugee' are constructed does not capture the 'messy social realities' of contemporary migration (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018: 50), but has come to exist as a dominant typology through which to separate out 'good' and 'bad' forms of mobility, and consequently, those deserving of help. For example, the categorisation of those crossing the Mediterranean Sea on boats in search of asylum in Europe as 'disguised economic migrants' has been central to the European Union's (EU) restrictive immigration and asylum policies (Sigona, 2018: 457). Furthermore, such misrecognition affects asylum claims processes where dominant constructions of asylum seekers as fraudulent affect the likelihood of their claim being successful (McKinnon, 2009).

We focus in particular on the *gendered* misrecognition of refugees; that is, misrecognition informed by value judgements–based essentialist notions of the feminine and the masculine (Skeggs, 2001). The literature points to the critical importance of gender in the construction of refugeeness. In particular, the gender of the refugee determines the extent to which they are viewed as 'genuine'. As Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017: 1169) argue, men[2] are visually portrayed as fraudulent and dangerous, as 'young men with dark skin who appear to trespass "our" own space'. Often they are vilified as people smugglers or migrant queue jumpers. Women, on the other hand, and particularly mothers with children, are depicted as victims (Sirriyeh, 2018). What is the role of gendered misrecognition in audience constructions of refugees from their visual portrayal in the tabloid media?

Method

A two-step research process was undertaken, based on Barthes' two stages of visual analysis: the denotive (what is being depicted) and the connotive (the ideas and values expressed) (Barthes, 1981). First, a content analysis of images used in British tabloid news coverage of refugees was completed, and second, two focus groups were held with tabloid newspaper readers analysing and discussing a sample of these images.

Three British tabloid newspapers were selected for analysis, on the basis that each had a high readership, and that they represented a variety of political positions and so a wide

spectrum of representations of the refugee: the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* as right-leaning newspapers, and the *Mirror* as left-leaning. Online versions of the newspapers were used to access articles and images. While this approach limited our ability to examine the positioning of the images on printed pages, as previously noted tabloid newspapers are now gaining a strong online readership with 60% of adults using the Internet to access news media (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2016). Indeed, in the focus groups, most of the participants accessed their chosen tabloid newspaper online.

Images of refugees used by these newspapers over a period of 6 months (31 December 2017 to 31 May 2018) were collected by searching for the term 'refugee'[3] in the search engines of each of the newspapers' websites. Images not containing refugees were removed from the dataset, as the specific focus was on images of refugees themselves. While other images accompanying stories about refugees contribute to the framing of refugeeness, they went beyond the specific scope of this study. In total, 414 images of refugees were found, which included 282 from the *Daily Mail*, 109 from *The Sun*, and 23 from the *Mirror*. The significantly higher number of images from the *Daily Mail* reflects earlier findings that the newspaper has an 'asylum obsession' (Greenslade, 2005: 22).

The purpose of the content analysis was denotive, to identify what and who was included in each image. This meant identifying and counting components of each image. Images were coded to identify the gender of the refugee and whether they were an adult or a child, their location, and any objects or non-refugees they were shown with. Following this categorisation process, the four quantitatively dominant categories were identified for further discussion at focus groups: lone adult man + criminality (55), woman/en with child/ren + destitution (43), small group of children + stereotypical childhood (22), large group of men + travelling (24). One photograph from each category was chosen[4] for focus group discussion. Capturing the visual construction of refugees by the photographer and editor in this way provided insights into the coding of images of refugees rendered dominant-hegemonic[5] through the symbolic power of the tabloid media.

The focus groups constituted the second connotive stage of the research in which readers of tabloid newspapers themselves analysed a sample of images. This approach enabled us to capture the meanings of the images as constructed by the audience. The focus groups explored what the participants imagined the images to be showing, why they thought that way, and how it made them feel. Focus groups were selected because participants would be encouraged to discuss, debate, and challenge interpretations without significant direction from the researcher (see also Kitzinger, 1994). The focus groups helped to reduce the power inequalities between us as academic researchers and the respondents, adding a more spontaneous quality to the ideas developed by the groups than would be achieved through other methods.

All of the participants were White-British readers of national tabloid newspapers located in a town in the West Midlands. Two focus groups, each lasting 1 hour, were held, one with six participants and one with five, in July 2018. Demographic information and information about engagement with tabloid newspapers were collected. While the sample is too small to be generalisable, our intention was to gain in-depth data to demonstrate the role of the audience in constructing the meanings associated with tabloid images of refugees.

The four images used in the focus groups were selected randomly, one from each of the four prevalent categories identified in the content analysis. Participants were not aware that the research concerned refugees; rather, they were told that it was focused on the use of images in the tabloid media more generally, to enable us to analyse whether participants would identify individuals in the images as refugees. Two decoy images taken from tabloid newspaper stories unrelated to refugees were also used to obscure the theme (discussion of these is not included in this article). At the start of the focus groups, the participants were given post-it notes and wrote words and phrases on these to associate with each of the images.[6] These words and phrases then informed the content of the discussion. The focus groups were audio-recorded, and the data were transcribed, anonymised, and analysed thematically. The data were first coded inductively to find emergent themes,[7] and then again with a view to identifying instances of misrecognition within each of the themes.

Participants in the focus groups were provided with information sheets about the research, the use of their anonymised data, and about the principle of informed consent guiding the research.[8] They were required to sign a consent form prior to participation. At the end of each focus group, the participants were told that the research specifically concerned the visual representation of refugees and were given the opportunity to withdraw their participation (none did). All names used in the analysis to follow are pseudonyms.

Gendered misrecognition

An initial analysis of the images revealed a significant over-representation of men in contrast to women. As Figure 1 shows, of the 414 images,[9] 256 contained one or more men, while 108 depicted one or more women. Children of both genders were more likely to be shown than women, though still significantly less often than men. This reflects the stereotypical construction of refugees as male (Nagarajan, 2013).

Digging more deeply into the analysis reveals a gendered coding of refugees across the dataset. Almost half of the images containing men were of a lone refugee, with a further significant proportion portraying a large group of men. Conversely, women were most likely to be shown with at least one child, and they were very rarely presented in large groups. This is a form of incomplete recognition, where the recognition of the normative features of the individual is only partial. Women are captured as passive carers only, overwhelmingly presented through the prism of their caring relationship to a child (see Anderson and Hamilton, 2005; Rudman and Glick, 2001), and men are removed from the family unit. Children, in addition to being presented with 'mother' figures, were also pictured in small groups with other children, but rarely in large groups. The outlying portrayal of men in isolation or in large groups with unidentifiable facial features and emotions underpins their dehumanisation in contrast to other categories.

This initial analysis identified the four most dominant framings of the refugee as 'lone adult man' (136 images), 'adult woman/en with child/ren' (65 images), 'small group of children' (49 images), and 'large group of adult men' (42 images). Four images, one selected from each of these categories, were selected as a representative sample for discussion at the focus groups. In the analysis below, we explore the four categories and selected images to demonstrate the construction of meaning by photographer, editor, and audience and the power of each in this process.

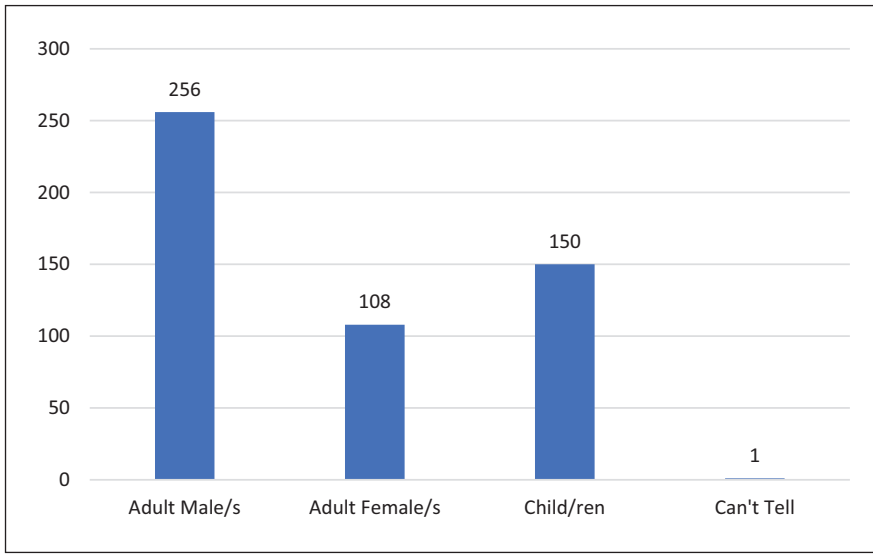

Figure 1. Overview of dataset.

Lone adult man

The vast majority of images of lone adult men are either police mugshots or depict a courtroom setting. Predominantly, the individual is photographed completely alone or in a small number of cases with police officers, border guards, and judges. In a small number of the images, objects are visible, including knives, balaclavas, and handcuffs. This analysis provides strong evidence to suggest the dominant-hegemonic coding of the male refugee as a violent criminal (see also Banks, 2011; McLaughlin, 2018).

The first image shown to the focus group participants was of a man in what appears to be a courtroom, with men wearing police uniforms milling around in a doorway behind him. He is wearing casual clothes and handcuffs, and his face is blurred. He is shaking hands with a man wearing judge's robes (taken from the *Mirror*, 2018).

The focus group participants overwhelmingly framed this image in terms of criminality and threat. The words assigned to the image in the post-it activity included 'suspicious' (FG2), 'criminal' (FG1 and 2), and 'guilty' (FG1). The discussions of the image focused on criminality, as is reflected in the following excerpt:

Ruth: he's got the handcuffs on as well hasn't he
Donna: and he's wearing the red sweatshirt
Ruth: yeah he looks like a criminal –
Donna: he looks dodgy
(*FG1*)

In this excerpt, the handcuffs and clothing of the individual constructed the criminality of this person to the participants. Participants also noted that the image was not taken in a British courtroom, and therefore conversation turned to how severe the crime must have been for it to make the news in the UK. Participants guessed 'paedophile' (Gemma, FG1) and 'he killed someone or something' (Elizabeth, FG2).

None of the participants realised that the man shown in the image was a refugee; rather, he was understood only with regard to criminality. This shows the power of the image producers' strong emphasis on criminality, which led the audience to find that the man depicted was a criminal, and not to be able to identify him as a refugee. This as such undermined their recognition of the refugee beyond a derogatory framing rooted in criminality.

Refugee woman/en with child/ren

The location for the majority of the images of adult women with children was at a campsite or inside a tent. While the majority of images included only refugees, of those that contained non-refugees only one of these was a police officer. The majority of non-refugees included were female celebrities, often wearing clothing containing charity slogans. A minority of images contained objects, including blankets, large bags, sleeping bags, toys, prams, and food. These objects are associated with both transit and domesticity.

This analysis shows that tabloid images of female refugees are influenced by misrecognition of women as solely maternal and passive (see also Ticktin, 2017). Humanitarian organisations play into this construction, focusing on 'ideal victims' in order to elicit support (p.581) and constructing celebrities as 'white saviours' tending to those in need (Abbas, 2019).

The second image shown to the participants was of a woman with two small children sitting inside a blue tent, looking outwards. A second, brown tent is slightly visible in the foreground. The woman is wearing a headscarf and appears to be of Middle Eastern ethnicity. She is holding one child to her chest, and the other sits by her side. They are casually dressed, with a brown blanket or sleeping bag covering their legs (taken from *The Sun*, 2018).

This image was met with an outpouring of sympathy and a recognition of the 'genuineness' of the refugees shown. Unlike in the case of the lone male refugee, the participants immediately identified this image as being of refugees, as is reflected in this excerpt:

Duncan: So I'm pretty sure this lady and her children are refugees and they've had to escape something, maybe Syria, but now they're stuck in a camp or something waiting for someone to let them in.
Elizabeth: Yeah –
Rebecca: Yeah they have definitely had to escape something.
Researcher: Okay and why do you get that impression?
Rebecca: Well they're in a tiny tent and like they don't look like they have anything with them.
(FG2)

The setting of the image in the refugee camp was important to FG2 participants in framing the vulnerability of the refugees. The inclusion of children also contributed to the sense of vulnerability. This framing rooted in the innocence of children led the participants to repeatedly compare the family shown to their own families, as in the following:

Gemma: That little one just won't let his mum go.
Fiona: No clinging on
Gemma: I mean most children, like your grandchildren, they're going to be running around, the only time they're going to sit like that is when they're knackered aren't they.
Sarah: Yeah
Gemma: They've seen things our children wouldn't see.
(FG1)

Comparing the children to their own relatives served to humanise the family to the participants, reinforcing their empathic feelings. This mirrors reactions to the Alan Kurdi image discussed earlier, in which hashtags such as #couldbemychild trended alongside the image on social media sites (El-Enany, 2016). The woman was defined through her presumed parental relationship with the children. At the same time, this sympathy for the 'mother' was reinforced through the ways in which the participants imagined her relationship with the absent 'father'. For example,

Sarah: Do you know what gets me about all of these little tiny children in places like Africa and everywhere, they should do something to men because it's the men that are raping the women.
Gemma: Absolutely.
Sarah: A lot of these women don't want these children, of course they want children –
Ruth: But not the way that it's happening
Sarah: Not this way. A lot of women are getting raped even by their husbands. I know, don't tell me that these women want, excuse me, full blown sex and want children in a bombed place where there are bombs going off.
Donna: Yeah but women are treated as second class citizens.
Gemma: But her husband might have been murdered, we don't know
Ruth: Yeah because he's not there with them, is he?
Sarah: But they never are though are they? They never are.
(FG1)

In this excerpt, the imagined absent father serves to further entrench the vulnerability of the woman shown, but also in his absence he is once again misrecognised as dangerous and violent. At the same time, the woman is again understood only as a mother, and Donna's comment that 'women are treated as second class citizens' links to Islamophobic tropes about the treatment of women in non-Western countries (Al-Hejin, 2015; Baker

et al., 2013), and Sarah's reference to 'Africa' also links to the wider stereotyping of black men as absent fathers (Beggs Weber, 2020).

In FG2, the discussion also centred on the absence of a father figure in the image, but in this case the father was imagined to be absent in a different way:

Elizabeth: Where's her husband? What if he's died?
Martin: He could have been killed or he could be in the army. We have no idea but she's just on her own with two children to look after in that little tent.
Rebecca: That must be terrifying.
(FG2)

While the woman in the image is still presented as the vulnerable mother in this discussion, the absent 'husband' is also seen as a victim of war, but this time his role is militarised (see also Allsop, 2017). This framing once again entrenches the gendered misrecognition which shaped how the participants constructed the images' meanings. It speaks to an acceptance of the powerful dominant-hegemonic code conveyed by the image producers and editors, but also of wider patriarchal power relations which shape the misrecognition of the refugees as active and dangerous, on the one hand, and as passive and caring, on the other.

Small group of child refugees

The majority of images showing small groups of children were taken at campsites, but many of the images also depicted school settings. The children were most likely not to be shown with non-refugees, but where they were, this was most commonly with a female celebrity. Again, images containing celebrities were framed strongly in relation to international aid, with charity slogan clothing and banners. A small number of the images also included teachers, some of whom were of White Western ethnicity. While most of the images of children did not contain any objects, those that did mainly depicted toys.

This category is the only one identified in the dataset not to be affected by gendered misrecognition. The gender of the children is not made apparent by the images; rather, the children are defined in the camp setting as 'genuine' refugees, and inclusion of school imagery as well as toys serves to humanise the children and to convey their vulnerability and innocence (see also Ryan and Tonkiss, 2016). This suggests that age is an important intersecting dimension in the construction of refugeeness. During childhood, gender is deemed unimportant and it is the child-ness of the refugee that represents innocence. However, as the child grows into an adult, gender emerges as a critical factor which, for men, involves a distorted depiction of masculinity as diminishing innocence and, for women, involves the absence of agency and an incomplete depiction of women solely as mothers.

The third image shown to the participants was of four children, appearing to be of Black African ethnicity, smiling for the camera, holding up cardboard toys with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) logo displayed on the side. The children are

wearing casual clothing, and are standing in a rural location, mainly scrubland, with a small, single-storey building partially visible to one side (taken from the *Mirror*, 2017).

As with the visual content analysis, this was the only image where gender-based differences did not emerge in focus group discussion, and rather all of the children were defined by their innocence. Both of the focus groups identified the children as refugees, as in the following:

Gemma: I think they've been through, they've been through some terrible things.
Donna: but, they're probably safe because they're under the United Nations in refugee camps.
Fiona: so hopefully they should be safe
Sophie: I feel like they've escaped something
(FG1)

Again, the setting of this image proved crucial to how it was interpreted, with participants picking up on the refugee status of the children as a result of UN logos shown on their toys.

The participants talked with sympathy about the children and the need for them to be helped, and once again this sympathy stemmed from the humanising of the children with regards to the participants' own relatives:

Gemma: shocking, think of your grandchildren
Sarah: I know, it's terrible
(FG1)
Rebecca: I just think like how lucky we are here, they're literally like I bet they've been abused and it was just horrible
Elizabeth: but look how happy they are with the toys they've made out of cardboard
Craig: they don't look that happy
Researcher: do you not think they look happy?
Craig: I think they deep down look depressed.
(FG2)

The ability to see these children as the same as the participants' own children and grandchildren deepened the vulnerability-based empathy that the participants felt towards them, and they were cast as defenceless victims of deviant behaviour. Yet empathy with the 'other' can serve to omit normatively relevant features of difference as a result of unequal power relations and thus to misrecognise the individual (Tonkiss, 2021; Schick, 2019), because it is underpinned by a focus on sameness, rather than an understanding of persistent difference. Here, for example, it is particularly notable that the participants did not raise race as a salient factor in the meanings that they associated with the images, despite the clear Black African heritage of the children. Race is particularly relevant to the politics of forced migration, in

particular because international structures of asylum seeking are functions of (post) coloniality (Mayblin, 2019; Picozza, 2021). In empathising with the plight of the families as 'just like us', there is a risk that the reality of the oppression experienced by those depicted is overlooked as a result of a failure to see differences rooted experiences of racism.

In the second excerpt above, the focus of the discussion shifts to the happiness or otherwise of the children, and this also arose in FG1, as in the following:

Gemma: It's like they've been rescued and now they've been given like normal children's things, toys to play with –
Donna: Especially the eldest two boys –
Gemma: Because it's just when you look in their eyes, they've got the eyes of old men I think, I know they're smiling
Donna: Well I think they might have seen their parents die
(FG1)

The focus on whether the children were happy seems to have its roots in the way in which the participants perceived their innocence. Have the children been allowed to be children, or has their childhood been taken from them? Research shows that unaccompanied child refugees are often portrayed as 'beyond the realm of what is considered a *normal* childhood' because of emotional trauma (Wernesjö, 2011: 492, emphasis in original).

Large group of adult men

Large groups of male refugees were most likely to be shown at, or near, a border. Other locations emphasised the group in transit, including walking along a road, on a boat, or at a bus station. Of the small number of images which contained non-refugees, these were predominantly border guards or police officers. The groups were often shown wearing hooded jumpers ('hoodies') and with objects that could be used as weapons such as rocks and sticks, large bags, and food or drinks.

This analysis chimes with text-based studies which have demonstrated that the tabloid media portrays refugees as large groups of men 'invading' Britain (Philo et al., 2013) and returns to our analysis of the gendered misrecognition of male refugees as a dangerous threat, devoid of family responsibility or vulnerability. These depictions also border on non-recognition because they show a dehumanised gathering of bodies with faces not visible. The presence of border guards and police officers again criminalises the men, as does the inclusion of disguising clothing and weaponry. In British culture, the 'hoodie' has become 'a symbol of menace and lawlessness' (Braddock, 2011).

The final image shown to the focus groups was of a large group of approximately 60 adult men running towards what appears to be a tall border fence, with white lamps high above it. The image is zoomed out so that no faces are visible and most of the men have their backs to the camera, although their casual clothing is visible. They are running across scrubland towards the fence (taken from the *Daily Mail*, 2018).

Both focus groups immediately noted the gender of those depicted, with one participant joking 'now that's where all the men are' (FG1). Similarly, words in the post-it activity for this image included 'mainly men' (FG1) and 'where are women and going where' (FG2). The discussion of this image focused on the threat that the refugees were seen to present to the country, as in the following:

Sarah: Well I thought of Calais when I first saw that because I think we paid quite a lot of money for Calais to build a very large barrier to keep migrants out and they broke up the Calais camps.
Gemma: And they've clearly found a gap here.
Donna: Yes they're trying to come over to our country aren't they?
(FG1)

By referring to the refugees as 'them' and contrasting them with 'our' country, the participants constructed a view of the refugee as 'other' and in direct contrast to themselves. Referring to the refugees as 'migrants' also occurred across both focus groups. This blurring of categories is a form of misrecognition affecting male refugees, as identified earlier.

The discussion of this image clearly contrasted very strongly with that of the two preceding images and further demonstrates the central importance of gender in the misrecognition of refugees as depicted in the tabloid media. One of the focus groups discussed this gendering of the perceived threat that 'migrants' present, as follows:

Craig: But that's what you tend to see, a large group of males heading towards a border.
Duncan: Why males?
Researcher: Why do you think it's males photographed?
Craig: Because they want to turn us all against us. The papers want it to be like all the immigrants are geezers, want to come over here they're going to rape your mum, they're going to rape your kids, lock everyone up because they want to turn everyone against them.
Rebecca: It is true they want you to be scared of them. But I think like I was saying like as a female looking at that like that is scary like you see loads of men. It is like don't you think, for me I think that looks quite scary that they're all trying to get into England.
Elizabeth: Yeah, they need to be checked in case they're dangerous.
Craig: I think that's sexist.
Rebecca: But it is true if there were more women in there you'd think like, you'd feel a bit more sad about it.
(FG2)

In the above excerpt, Craig views the image as scaremongering on the part of the tabloid news media. While Rebecca acknowledges this, she still admits that it is a threatening image for her. This was the only instance in the focus group discussions where a

participant opposed an aspect of the dominant-hegemonic coding, but this was limited to that group (notably, the group with male participants). The discussion in FG1 contrasted the image with that of the woman with children which had been viewed earlier, and focused again on the presumed threat that the men presented:

Sarah: So I see an individual mother and I think at the individual mother's level I think I want to do something for that person but then when you see hoards and hoards of nameless people it starts to become, erm –

Fiona: Frightening for one thing.

Sarah: I don't know something should be done about these people wanting to stay in their own country.

Donna: Yes we need to be supporting those countries, rebuilding them so they don't have to come here.

(FG1)

Overall, this image elicited almost no sympathy from the participants in the focus groups. Unlike those showing women and children, the image of the large group of men was associated strongly with threat, with 'hoards of nameless people' viewed as 'other' by the focus group participants. This threat-based interpretation of the image was strongly related to the gender of those depicted, and once again this demonstrates the centrality of the criminality conveyed by the image producers and editors to the misrecognition of refugees by the wider audience.

Conclusion: loners, criminals, mothers . . .

This article has sought to argue that misrecognition is a critical concept in capturing and understanding the visual construction of refugees in the British tabloid news media. Our two-step analysis comprised of visual content analysis alongside focus groups revealed a gendered misrecognition of refugees. Men were found to experience misrecognition as invading criminals and as non-refugees, while women experience misrecognition as vulnerable mothers. In both cases, age was found to be a critical intersecting dynamic affecting the shape of this misrecognition.

For the most part, the audience accepted the dominant-hegemonic coding of the images by their creators, which hints at the symbolic power of the media in constructing understandings at the intersection of forced migration and deservingness. Central to this gendered misrecognition is vulnerability. Women are constructed as care-givers made vulnerable both by their femininity and by their perceived role as mothers to vulnerable children. Their misrecognition centres around the lack of agency that they are constructed to have. Men are, at best, constructed through a militarised lens, and at worst, as threatening criminals. Their misrecognition centres around the definition of vulnerability that they are constructed out of. While vulnerability to death may be conceived of as a shared condition of being human, the 'grievability' (Butler, 2009) of the bodies portrayed in the images was heavily gendered both by the producers and publishers of the images, and by the audience itself. This is seen in particular in the

dynamics of empathy displayed at the focus groups, with (in some way problematic) empathy elicited most strongly for the images of children and at least a form of pity expressed for the images of women (see also Boltanski, 1999), while the images of men did not elicit these responses.

With images of men vastly over-represented in tabloid media coverage of refugees, it is this absence of vulnerability which dominates the construction of refugees in this media. The similarities between the findings of the content analysis and the focus group discussion show how the gendered misrecognition portrayed in the images shaped the construction of the images by the audience itself. While the focus group study was small, it is indicative of the power of the tabloid media, and of its visual imagery alone, to transmit tropes of misrecognition which can severely curtail the extent to which refugees and people seeking asylum are able to secure safety.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this journal, as well as to Sarah-Jane Page and Katy Pilcher, for helpful comments on previous drafts. An earlier version of the article was presented at the University of Nottingham Postgraduate Conference in Politics and IR in June 2021, and we are grateful to co-panellists and audience members on that occasion for insightful questions and discussion.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. Defined by Laitinen (2012) as 'their personhood, merits, needs, etc.' (p. 26).
2. We use 'men' and 'women' as an abbreviated way of expressing 'predominantly masculine' or 'predominantly feminine' coded imagery. We acknowledge that it is beyond the scope of our method to know the ways in which those depicted in the images self-identify.
3. While we acknowledge that incorporating 'asylum seeker' as a further search term would have broadened the findings reported in the article, and would have tapped into the significant debate concerning the rights of people seeking asylum in the UK (see also Sirriyeh, 2018), this is beyond the scope of the current article. It is, however, further explored in the wider project of which this article forms one part.
4. At random, using a number generator.
5. Defined by Rose (2016) as the image producers' preferred reading of the image.
6. We recognise the potential ethical issues raised by circulating derogatory images, but note that our participants were all already exposed to similar imagery as a result of reading tabloid newspapers.
7. Threat, victim, criminality, humanising, childhood, parenthood, 'us' and 'them', emotion, gender, age.
8. The research followed the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association (2017) and was approved by Aston University's research ethics committee.

9. The total count of images showing men, women, or children amounts to 515 despite there being only 414 images, because some images contained a mix of these categories.

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Date submitted 8 July 2021
Date accepted 20 April 2022